



2016 Camp Curriculum



*Celebrate the Grip:
You Don't Know Who You Are
Until You Know Whose You Are
by Jeff McSwain*

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Dear 2016 Camp Directors and Staff:

“He’s got you!”

This camp curriculum is meant to emphasize one main point: The “grip of grace” is God’s unconditional love and faithfulness, which wraps every person up into Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension. Everything we understand about God starts with the loving grip Jesus Christ has on us through his incarnation. And, as last summer’s curriculum highlighted so powerfully, we marvel over the discovery that God’s grip of grace extends all the way back to each individual’s creation in Christ and never lets go (Eph 1:4-6). The grip of grace is a non-negotiable! In fact, even any talk of hell must start with this never-ending grip. In our sinful natures we fight against the grip to our destruction. Conversely, by the Holy Spirit, we **celebrate the grip** and are transformed.

By now you have seen “The Grip” illustration. Like any illustration, this one has its shortcomings, but “The Grip” reinforces the singular truth that all human love for God begins with the truth that God first loved us. “The Grip” seeks to reflect God’s unchanging attitude toward all humanity and the gospel truth that Jesus “brothers us,” including us in his relationship of love with the Father and Spirit. Our identity as beloved children of God is therefore rock solid, not because of what we have decided, but because of what God decided when he embraced us in Christ from all eternity.

That is why when we say “celebrate the grip!” we are referring to celebrating God’s grip on us, not our grip on him. The natural response to truly understanding God’s grip on us is to reciprocate with our own grip. When God’s love sinks in, we want to respond! Of course, to be theologically accurate, we admit that even our grip (i.e., our reciprocating grip) only takes place inside Jesus’ grip on us. As our brother, Jesus is already reciprocating the grip for us in his faithfulness to the Father, including us in his perfect response to the Father’s love - which is worship!

That’s why we talk so much about participation; we are invited to participate in Christ precisely because we exist within his vicarious faith, love and obedience. In essence, we find our true humanity as we participate in Christ’s response *for us*: In the words of John (8:36), “when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!”

As the unique mediator, Jesus represents God to us (a God-humanward movement) and us to God (a human-Godward movement). In other words, God grips you in Christ, and in Christ you return the grip. Realizing Jesus is on both sides of the mediation—the God-initiating and human-responding sides—can introduce challenges to our spatial ways of thinking (try thinking of the player in tennis who is serving being the same one who is returning!). This curriculum will focus on Jesus’ initiative of love in the God-humanward direction. In other words, the focus will be on Jesus as fully God and therefore the truth that Jesus’ grip on us *is* God’s grip on us.¹ Jesus as humanity’s responsive grip on God can wait until another time (*Celebrate the Grip*, part 2?)!

¹ I will leave it as mostly implied that no one could respond to God unless Jesus is responding for us. Again, this is a strategic decision on my part. The downside is that this emphasis may overshadow our understanding that Jesus is just as much on the human side of the equation as the God side, but I also know that an infestation of liberal theology (modern day Arianism) has at times kept Christians from really understanding Jesus’ oneness with God. In liberal theology Jesus’ internal relationship with God is lost. Jesus is portrayed as the prime human example or role model with a special relationship with God. Of course our orthodox theology moves us way past our imitation of Jesus’ humanity to our inclusion in Jesus’ humanity. Jesus is not someone we exalt merely as the greatest human amongst humans, nor even as someone who simply enters our human subjectivity, but someone who defines our human subjectivity. Jesus Christ, Son of God, is the one true human being who includes all human beings and apart from whom we have no human existence at all. We must always keep this in mind, even as we emphasize Christ as one being with the Father and the Spirit.

It is absolutely critical our campers know they can trust the picture of God we see in Jesus Christ. As the Nicene Creed proclaims, Jesus Christ is God from God, light from light, true God of true God, of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father! Through Jesus' encounters with people in the Gospel of Luke, I pray that the Holy Spirit will indelibly print on campers' hearts the absolute truth that they belong to God as his beloved sons and daughters in Christ, not because of anything they have done, but because of what God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—has done.

As the quote from T.F. Torrance on the next page indicates, it is difficult to preach the gospel of grace without “throwing people back on themselves”—this is an all too common pitfall in proclamation which leads people to think the final contribution to accomplish salvation is up to them. Our goal is to point the campers to Christ and one way to do this is to encourage them to respond to the grip by speaking gospel truths back to God, for example:

Thank you for the relationship you have given me

You are my Good Shepherd, I belong to you

Thank you for carrying me, Jesus, I need to be carried

Jesus thank you for including me in your life with the Father and Spirit, I want to grow in Christ

Thank you for dying for me, Jesus, so that I might know nothing can separate me from the love of God!

