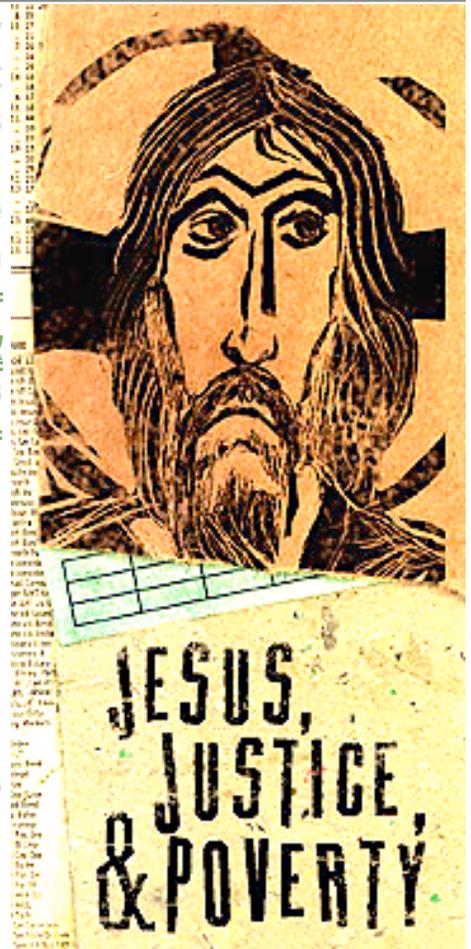


What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? Who are our choices? Do we need to change? Do we need to change? Where are injustices happening? How can we discover truth from the Bible? What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? Do we

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This **Continued Dialogue (CD) Packet** is designed to explore topics that might interest students who are more socially active and/or have justice-specific questions or issues with God or the Christian faith. These CDs are an attempt to expose the true Jesus that preached the Kingdom of God while caring for the poor, brokenhearted, marginalized and oppressed sectors of society. The Jesus that didn't separate evangelism from justice, but lived them both out seamlessly in his life. **The Jesus that looked more like a revolutionary than a religious leader, the one who lived out the love that he spoke about.**

Be sure to foster a discussion in which the participants, regardless of their spiritual/justice background can be open with each other and the text.

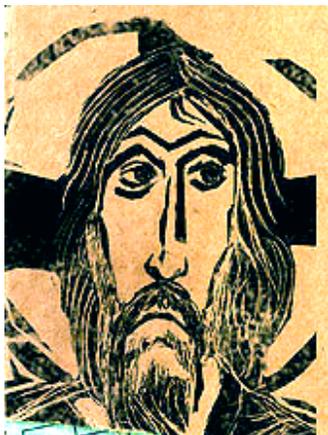
They should challenge and encourage one another as they co-learn about Jesus, justice, and poverty. As you lead people through these studies, try to strip away all the cultural attachments of Christianity, so they can see the essence of Christ. When people are introduced to the true person of Jesus, they usually do not escape being drawn into a life of following Him, one that defies conformity and self-interest. It is a life that has a mission in this world: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

Separate topics or questions are explored in each CD. They have no particular order or specific timeline. They are not meant to be the 'answers', instead they will hopefully open up space to dialogue further. Encourage people to always be open to dialogue with God and with others, and never stop seeking understanding, to err on the side of curiosity rather than skepticism. But also make people aware that Jesus isn't just a life to be studied and that faith isn't about getting answers to questions. Jesus is God, and He desires a relationship with us. Always be ready to invite/challenge them into that relationship further.

Each CD has a leader's version, and participant version. The leader should prepare the CD beforehand, and make as many copies of the participant version as needed. More copies available at www.bayup.org. Always invite your extended community to pray for your CD group.

The original material for this Continued Dialogue Packet is taken with permission from InterVarsity San Diego's Justice GIG Guide (2006), which was edited by Sarah Holine with contributing authors Elena Gradillas, Grace Smith, Amanda Jordan, Ryan Lustig, and Randy Woo.

JJP Continued Dialogue Packet edited by Elizabeth Thrasher, 2007. Scripture used from NRSV and TNIV translations (www.crosswalk.com). Graphics taken from Flickr, January - February 2007. (www.flickr.com: artists featured are Alison Haltenhof, Tom Stone, Ian and Ellen Ann, and Mick Yates).



