



Week 5: New, Not (Just) Improved

Luke 5:36-39

GOAL: To learn to see how life in the Kingdom of God is not just an addition or improvement to the old way of life; it is a replacement – a whole NEW kind of life.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- If you have not yet signed up for your group to serve with Building for the Better, find the date that works best and have them sign up during your group meeting.
- If your group has kids or students, let them know that kids' and students' Grow Groups will not meet on March 10. Decide together whether you will still meet that day, and let Amy know.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Jesus, thank you for your love and grace through the cross that makes life in your kingdom possible. Thank you for teaching us through your Word what your Kingdom is like. Thank you for your Spirit who is constantly present with us, available to teach us and empower us to live fully into your Kingdom life. May your Kingdom come, may your will be done in us. Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT

- Use this time to connect with your group relationally - both formally and informally.
- Invite your group to share one way that they have seen God at work in the past week, and one way they're praying for God to move in the week to come. (Your Inreach Coordinator can take notes to share these requests with the group.)
- Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today, including any praises or prayer requests from your previous conversation.

COORDINATE

Spend a few minutes covering any details the group needs to know:

- There are only three dates left to serve with Building for the Better! If your group has not yet participated, please choose one of the dates and sign up TODAY. This year, you cannot sign up for spots in bulk. You will need to ask each participating group member to sign up themselves for the date that your group selects.
- If your group has children or students, talk about whether or not you will meet on March 10, when we will not have kids' or students' Grow Groups. (If you decide to cancel that day, please be sure to let Amy know.)
- Ask your group to mark their calendars for the Table to the Cross service on Thursday, March 28, at 7pm. This is a meaningful opportunity to consider Christ's sacrifice on the cross and prepare your heart for Easter. We are asking all of our Grow Groups to attend and sit together. This will take the place of your Grow Group meeting during Holy Week and Easter (March 25-31). If you have kids and students, it is a meaningful experience for them as well! Childcare will be provided for babies and preschool children.

DISCUSS

- Pastor John shared some of his favorite window views, and now it's your turn. What's your favorite window scene? Could be from your home, workplace, or even a memorable travel spot.

Leaders Note: *We haven't asked an ice-breaker question in a while. Let this be an opportunity to get to know one another a little bit. You as the leader can be ready to share one of yours first. Then invite others to describe one of their favorite window views.*

After the group shares, you might take a moment to remind the group that this sermon series is called "Windows: Parables that Paint a Picture." Pastor John defines a parable in his sermon: "A parable is a story that illustrates a deeper reality. A parable uses things we are familiar with to explain things we aren't as familiar with." As we study 7 different parables from the gospel of Luke, we want to be on the lookout for how these parables give us a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is like.

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Read Luke 5:36-39.

- Pastor John begins by setting the context for Jesus telling this parable. Have someone in your group summarize this context. Why were the Pharisees and teachers of the law so upset with Jesus?

Leaders Note: *Throughout chapter 5 and into chapter 6, Jesus has been doing some things and saying some things that amazed the crowds and highly irritated the Pharisees and teachers of the law. In fact, Jesus' words were shocking and offensive. These controversies included not only that Jesus healed people but also claimed to forgive their sins. He and his disciples didn't practice the typical rituals that demonstrated piety in Jewish culture like regular fasting. Instead, they hung out with the wrong crowd and even ate with them. And to top it all off, Jesus had the nerve to heal on the Sabbath! What?!? All of this context helps us understand why Jesus told this parable and what he was trying to help them understand about the Kingdom of God.*

- Jesus used two simple metaphors in this parable to help people understand the Kingdom of God – a patch for an old garment and an old wineskin. In your own words, what do these object lessons teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Leaders Note: *Pastor John explains in his sermon that Jesus was showing how it can be disastrous when you try to add the new to the old. He uses the phrases: "You can't use the new to patch the old." And "You can't use the old to catch the new." Jesus was announcing in a subtle way that his coming into the world was the beginning of something brand new. A brand-new era has dawned. The Kingdom of God has now arrived!*

- Pastor John's main point is that life in the Kingdom of God is NEW, not just improved. What does he mean by this? What two examples did John give of ways we sometimes try to 'patch Jesus' onto our old systems? As a group, brainstorm other ways we're tempted to do this.