By speaking these truths and others back to God, campers are reminded that they are not meant to *create the truth* with their decisions; for example, please come into my life and rescue me (as if Christ wasn't already in their lives or as if Christ hasn't rescued them), please forgive my sins (as if Christ hasn't forgiven them), please accept me as your son or daughter (as if the campers were not already children of God).

Remember that the idea of response *outside* of the economy of grace and truth is very heavy: if Christ has done all that he has done only to “put the ball in our court,” the “ball” would be a medicine ball of utmost proportions! I want to warn about this semi-Pelagian tendency in evangelism because it is so subtle. For instance, there are places in our featured gospel narrative (Luke), where Jesus will say to those he encounters, “your faith has healed you,” or “your faith has saved you.” If we didn't know better, we might think these people to whom Jesus is speaking *created the truth* of their salvation by their faith! That is why we approach every one of these stories with the knowledge that the grip of God on every individual has already taken place, as revealed in Jesus' incarnation, and before any of the encounters themselves happen. So when Jesus says “your faith has healed you,” or “your faith has saved you,” he is recognizing that these people understand something of who Jesus is and are participating by faith within the prior grip of God's faithfulness. Said another way, the participants are “living into” the healing, wholeness and salvation of Jesus Christ—healing, wholeness and salvation that they have already been given, before any so-called “validation” on their part. When Jesus is pictured as physically gripping someone in the gospels (for instance Simon who is sinking in the water), this is simply a visible sign of the invisible truth that Jesus has every person in the story, and every person ever created, in his incarnate grip by the Spirit.

You'll notice I have included tag lines associated with each message to provide natural action steps for the campers to take in order to express their desires to grow in their relationship with Christ. I'm calling these Reality Rules to “flip the script” on the normal way we think of rules (rules are typically related to *things we are supposed to do*). Reality Rules are instead rules to remember about *who God is* as God reveals himself to us in Jesus. These lines all begin with “Jesus,” as in “Jesus knows me the best and loves me the most.” Please encourage the campers to memorize all six Reality Rules as the camp session

progresses. I hope they will transition from saying these truths *about* Jesus to saying these truths directly *to* Jesus in personal communication with him. For example: “Jesus, You know me the best and love me the most.”

I pray that the Holy Spirit will move in mighty ways this summer and that many campers will come to know Jesus more fully as their Savior and Lord. When you see the Spirit moving in a camper’s life, don’t hesitate to get on board with what God is doing. Pray with and encourage these young disciples, and look for ways to get them folded into Christian community right away!

Have fun, and may you sense the joy of the Lord as your strength!
Jeff

P.S. Obviously Matt Redmon’s song “Never Let Go” is a perfect musical complement to this curriculum!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y83-vMeWc9E>

How to preach the gospel evangelically, by T.F. Torrance

*We preach and teach the gospel evangelically, then, in such a way as this: God loves you so utterly and completely that he has given himself for you in Jesus Christ his beloved Son, and has thereby pledged his very Being as God for your salvation. In Jesus Christ God has actualised his unconditional love for you in your human nature in such a once for all way, that he cannot go back upon it without undoing the Incarnation and the Cross and thereby denying himself. Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. **He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let you go,** for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.²*

² TFT, *Mediation of Christ*, 94. Emphasis added. Speaking of our response as also being inside of the grip, the quote continues: From beginning to end what Jesus Christ has done for you he has done not only as God but as man. He has acted in your place in the whole range of your human life and activity, including your personal decisions, and your responses to God’s love, and even your acts of faith. He has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you, so that he acknowledges you before God as one who has already responded to God in him, who has already believed in God through him, and whose personal decision is already implicated in Christ’s self-offering to the Father, in all of which he has been fully and completely accepted by the Father, so that in Jesus Christ you are already accepted by him. Therefore, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

Chapel 1: Attitude Problem

[Hold up Bible] This book makes an astounding claim, worthy of our consideration. It says that we live on a visited planet (and I'm not talking extra-terrestrial beings!). It says that God, the God who made the world, came into the world he created, and his name was Jesus Christ. Now when you think of Jesus Christ, what images come to mind?