What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? Do I need to change? Do we need to change? Where are injustices happening? How can we discover truth from the Bible? What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? How do we learn

C D Studies

p. 3 Jesus and Justice

p. 5 Jesus and Poverty

p. 7 Jesus and Identity

p. 9 Jesus and Suffering

p. 12 Jesus and Exclusion

Dialogue It Up

p. 3 Jesus and Justice

- What do ideas/realities do you normally associate with “the good Christian life?”
- What does justice mean to you?
- What do you think God says about justice and those who follow him?

p. 5 Jesus and Poverty

- What biblical basis is there for caring/advocating/loving the poor?
- How does God view the poor? How should we?
- What, if any, are the spiritual repercussions for ignoring the poor?

p. 7 Jesus and Identity

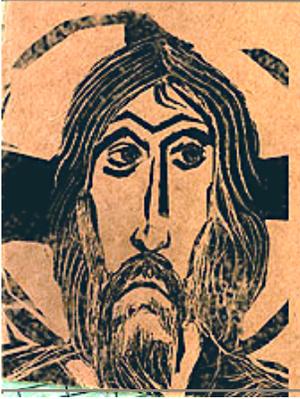
- Where is your identity? What are your gifts and passions?
- Are you fearful that following Jesus will mean losing your identity?
- Does God want to affirm and use our gifts, passions, and cultures?

p. 9 Jesus and Suffering

- Are there areas of suffering or brokenness in your life?
- How do we know that Jesus cares about us as physical/emotional/mental/social/spiritual beings? What does Jesus say or do about complex suffering?
- Is there something that you long to have healing for, in your own life or in the world? Does God care about restoration for people and systems?

p. 12 Jesus and Exclusion

- Who do you think the church normally welcomes, and does not welcome?
- Have you ever felt excluded? How has that affected your view of God?
- How does God feel about marginalization, and how does God act towards the marginalized (perhaps even those the church sometimes excludes)?



Jesus and Justice

WHAT IS POVERTY?

What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? **WHO IS JESUS?** What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? **JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE.** Do we need to change? Where are injustices happening? How can we discover truth from

M a t t h e w 2 5 : 3 1 - 4 6

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' 45 Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

LEADER: *This is a general study on the idea of justice using the end of Matthew 25. There are many ways you can go with this CD, and probably a lot of questions that can come up. It should be a good intro to what God values in our life, and you can use that to contrast those ideas with the ideas we usually equate with the "good Christian life". This is actually a good study for people at all levels of activism/justice.*

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What does justice mean to you?
- What part do you think it plays in the Bible?
- Why is it that we have this feeling that we should promote justice?

A CLOSER LOOK:

Read Matthew 25:31–46

Who is narrating this story? (Jesus is speaking to the disciples)

How does God separate people?

What might be the significance of the analogy of the shepherd separating the sheep from the goats?

Jesus refers (verse 37) to those who are blessed as "righteous". What do you think it mean to be righteous in this passage?

What seems to be the message Jesus is trying to get across? What's important to Jesus about our lives?

Jesus is saying that serving people around you is the equivalent of serving the King himself. What does this tell us about who Jesus is? (Help them think through what it means that Jesus allies himself not with the powerful or important, but the poor and the broken.)

A CLOSER LOOK (cont'd) ...

What do you usually think of the church telling you what you should do? What does this passage say Jesus tells you to do on earth?

God has a bigger plan for the world: working for redemption, and using people from all over the world to bring justice, hope, and good news. It is crucial to the gospel to be providing for people in need. This is what God will care about when you end your life, but also this is what will help you see God on earth.

IS THIS REAL?

Leader: Share a story about how you helped (or didn't help) someone in need, and how you saw God in that (or missed an opportunity). Share something that you've learned from the poor or broken, and how serving has helped you see God better. Share what your experience with working for justice has been like.

AN INWARD LOOK

- How does this view of the Christian life differ from what you expected?
- Does this idea of what it means to follow Jesus excite you? Why or why not?
- How could you see yourself being used by God in the world around you?



Graffiti in Barcelona, Cataluña. By Alison Haltenhof 2007

FURTHER LOOK

When Jesus came on the scene, he proclaimed his mission by quoting a well-known Old Testament prophet named Isaiah. Look at Isaiah 61, with an eye for how God is concerned about justice, and then read Luke 4:19–30. What strikes you about Jesus' choice of scripture in his hometown, and how the theme of justice was received there? What about the character of God in Isaiah 61 and in Luke 4, raises interest and/or questions?

