

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Luke 7:1-17

(please not, all the discussion questions are at the end)

7:1-10

Let's begin with the question Jesus posed to end His message from the previous passage: *"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* (Luke 6:46 NIV)

We want to keep this question well in mind as we look at this next passage.

In this passage we're introduced to a centurion (a commander of 100 soldiers in the Roman army). In Matthew's account of this story the centurion speaks directly to Jesus. In Luke's account the conversation actually takes place through intermediaries ("the elders of the Jews", verse 3; and "friends", verse 6)

We're told that the centurion's servant was deathly ill, and that the centurion highly valued his servant. We're also told that the elders of the Jews *"pleaded earnestly"* with Jesus to heal the centurion's servant. Now what is striking is that the Jews would intercede on behalf of the centurion because, generally speaking, they despised the Romans...let alone a commanding officer in the army. Notice their reasoning/rationale, *"This man deserves to have You do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."* (7:4b-5a) So did the elders of the Jews really care about this centurion or his servant? Or did they just want to stay on his good side? Was this compassion on their part or expediency/pragmatism? Did the elders really have high esteem for this centurion, or was there something of a more selfish nature at play? I wonder if Jesus thought something like, *"Well, this is odd...the elders going to bat for a centurion?"*

Notice the contrast in how the centurion viewed himself in all this: *"I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you."* (7:6b-7a)

An important and timely theme that seems to be bubbling up here is what we might call "entitlement". The use of the words "deserve", and "worthy" is entitlement language (we could even throw in the word "rights"). Before I dive too deep into that, let me preface by stating that the Gospel is inherently a social commentary. It speaks directly to the questions of "Who's in charge here?" and "How do we get along with one another?" Thus, any good preaching/teaching of the Gospel will have some social commentary included.

With that said, let's consider the idea of "rights", "entitlement", and what we actually "deserve". For the sake of argument, let's examine the opening paragraph or so of the Declaration of Independence:

In Congress, July 4, 1776.

**The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America**, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

As followers of Jesus we have the responsibility to discern whatever “truth claims” that come down the pike in light of Scripture. So the question is: does the above sentiment align with Scripture? Notice the use of the words “entitle” and “rights”...notice also the use of “God” and “Creator”. Does Scripture actually back up this opening claim from the Declaration of Independence? The answer is NO. Just because someone (in this case the “founding fathers”) slap the words “God” and “Creator” into their treatise, does not thereby give it the endorsement (and authority) of the Divine. As Christians it behooves us to understand that the “rights” and “entitlements” that this country is built on are an illusion, a human construct, steeped in humanistic thinking and NOT a product of Gospel-thinking.

If we were to go to Scripture and ask the question: “What are we entitled to? What do we inherently deserve? What is owed us?”, what would the answer be? Scripture tells us this: “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23) and “*the wages (i.e. what we earn, what we deserve, what we are owed) of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a)

So while we can get behind the concept that “all men are created equal” the basis for that equality differs between the Declaration of Independence and the Bible. Correctly understood our equality is NOT based on unalienable rights endowed by our Creator, but rather on us all equally deserving death. Now we may not like that...but truth isn't truth based on whether we like it or not.

So what does this have to do with the passage at hand? Let's compare/contrast the thinking/rationale of the elders of the Jews with the centurion. The elders believed that some people deserved certain things (and the implication is also that some people don't deserve certain things). And let's face it, they suffered from a certain level of entitlement as leaders of their people...an entitlement that caused them to not recognize the Messiah. What we need to understand that is that rights, entitlements, what we deserve or think we're owed is completely

contrary to the whole idea of GRACE. The centurion, on the other hand, was not operating out of a sense of entitlement. He didn't think he deserved Jesus' attention at all...and thereby was able to receive the grace Jesus offered.

Notice Jesus' response to the centurion, "*He was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following Him, He said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'*" (7:9) Now it would seem to me that impressing Jesus is a very hard thing to do. But apparently this centurion made quite an impression. What did Jesus find so great and amazing about the centurion's faith?

There are, I believe, 3 elements of the centurion's faith that stood out to Jesus. First, he valued others. The centurion "highly valued" his servant, and valued the Jews enough to do good by them (like build their synagogue). It would have been very easy for him, and quite typical in fact, for him to look down upon both his servant and the Jews. But this centurion was different. Secondly, he recognized his own unworthiness. He didn't function/operate from a sense of entitlement. Third, he recognized the authority of Jesus. That's huge. Many people want what they think Jesus can offer them...but most don't really want Jesus having authority over them. This was certainly true of the Jewish elders. So it wasn't simply that the centurion believed that Jesus could heal his servant that impressed Jesus...because even the Jewish elders believed that.

So as we examine our own faith, we can look to these 3 elements (valuing others; not being deserving; submitting to Jesus' authority) to see how we are doing. The first and third element tie in directly to Jesus' earlier question, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (The second element is more of a posture/disposition of our heart.)

7:11-17

In this next section we see Jesus encounter a widow who just lost her only son. We're told, "*When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her...*" (7:13) When we think about someone having authority over us (which Christ clearly does), the natural question(s) is, "Is this person good; can I trust this person?" In this snap shot we catch a glimpse of the heart of God. He sees and knows the pain and needs of each individual (as represented by this widow), and His heart goes out.

While we can get our heads around the loving heart of God, let's be honest...our minds tend to think, "Well, why doesn't He super-naturally intercede into every need like He did here in raising the widow's son from the dead, and healing the centurion's servant?" That's a good question with no easy answer. But I suspect the "answer" (if we can even call it that) might lie back with the faith of the centurion. Jesus wants each of us to have a faith that resembles his. Jesus wants us to value others deeply (like He does). Jesus wants us to recognize that we don't deserve anything (because only then can we accept anything as what it truly is...grace on His part.) Jesus wants us to understand His authority over us, and to live accordingly. Notice that

none of this is contingent upon Him doing anything for us, or doing stuff we think He ought to do.

- Q. In what ways do you see entitlement playing out in your life? What do you think you deserve or have a right to?**
- Q. What do you think about the idea that the founding documents of this country are not products of the Gospel, and are really more fruits of humanism?**
- Q. How would someone complete this sentence about you: “I know (insert your name) values people because....”**
- Q. Do you have issues with authority? How so?**
- Q. Have you ever been in authority over others? What challenges did you face?**
- Q. Considering all those over the course of your life who have had authority over you: who was a particularly good authority figure (and why/how) and who was a particularly bad authority figure (why/how)?**
- Q. Since/if this Christian life can be boiled down to doing what Jesus says, as a group list everything He has told us to do. (Try to be as specific as possible.)**
- Q. What’s the difference between a healthy sense of unworthiness and an unhealthy low self-esteem/self-concept?**
- Q. Notice verse 16: “They were all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. ‘God has come to help His people.” When was the last time you were “filled with awe”? Also, how is God still helping His people today? What does that look like?**
- Q. Let’s pretend you are in a philosophy or political science class in college. The professor has assigned, as your term project, a paper that asks you to address this question: How do you have a good, peaceful, just society without appealing to “rights”? As a HG (let’s pretend it’s a group project) what are some of your initial thoughts to that question?**

**(Hint: How do you believe in—or what do you believe about—the Kingdom of God?)**