

“Ways of Minimizing Sin Versus Maximizing Jesus” (Growth in Grace II)
(Study 4 of “Spiritual Processing Group: Sonship B” Series)

Opening Question (10-20 Minutes)

1. What’s a favorite costume you’ve worn?
 - Describe what it looked like- Did you buy or make it? How much of your body did it cover? Was there a mask?
 - Describe it’s effect- How did people react? How did it make you feel to see it or wear it?
2. If your group can handle it, read the following aloud and talk about it: *“We each have a style, or a mode of interacting with our world. We use this style to regulate how close others may be to us and how far they may withdraw. If people get too close, we usually feel the awkward rise of shame; if they get too far from us, we often feel loneliness and loss...notice how the person draws you in or keeps you at a distance. The people who draw you in often fear loneliness more than shame. Those who keep you at a distance usually fear shame more than loneliness. Most people will draw and distance simultaneously.”* (Dan Allender, *The Healing Path*)
 - What do you do to draw people in?
 - What do you do to keep people at a distance?

Let’s take a look at a story Jesus told about how we don’t sometimes see ourselves honestly- and how that changes the way God and others see and treat us...

Scripture Study (15 Minutes)

Read Matthew 21:28-32

(Read the parable aloud twice: have one person read it in the ESV and the other in the NLT.)

1. Be quiet for 30 seconds. Think or write. Now what are your first impressions?
 - What’s your emotional, gut-reaction?
 - Ask a question you have (or can think of).
 - Volunteer a thought or comment- about a verse or the whole passage.
2. In verse 28, a father tells his son to “go and work in the vineyard today.” Is there something in your life that feels like working in the vineyard?
 - What is it about working in the vineyard that produces such a mixed response?
 - Why do you think Jesus chose this image for our reluctance to obey God’s will?
3. What are some ways we hide behind telling people I will not (“no”) or I will (“yes”)?
 - Do you identify more with the first son or the second son? Why?
 - Jesus identifies the posture of the first son with the tax collectors and prostitutes. If you identified with the first son, how are you with being associated with tax collectors and prostitutes?
 - Jesus identifies the posture of the second son with the chief priests and the elders of the people (the “you” that goes back to verse 23). If you identified with the second son, how are you with being associated with the chief priests and the elders?

Scripture Passage (Parable of the Two Sons)

Matthew, Chapter 21- English Standard Version Translation (ESV): ²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’

²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."

Matthew, Chapter 21- New Living Translation (NLT): ²⁸ "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. ³⁰ Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go. ³¹ "Which of the two obeyed his father?" They replied, "The first." Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do.³² For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins."

Group Discussion (20-25 minutes)

Spiritual Exercise: "Naming Our Sins More Honestly and Telling the Whole Truth about Jesus"

Noticing and Naming: "6 Ways We Minimize Sin"

Can I get 6 different volunteers to read aloud? Would each of you read a different strategy to minimize our sin. After we read the following, spend some time thinking of or writing-down specific instances or relationships where you've done each of these strategies.

1. Defending: *I struggle to receive feedback. I can't hear criticism. When confronted, I explain things away or make excuses. I justify my decisions or actions. People find me hard to approach.*

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2. Faking: *I keep up appearances. I maintain a respectable image. My behavior is driven by what people think of me. People find it hard to know the real me.*

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3. Hiding: *I conceal or don't ever mention the bad stuff about me. I am driven by shame and fear of rejection. I think when people really get to know me, they won't accept or love me.*

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4. Exaggerating: *I tend to highlight myself in a conversation. I emphasize my good traits, and point them out- directly or indirectly. Or I can seek attention by (over-)emphasizing the bad things going on in my life. People can't handle a boring version of me.*

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5. Blaming: *I'm quick to blame others: it's always someone else's fault or just my situation. I struggle to own my faults and role in a conflict. I worry people will reject me, if it's my fault.*

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6. Downplaying: *I'm just normal, not that bad. Everyone else struggles with whatever I struggle with- and often times, worse. Things can mount for me until they are overwhelming all-at-once. People need me to be calm, cool, collected, and in control. I can't be stressed, anxious or messy.*

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Which example (or examples) of minimizing your sin do you identify with most?

- Why do you think you are drawn to this particular strategy?
- What about your self-image feels vulnerable or at stake?

The Invitation to Rest: "3 Truths about How Jesus Sees Us Whole"

I'll read the following quote twice. Between the readings and afterwards, let's sit with these truths, and silently apply this Jesus to the real-life examples and relationships stirred up for us.

"You get your self-image from Jesus- he's the only one who will tell you the truth and he loves you...God chose to be my friend, because he wanted to be my friend. He asked to hangout. He will never leave or forsake me. I can't get behind. You're good enough. You don't have to pretend to be good. There's nothing to protect, no potential you haven't lived up to. What if being human was okay? What if I could admit to you I'm a sinner, and the statute of limitations hadn't run out because I committed the sin this morning? Let God's love go to your head! Jesus would have still come and died, even if you were the only person on earth. The Father would and has given everything for you...Jesus is fond of us! Therefore, 1. We don't have to pretend to be good, 2. We don't have to pretend to be right, and 3. We don't have to fight a battle that's already been won by Jesus (perform)." (Steve Brown)

Group Prayer (10-15 Minutes)

Ideas for Communal and Personal Prayer.

- Share for yourself, and pray for the person sitting at **9 o'clock** from you

1. Here is a reflection questions to ask yourself, and- if time permits- share about: *What about my heart-attitude or life-choices does this gospel of big sins and a bigger Jesus challenge?*

- (Is there something you're feeling or thinking from the spiritual exercise- maybe a question or comment?)
- Is there a praise, a confession, a word of thanks, or a request you'd like to make about what you're processing?

2. Is there something else going on that what can we pray about for you?