THE CHALLENGE

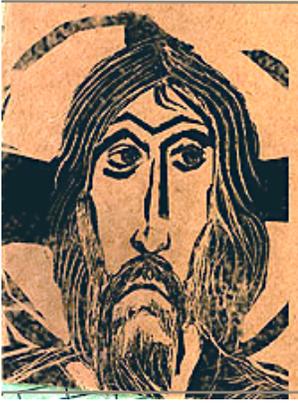
LEADER: Ask the students who self-identify as Christian and the students who do not to be open to incorporate the truths they've learned into their lives.

What are some practical ways you can incorporate working for justice into your daily life? Look for how that can show you something new about Jesus.

Look at the ways that you have viewed what the "Christian life" looks like. Think about how this new information changes the way you understand what it means to follow Jesus.

(This might be a good place to invite them into a relationship with Jesus, if they aren't already. And the Christian students might be open to making a commitment to serving the poor, or to living in a more justice-oriented way.)

Ask God to show you what He wants to do with your life to serve people around you and in this world.



Jesus and Poverty

WHAT IS POVERTY?

What is poverty? What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? Do I need to change? Do we need to change? Where are injustices happening? How can we discover truth from

WHO IS JESUS?

JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE . . .

L u k e
1 6 : 1 9 - 3 1

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." 25 But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." 27 He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house? 28 For I have five brothers that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." 29 Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." 30 He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." 31 He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

LEADER: While this CD doesn't theologically answer the issues dealing with poverty (why is there poverty/hunger/etc. in the world) it is a picture of Jesus' heart for the poor, and the strict command to serve the poor. It can be used to prove to non-Christians that it is very biblical to advocate for the poor/serve them/love them. You can use this passage and contrast much of the Western Church and see what differences they see. You can also talk about the issue of simple living, and use some of the ideas in the CD about suffering (we are part of the problem). But continue to point them to Jesus, and his heart for marginalized people. For the Christian students, they may identify with Lazarus and feel guilty. While allowing space for honest expression, try to make it also a space that fosters forgiveness and reconciliation.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What has your experience been with poverty?
- Can you think of an instance where you were faced with your wealth versus someone else's?

A CLOSER LOOK:

Read Luke 16:19–31

What were the social statuses of these two men during this time period? Who had more weight in society?

How GROSS is the fact that dogs licked Lazarus' sores?! What else do stray dogs live off of? (the refuse of a village)

How do you think the rich man felt toward Lazarus?

What is the interaction like between Lazarus and the rich man?

What were the men's lives like in comparison to their after-lives?

A CLOSER LOOK (cont'd) ...

What do you think about Abraham's answer to the rich man's request in verse 25?

Why do you think the rich man entered Hades and Lazarus Heaven?

Who do you think this parable is being told to? By whom and for what reason?

Why do you think the rich man's brothers couldn't be warned? (Not even someone rising from the dead will (alone) convince us to change our behavior, we have to accept who Jesus is by faith, not just miracles.)

What is Jesus saying about our duty to the poor?

What are the lessons we can learn from this story?

(Some possible lessons: Jesus promises that the poor and afflicted will be comforted, and they are highest on his list of priorities; our interaction with the poor must be relational, not temporary or out of pity)



Theresa, in Tenderloin. Taken by Tom Stone, April 2006.

IS THIS REAL?

Leader: Tell a personal story about an encounter/relationship you've had with someone living in poverty, and how Jesus revealed His hope through it. Share about your experience with Jesus and what He says about the poor, and how you feel like that has affected your life. You can also talk about privilege in your own life (if this applies to you) and what you feel like God is calling you to in using that for others.

AN INWARD LOOK

- Does this view of Jesus contradict what you know of Him or Christianity already? How?
- What would it mean to you to know how Jesus cares about poverty?
- How can society change to lift others out of poverty, according to Jesus?
- How can Christians change their approach to poverty? (Since local/national poverty is often overlooked in favor of "exotic" overseas mission work)

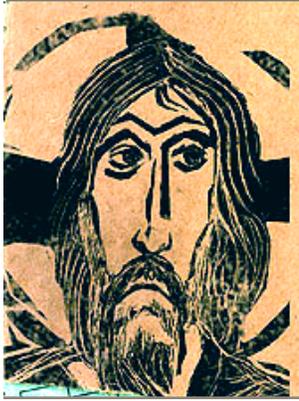
FURTHER LOOK

Mention of helping the poor, or of the Lord condemning those who oppress the poor, occurs 256 times in the Bible. Of that, only 36 of those times is it the fault of the poor person that they are poor. 118 times refer to people being poor because of misfortune or natural calamity, while 111 references indicate people being poor because of injustice and oppression. Start studying some of these passages (e.g., Leviticus 25, Psalm 72, Isaiah 58 and 61).

