



**EATING  
AND  
DRINKING  
VGROUP  
STUDY**



**VINTAGE PRESS**



Eating and Drinking: vGroup Study

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# JESUS AND TAX COLLECTORS

Who doesn't love to eat?! In New Orleans we often say, "we don't eat to live; we live to eat." But it's not just the food that makes eating so enjoyable. Part of the reason we love to eat is because eating brings us together. Meals provide opportunities to connect with family, friends, and even strangers.

While much has changed throughout the centuries, the power of meals hasn't. Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus utilized meals to connect with his followers and those in need. This is particularly true in Luke's Gospel. One writer notes, "In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."<sup>1</sup> As a part of Eating & Drinking, Vintage Church's Lenten series, we're reading through Tim Chester's *A Meal with Jesus*. In this book Chester suggests "the meals of Jesus are a window into his message of grace and the way it defines his community and its mission."<sup>2</sup> During this season of Lent, Vintage Church is going to focus in on Jesus' meals with others.

- How do you view your meals? Are they just times for you to eat? Are they opportunities to connect with people? Or are they something else?
  
- When you have meals with other people, who are the people you eat with? Why do you eat with these people?
  
- Are you familiar with the people Jesus ate with? If so, who were they?

In Luke 7:34, Jesus is described in this way: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" Jesus was known to be (1) a person who ate meals and (2) a person who ate meals with seemingly the wrong people. Let's look at one of Jesus' first meals in Luke 5:27-32.

*<sup>27</sup>After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup>And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*

*<sup>29</sup>And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. <sup>30</sup>And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

<sup>31</sup>And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup>I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Luke 5:27-32

- Why did the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, have such a problem with Jesus eating with tax collectors? How did the religious leaders view tax collectors? How did Jesus view tax collectors? What does this teach you about God's grace?

Jesus invited Levi to be one of his disciples. Levi then invites Jesus to a party. Notice how the tax collector versus the religious leaders respond to Jesus.

- What do you notice and what does this tell you about how both parties understand Jesus? What does this teach you about God's grace?
- The religious leaders ask Jesus, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" What does Jesus' response teach you about God's grace?

Jesus' understanding of God's grace was contrary to the religious leaders'. For the Pharisees and scribes God's grace was for a select few and only for those who follow a strict code. Rather than invite others into this grace, the religious leaders saw their role as gatekeepers, restricting access to God's grace. Jesus, however, saw God's grace as open to everyone and anyone who would receive it. God's grace was to be celebrated. Because the grace of God is good news, it is for those who are in need. Rather than be gatekeepers, we're to be spokespersons for this good news. As we reflect on Jesus' meal with tax collector and sinners, let's consider what we should know, feel, and do.

- Who are you more like--the tax collector or the Pharisees? How does this story of Jesus help you understand grace more and adjust for a more true understanding of grace?
- Like the tax collector, we should celebrate God's grace. During this season of Lent, how can you celebrate God's grace?

Jesus understood his mission. He was sent to be a physician for the sick and to preach repentance for the sinner.

- Like Jesus, we too are to share God's grace? What are some ways, both normal and unique, that we can share God's grace this Lenten season?

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 15.