



Small Group Guide: Week 4

Making the connection |

- Welcome your group.
- Check in with each other: What's one of the most dangerous things you did this week?
- Did it put you alone in danger or might it have involved others as well?
- Here are a few discussion questions to get you started:
Which of your teen years was the hardest for you? Why?
Who has invested in you over the years?
Do you surround yourself with people who have your best interests at heart? Explain.
Are they Christian?

Watch the video |

When I was fifteen my friend Tanner and I bought a ticket for a PG-13 movie, however took this ticket and snuck into an R rated movie. Getting home that night, my mom looked at me in a different way. A way where I knew she knew but I didn't know how she knew. She told me how one of our family friends had sat behind me in the theater! And they called to let her know. I was busted! My first sneaking in to a movie failed miserably. But, in that moment, I was able to release my guilt and this secret. In that moment, my mom did not yell or get angry but loved her fifteen year old boy. She busted me but loved me nonetheless. How much more does God bust us but loves us nonetheless. There is nothing we can do that stops God from loving us. Now the only question that remains is will we let that love in?

Have you ever gotten busted for something you'd done? If so, what was it?

Do you think it is possible to keep something secret and never letting anyone you know that you had done it? What does it feel like to keep a secret from people?

What are ways that you avoid dealing with mistakes, issues or problems in your life?

Do you have people, in your life, or are you yourself struggling with something and keeping it to yourself? Why do you think these people are keeping it to themselves? What can you do to help?

Who are some people in your life that could never do anything to make you love them less? Do you feel this way about all people? Why or why not?

Are there people, in your life, that you need to let them know you love them? When have you got more caught up in rules, instead of letting someone know you love them?

Do you believe and feel deep down, in your heart, that God loves you no matter what you've done or will do? If yes, how did you reach this feeling? If no, what is keeping you from letting God fully love you?

What do you think God wants us to do with bad decisions, struggles or guilt? What stops you from going to God or going to other people to receive forgiveness?

How do you think God works in other people to feel loved and forgiven? Is there a moment in your life where you confessed your: pain, shame, guilt or bad decisions?

Connecting with the Sunday reading |

Our reading this week is Jesus' best known parable, the one normally called *The Prodigal Son* in Luke 15. It's the story of a man with two sons; the younger is bored with his life and impatient. He wants his share of his father's inheritance now, while he can enjoy it. So the father gives it to him. He goes and spends it all, loses all his friends, and ends up with the worst imaginable job for a Jew—feeding pigs. He comes to his senses and decides to go home, his plan being that his father accept him as a hired hand. Instead he is welcomed as a son and given all the perks of sonship, including a feast celebrating his return.

The elder brother, however, is not as happy to see him home. In fact he is furious to learn that the wasteful life of his younger brother is forgotten, and he is allowed back into the family. He refuses the father's pleading to welcome his brother home, reminding the father of all the years he has been a good and dutiful, hard working son.

It says at the beginning of this chapter, "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to (Jesus). And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:1-2).

1. Do you see parallels in this story to those who were listening to it?
2. How do you think the tax collectors and sinners interpreted the parable?
3. How do you think the religious people, the Pharisees and scribes, received Jesus' story?
4. When have you been a younger son? When have you been an elder brother?

Closing |

- What does it mean to really trust others to forgive you?
- What does it mean to really trust God to forgive you?
- Are you able to forgive yourself?
- Does it make it easier to forgive others?
- As a group ask God to help you live your life without secrets and shadows. Then pray for others who suffer anxiety and pain from their past.