THE CHALLENGE

Either intentionally search out and place yourself in a poverty-stricken area in your city, or have a substantial conversation with someone who society considers poor. Ask them what they think of God.

Pray for God to reveal himself this week, specifically in the issue of poverty.



Jesus and Identity

WHAT IS POVERTY?

WHO IS JESUS?

JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE...

from

L **u** **k** **e**
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1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

LEADER: *This is a CD based on culture, and exploring how following Jesus doesn't have to take us out of our culture, passions, communities. Instead, we see that Jesus comes to this group of fishermen and speaks to them in their own language... he uses examples they can understand and proves that He is the creator of all things, even identities, cultures, and passions. He goes to them, speaks into their identities as fishermen and invites them into a bigger purpose for their life.*

This CD might be good for activist students, artists, people who have the fear that becoming a Christian would mean leaving behind their passions, culture, identity. It speaks to what it means to have your identity in Christ... and breaks down the idea that that identity would have to look like mainstream, uniform, boring religiosity. It would, however, show them that Jesus doesn't just invite them into a club, he invites them into a mission, and He wants to use their gifts, passions, cultures to change the world.

Also use this CD for Christians who are hesitant about "the social justice agenda"-- they need to be called by Jesus into the greatest adventure of their lives.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What are some of the things that define who I am, my identity? And what does it mean to be a Christian?
- Does accepting Christianity as a lifestyle mean abandoning my own identity and culture?
- How can I serve God with who I am: my culture, my passions, my sphere of influence, my identity?
- Is there anything that God is asking me to deny in order to follow Him?



Tiled wall in Liberec, Prague,; Ian and Ellen Ann, Jan 2007.

A CLOSER LOOK:

Read Luke 5.1–11

How is Jesus' timing significant, what was going on when he approached the fishermen?

(Jesus met the men where they were and in a manner they were familiar with, as fishermen in boats. He gets into their boat and continues to teach the crowd.)

What does it mean or suggest that Jesus approached the fishermen?

(Jesus pursues us where we are, doing what we're doing.)

What value is it that Jesus taught from a location that the men were familiar with?

Why do you think Jesus asked Simon to put His nets down?

(Jesus is asking Simon for a step of faith. It is interesting that Jesus isn't trying to change who Simon is or what he's doing, but encourages him in a way that leads to incredible success. He makes Simon better at what he does. But Simon had to obey when it didn't make sense to see it happen. Jesus approaches Simon as an expert. Simon is a master at what he does, yet Jesus proves that not only can he relate to Simon, but he is even wiser and more knowledgeable. He not only understands Simon's abilities and passion, but wants to take them to the next level.)

How does Jesus call these men? What might it mean for their lives? What fears might they have?

(Jesus calls these men with language they understand. He calls them into a life that is not completely unfamiliar, even though it's new and mysterious. Jesus invites them into a greater purpose for their lives, yet reaffirms their identity, all that is familiar. He fills out their life and their identity, He doesn't detract from it. Jesus wants to use who we are for greater things. He doesn't ask us to be something we're not, or someone else.)

IS THIS REAL?

Leader: You can share an example from your own life where you feel like God has used your gifts and passions or your culture to do something or impact someone in a bigger way than you expected. You can share how you feel like you've grown in who you are, instead of being conformed to someone else. How does following Christ make you unique and give you a greater purpose in your life? Maybe share a fear that you've had in becoming or being a Christian (in regards to losing your culture/identity), but how Jesus has come through for you.

AN INWARD LOOK

- What fears hold you back from following Jesus?
 - What are some of the things you think you'd have to give up to follow Jesus?
 - How would you respond if God actually wants to grow you in your gifts and identity, rather than taking those away from you?
 - What do you think God would want to use in your life to affect people around you, and possibly affect the world?
-

FURTHER LOOK

If they still have questions about identity and culture, you can take them to Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit comes, and they start speaking in their mother tongues, or take them to Revelation 7:8–10. You can talk to them about how God created different cultures, and how in heaven, all nations, tribes, ethnic groups will be there. Begin a discussion about how the Kingdom of God is not homogenous, and how/why God created us all differently. Challenge them to look at nature and all the different species to see how creative God is.