Leaders Note: *Pastor John gives a couple of examples in his sermon of how we are tempted to make Jesus just an add-on to our old way of thinking and living – achievement and politics. Before mentioning the others below, let your group grapple with this question. Give them time to reflect and then respond. Some others might be:*

- **Money:** *The old way of living is that acquiring and consuming is the pathway to happiness. We try to "patch" that by adding a little generosity every now and then, but nothing that would radically rearrange our comfort. But here's the new view we learn from life in the Kingdom of God: everything we have belongs to God, so we live with open-handed generosity, ready to steward and sacrifice anything or everything as God leads.*
- **Friendship:** *The old way of living says that we should develop relationships with people based on shared interests or potential benefits. The "patch" might be keeping strict boundaries on who we will associate with. But the Kingdom of God calls us to live as brothers and sisters, regardless of affinity, always welcoming, respectful and kind, eager to share the love of Christ.*

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- **Purpose/Mission:** *The old way of living says that I am the center of the universe. The “patch” might be that Jesus calls me to do a little for him along the way. Living in the Kingdom of God means that Christ is the center of the universe and I get to be a part of what he is doing.*
- **Prayer:** *The old way of living means that we don’t really pray at all. The “patch” might be that we pray as a duty or a box to be checked. But life in the Kingdom of God invites us into a constant conversational life with God through his Holy Spirit that abides in us.*

Something to think about: For the Pharisees, their “old garments and wineskins” were their misguided obsessions about the Law to the point that they couldn’t see the new thing God was doing through Jesus. They had forgotten the most basic ways of how to love God and their neighbor because they were too busy excluding and judging. Are there ways that our “religious” traditions are actually preventing us from seeing what God is doing and joining him in it?

- **Reread Luke 5:39.** *If life in the Kingdom of God is a whole new way of seeing the world and living in it, what can be scary about this? What prevents us from “going all in” whole-heartedly to life in the Kingdom of God?*

Leader’s Note: *As we name the barriers that prevent us from following Jesus with full trust and abandon, this helps us to become more aware of them, and to ask Jesus to help us overcome them. Some examples might be:*

- *We are not quite convinced that God’s way of living is actually the best way to live. We don’t really believe it, or we only believe it in certain areas, but not in others.*
- *We are afraid that God might ask us to do something that we don’t want to do or that would harm us.*
- *We listen to other voices that constantly contradict and confuse us about how to live.*

C.S. Lewis gives us another striking image in his book, The Weight of Glory, that points out how foolish we can be about preferring the old way of life instead of embracing the incredible gift of life with him in the Kingdom of God.

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

- *How can we create space for the Holy Spirit to be our transforming guide, showing us how to let go of our old life and embrace our new life in the Kingdom of God?*

Leader’s Note: *Of course, any of the classic spiritual habits that create space for God can be helpful – meditation on God’s Word, prayer, solitude, confession, etc. But here a few that might be especially helpful in regard to seeing new ways of living more fully in the Kingdom of God:*

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- **Daily Examen:** Just before you sleep each night this week, pray: “God, where did I resort to old garment patches or wineskins today?” Think back through your day and talk to God about anything God brings to mind.
- **Ask and Listen:** As you go through each day this week, pray as you go through your day and try to listen for His voice. For example, you might pray:
 - “God, how do you want to use me in this work meeting I’m about to attend?” Then listen, pay attention.
 - “God, give me a creative idea for loving my kids today.” Then listen.
 - “God, show me how to be kind to the stranger that is waiting on my table at lunch today.” Then listen.
- **Worship:** On your way to work or as you take your exercise this week, listen to your favorite worship music. Let it renew your mind and help you dwell in God’s presence all day long as you whisper, “Lord Jesus, let your Kingdom come and your will be done in my life today.”

For this final question, before our time of prayer, gather everyone into pairs (perhaps of the same gender) in order to better personalize and apply what we have learned.

- What is one part of your old way of thinking and living that Jesus may want to replace this week?

PRAY

Leaders: Within the same pairs, ask them to pray a simple prayer for each other: that they might learn to trust their King, Jesus, and choose to follow him wholeheartedly this week.

If dividing into pairs just isn’t a fit for some reason, guide your group through these prayer points:

1. Give thanks to Jesus for making life in his Kingdom possible.
2. Silently confess one area where you are afraid or unwilling to embrace Kingdom life; instead, you are holding on to old garments or wineskins.
3. Ask God to show us at VRBC how to be Kingdom people, living fully and joyfully into the life God is calling us to live TOGETHER for his glory and his purposes.

Optional: If you have prayed together as a group, consider asking people to join you in closing the prayer time by reciting the Lord’s Prayer. If people have prayed in pairs, you can invite them to close by praying this together as well.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”

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