

# When Jesus Went to Vegas

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## Overview

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This week we are going to look at how Jesus responded to the sin in Sin City. We'll be looking at a side of Him that most of us don't understand or like. Jesus was full of grace and acceptance when he came to Sin City. He loved every person he was around more than they could ever fully realize. Shawn is teaching out of the story of the calling of Matthew, a tax collector, and how Jesus went and partied with Matthew's friends. In group, we are going to focus on one of the most important verses in the New Testament on grace. I refer to this week as a "Going Public" week in Growth Group. It will take courage to really talk through these questions as a leader. You can do it!

*Let me give you guys a facilitation tip.* When you facilitate anything, the goal is not to just make it through the material; the goal is to make the subject at hand your own. If you own the subject you are talking about as a facilitator, it comes across much stronger than if you are just repeating what I or anyone else said. One "sin" of facilitating is to read word for word off of my or any other notes to your group. People really want to hear what you have to say on the subject as the facilitator, not me. So please study these notes and spend time in prayer for your group. After that, leave the notes at home, go with your questions, and make the discussion yours. If you do this, people will know that you spent more time in preparation and that this is your subject. When your group can sense that you are passionate about something and own it, your group will be more successful!

## Objectives

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- To expose people's thoughts on grace within the group.
- To discover together how to receive God's grace.
- To offer an invitation for people to "Go Public" with their faith for the first time.

## Special Announcements

- **GREATER IMPACT SERVICE PROJECTS:** *Before your group starts, let your Greater Impact Coordinator talk about when your project is and what your group is going to be doing.*
- **PARENT/CHILD DEDICATION:** *If you have young families in your group, please announce the dedication services on May 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup>. This ceremony allows parents the opportunity to publicly affirm and celebrate their desire to raise their children in Christ. Go to Guest Services this weekend to pickup the form that is due next Friday, May 5<sup>th</sup>.*

## Facilitators' Guide

- 1. Most people think: "The more good I do = The more God loves me." Have you ever thought this way? Why or why not?**
  - I don't know if I can explain to you guys through the notes the magnitude of this opening question. One of the greatest lies Satan would have us believe is that the more good you do, the more God loves you. In complete honesty, I believe this. I have thought this way and still do in many ways. It is an unbelievable trap to place ourselves in as Christians or non-Christians. I truly believe that every person on earth thinks this way at one time or another. Starting with this question will help to lay a solid foundation for the rest of this discussion.
- 2. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to a church in the first century. Why do you think church people still need to hear about grace?**
  - Doesn't it often feel as though grace is talked about more on the front end of Christianity than the back end? When I was seventeen years old and about to commit my life to Christ, all I heard about was a Jesus that loved me for who I was and that I didn't have to "clean-up" before coming to receive His grace in my life. That is an attractive message for a messed up seventeen-year-old with no hope for anything other than baseball. So, I committed my life to Christ and then the "loving" Jesus that everyone told me about seemed to turn into the Jesus that I needed to do right to please. If I didn't, he wouldn't hear my prayers or love me back. The church turned on me. Jesus became a "slot machine" of sorts for me. I just kept putting my good deeds in, pulling the lever, and hoping that, this time, the cherries would line up and I would win the grace that was once free to me.
  - For you and your group, the reason church people still need to hear about Jesus' grace is because Jesus is the same on the front end as He is on the back end. Does He want you to sin? No. But He understands that we will all mess up, and He still loves us regardless. Philippians 1:6 points out that Jesus will finish the good work He started in your life. We give up on ourselves because we think we are supposed to be really good now that we go to church. That is simply not true! We are still people, and we are still going to mess up A LOT. Therefore, this message of grace is huge for those of us involved in the church!
- 3. What are some things from your past that may lead you to think that Jesus would run away from your Vegas?**
  - This is a great community-building question! It is also one of those questions that you need to really pray about before your group starts. Pray that people would open up and be willing to share out of their lives for a few minutes about their pasts. Many people don't picture Jesus walking into their past and forgiving them of everything they have ever done wrong. I promise you this: One of the ways that people feel the grace of God most is when other people look them in the eyes and say, "I know what you did is wrong, but I still love you." When people share grace with one another, God's grace is experienced. Encourage people to share things that are uncomfortable because grace will be extended. This would be a great time for you, as a facilitator, to jump out there and model the way.
  - You can make your group a place of grace by sharing that whatever is said in that room stays in the room. Creating a safe environment is key to people sharing stories from their pasts!

#### 4. Have you ever personally experienced God's grace in your Vegas?

**\* If so, share about the experience of having Christ come to be your forgiver and leader (committing your life to Christ).**

**\* If not, would you be open to allowing your group to help you experience God's grace?**

- The bottom line on this question is that we want to draw a line in the sand. People have either experienced Christ's forgiveness and grace or they haven't. So, we're asking those who have to share their stories. We also want to pray with those who have yet to know the grace and forgiveness we are referring to.
- You will be asking the people who have experienced Christ's grace to share about the time they committed their lives to Christ. You need to share first as a facilitator. This is the time when you can share from your lives about your salvation experiences. Many people have different experiences. For some people, it was a long process and they don't know the exact date or time, but they know their life has changed for the better. Some people, like me, have a defining moment for which we remember the time and the place where the message of Jesus came into our lives. Regardless of the circumstances, encourage people to share these stories together.
- If someone hasn't stepped over the line of faith yet, please be gentle with them. We want to provide a safe place where people can voice their deepest struggle with making this step and everyone can support them. If someone wants you to pray with them as a group about this decision, do so. If you can tell you need to back off and talk with the person later, that is great also. Just make sure that you build time into your group meeting in which you give people the opportunity to experience Christ's love and grace. This could be a night that someone in your group remembers and talks about forever. Please be open to Christ's leading.
- What do you do if someone wants help receiving Christ's grace in their life? Simply talk with them about what it means to commit your life to Christ. Explain that you make a decision to quit trying to be good enough on your own and accept Christ for who He is – a loving, graceful savior. After that, you can pray with them as they move forward in making a decision.