THE CHALLENGE

Tell God about the things that you don't want to give up to follow Him. (This may take a little bit of explanation about what prayer is, and how you can do it.)

Look at your life and see if there are passions, skills, gifts that you have that God may be able to use, if He is indeed real and worth following. Think about what it would be like to use your gifts and passions for other people.



Jesus and Suffering

WHAT IS POVERTY?

WHO IS JESUS?

JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE...

**J o h n
9 : 1 - 3 8**

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees

LEADER: *This CD is pretty self-explanatory. It is a look at one encounter a man has with Jesus, and how that can be used to show Jesus' heart, especially towards those who suffer. It isn't meant to be a theological discussion, but rather an experience with who Jesus is and what he wants for this world. You may have to talk more with them about Jesus' divinity, and issues like free choice to go deeper with this question. But first, let them encounter Jesus as the blind man did. Suffering is suffering, and we all need healing from the Lord who loves us.*

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think there is suffering in the world?
- What has been your personal experience with some of the suffering that there is in this world (ask them if they feel comfortable sharing this, and offer some of your own experiences also. This can be about their own life, or suffering in the world.)

A CLOSER LOOK:

Read John 9:1–38

Describe the disciples' question toward Jesus. Does it make sense? (During that time, it was thought that a person or the person's parents had sinned if they had birth defects, such as being born deaf.)

What do you think the blind man's life had been like? (If he had been blind since birth, he would have been a beggar in that society. He would have been dependent on others, not really a free man.)

John cont ' d A CLOSER LOOK...

said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Describe Jesus' response to his disciples' question. (He is correcting a belief that suffering is due to sin. More importantly, he explains that when suffering is fixed, healed, or relieved, the work of God is all the more visible and shown to those around.)

How might the blind man have felt when his vision was restored? (Help them think through what it would be like to be blind, and then imagine receiving your sight, what it would be like to look at things for the first time, to see colors, nature, people.)

Describe the Pharisees reaction to Jesus' healing of the blind man. (They questioned and interrogated the man twice, and even examined his parents. Each time the blind man was questioned, he simply explained his experience with Jesus—there was no more he could say. He was just speaking the truth. His parents, afraid of being kicked out of the synagogue, chose not to respond to Jesus and thus, threw it back on their son.)

What is Jesus' response? What does He do? Physically, emotionally, spiritually? (Through pain and suffering, often people come to a knowledge of God. The blind man went through trial after trial explaining only his experience and his knowledge and in the end, found Jesus and believed. This is a picture of what Jesus is about. He came to heal the blind and make them see. Jesus cares about suffering, but he also commands his followers to care about suffering. To follow Jesus is to step into that mission of bringing hope, healing, and restoration to a broken, suffering world.)

Describe what you think Jesus' values are from the passage. (E.g., Is Jesus concerned with physical healing over with spiritual healing? Does that tension exist for Jesus?)

IS THIS REAL?

Leader: Share a story about suffering in your own life, and what God has done through that. You can also share a story about how God has used you or other believers to extend God's hope or healing in the world. Be careful not to trivialize any kind of suffering, whether that is in the life of the person you're doing the CD with, or in your own life.

AN INWARD LOOK

- Are there places in your life where you are suffering and in pain?
- Do you want to be healed like the blind man?
- Are you willing to wade through the pain to find Jesus? He is waiting for you – he knows what the pain feels like.
- Do you believe that Jesus wants to end suffering (physical and spiritual) in the world?
- What in this story gives you hope?

FURTHER LOOK

If they still have questions about suffering, (and most likely they will), here are some more notes:

C.S. Lewis says – “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Outside of Jesus, suffering makes no sense. People in pain and needing a full healing, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, are not going to get it outside of Jesus. Only in context of Jesus, does it make sense. He made the ultimate sacrifice, giving up his life to save ours. He suffered, to the point of death, so that we would not have to suffer to eternity.

Jesus’ death, but specifically his Resurrection, his ultimate victory over death, provides hope for all the suffering in the world. It is through God’s judgment that all evildoers and oppressors will be stopped.

You can still take them to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Also, help them think through the link between suffering and human choice. Much suffering in the world is caused by people, and their selfish choices. You can think of some helpful modern-day examples of this, or ask them if they can think of examples themselves.

THE CHALLENGE

It is easy to find suffering in the world. Try to find, either in the news or in your friends/family’s lives, a way that suffering is being challenged or overcome. Look for ways that God is actively working to end suffering in the world.

Think about yourself. Are you part of the problem, or part of the solution? If you care about suffering, what are you doing about it? Ask yourself if you want to be aligned with real hope, real power to fight suffering and injustice. Ask yourself if Jesus may be that hope.

Think about this statement by Martin Luther King Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” God feels the same way, that’s why he is committed to ending suffering and oppression. But evil isn’t just outside in the world, it’s also in ourselves. We are at times selfish, uncaring, and apathetic. God is committed to changing us as individuals, so that we can be faithful to his commitment to changing the world and its systems and institutions. Ask God for the healing that you need. Pray for that healing with another person.



Sister of Mercy in Mozambique, with AIDS orphan. Taken by Mick Yates, Aug 2005.



Jesus and Exclusion

WHAT IS POVERTY?

WHO IS JESUS?

JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE...

What causes it? Who is Jesus? Why does he matter? How do I fit in? Can I even help? What does justice look like? Who brings justice? Who is affected by my choices? What are our choices? Do I need to change? Do we need to change? Where are injustices happening? How can we discover truth from

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36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner." 40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii*, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." 48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

* The denarius was the usual day's wage for a laborer

LEADER: This is a general CD on how Jesus deals with "sinners"—people that the church might normally exclude. This CD can be key to helping students see Jesus' character, that he excludes no one, and that he really protects and loves those that society or the church may marginalize.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Who do you think are the outcasts in our society or on your campus?
- Do you see people being included or excluded most often by Christianity?
- What groups of people are excluded?

A CLOSER LOOK:

Read Luke 7:36–50

Who are the Pharisees?

(Pharisees: teachers of the law, "enforcers", seemingly model citizens, by virtue of their embracing of the law. However, they often sought to trap Jesus by finding something he'd do wrong. Often strongly warned against hypocrisy by Jesus.)

What are the actions of the woman?

(She wept at his feet, wiped them with her tears.)

What is the significance of the alabaster jar?

(A costly offering, given to someone who she thought was well deserving.)

How does Jesus receive the perfume?

Who calls the woman a sinner?



Slightly photoshop-altered sign. 2007.

A CLOSER LOOK (cont'd) ...

Why do you think Jesus values her offering more than the Pharisees'?

How does the parable fit into the rest of the story?

How do you see the Pharisee and the woman different in their approach to Jesus?

Why does Jesus say: “her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little”? What is the connection between forgiveness and love?

What does this story tell us about Jesus?

(Dining with Jesus is not exclusive, it's open to all. Attitude is everything when we approach Jesus, He's interested in where our hearts are at. Jesus doesn't want our formalism, He wants us just as we are: often raw, ashamed, confused, and conflicted. Jesus loved the woman, just as she is, and He forgave her.)

IS THIS REAL?

Leader: Share a part of your life where you struggled for acceptance, and found it in Jesus. You can share a time that Jesus forgave and accepted you, in the midst of your brokenness, and where other believers accepted you also.

AN INWARD LOOK

- Where have you seen people excluded by what they do/ who they are?
- Do you see that exclusiveness in Jesus? Did you expect Jesus to act differently?
- Where in your life have you felt excluded or not accepted?
- What do you think Jesus would say to people struggling with something, or someone on the margin of society?

FURTHER LOOK

Throughout the Bible, God is constantly calling people to care for the marginalized. Try a word study of scripture in the Bible for “widow,” “orphan,” “oppressed,” “outcast,” “alien,” and “destitute”. Old Testament books like Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel are full of these passages. In the New Testament, Jesus fulfilled this aspect of God's character by seeking out those on society's margins. Three good examples: Samaritan woman in John 4, the man with leprosy in Mark 1 and the bleeding woman in Mark 5.

THE CHALLENGE

Look at your life. Are there things that you think are unforgivable? Things that you feel like Jesus would condemn you for? Do they keep you excluded from Jesus? Ask Jesus for forgiveness. There is nothing too great that would keep Him away from you (Psalm 103, Romans 8:37–39). If you feel comfortable, share some of those things with another person.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. Psalm 103:8–10

Are there ways that you've seen the church exclude people that have kept you away from God? Forgive the church for those things. Let them go, stop letting those things separate you from God.