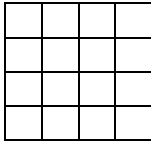
[Show slides with different portrayals of Jesus! Pele Jesus, Blue eyed Jesus, Disco Jesus, J. Crew Jesus, Back-seat Driver Jesus etc.]

The Bible says when he arrived, the world didn't recognize him. In the Pele Jesus slide, Jesus is wearing a robe and sandals while the rest of the players are wearing Adidas and Umbros. He stands out like a sore thumb! If you were living 2,000 years ago, however, you might not have picked Jesus out in a crowd. God took on the form of a dark-skinned, Jewish man from a small Palestinian town called Nazareth. He wore robe and sandals, but so did everyone else. He spoke the local dialect (Aramaic). He did not glow or have a halo around his head.

What if Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to walk the earth in our time instead of long ago? What if he walked into this room from one entrance, and at the same time you walked in through the other door, and it was just the two of you, how would Jesus greet you?

I believe Jesus would call you by name, or your affectionate nickname, and that he would rush over to embrace you. Then he would pull back, look into your eyes and exclaim, "It is so great to see you!" And you would be absolutely certain that he really does see you. You might be taken aback a bit, because you aren't sure you know this guy, but I believe that in that moment you would feel completely known, and also completely loved. No matter what you've done or what has been done to you, I believe in that encounter with Jesus you would experience a safe place, full of unconditional love and acceptance.

16 Squares Illustration



Display a 4x4 square, like the example to the left, using paper or a projector.

Ask: How many squares do you see?

(The first answer will always be 16, of course, then 17, which includes outside border square. Remain silent and shake head until you get more answers. Someone may eventually hit on 30. After the 17 you have nine 2x2's and four 3x3's, making 30).

The 16-17 squares are like what you are on the surface. We're often told that how we look is what defines us, kind of like the advertising slogan "Image is Everything." Think about all the ways we try to put forth an image: clothes, hair, shoes, and jewelry, even tattoos. That's all surface stuff, related to what we do and say. Sometimes we get frustrated because we think others don't know the real person inside and are only focusing on what they see. But who we really are is under the surface—the hidden squares. There might be some good squares we wish people could see, and all of us have some ugly or painful squares underneath we wish we could hide. That's why we don't want people to see underneath our surface "image." Perhaps we are afraid if someone sees too many of the underneath squares they might be repulsed by something ugly and turn away or reject us. But Jesus sees you on a 30-square level. He knows the real you - good and bad - and he does not turn away. He does not condemn you for your sins. In fact, he forgives you before you even ask!

Most importantly, Jesus sees you down to the deepest square, where your real image resides. He knows you are a beautiful son or daughter of God, created by Christ himself in *his* image, and that's what he focuses on. Your Creator made you good, and no matter how sinful you may feel, your created goodness remains. No matter how broken you are Christ never loses sight of your wholeness in him. When Jesus entered the world as a human being, he demonstrated that he, your Creator, has an unchanging grip on you. Let me illustrate this grip: (Repeat Grip illustration)

So you see, God never lets go of you. That's why we say you are in God's unchanging grip.

So going back to Jesus, when he entered this world, he was demonstrating that he has an unchanging grip on you. Emmanuel means "God with us," God with you! And God with you means you with God!

I want you to think about Jesus' birth for a moment, when God first entered our world as a human being. Can you imagine what it must have been like to really be there when Jesus was born and to see him in Mary's arms?

This song tries to describe such an experience.

[Play the Newsboys song *Adoration* on YouTube. Lyrics come up on screen. The line to emphasize is "Jesus our Emmanuel, is with us here and **he won't let go.**"]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JATtxxglPN4>

Now most people didn't recognize Jesus when he was born. Think about how crazy it is to think of a baby as God among us! But his mother Mary for sure knew who he was. You know those bumper stickers on cars that brag, "My child is an honor role student?" Mary could've slapped a sticker on the back of her donkey that read, "My child is God!" She knew that Jesus had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, without her ever having had sex.

This child, God with Us, Emmanuel, grew up as a carpenter, but when he was 30 years old he started walking around the country reaching out to people with God's love. This week we are going to look at some passages from the book of Luke and see how Jesus interacted with others. We will begin to discover that Jesus' interactions in these stories aren't just about God's *love* in action; they are about **God himself** in action! I want you to sense Jesus' knowing us and loving us at the deepest level. I encourage you to put yourselves in the shoes (or sandals!) of the people who Jesus encounters in the stories we'll discuss this week. He is still Emmanuel. He is with you right now, and he won't let go.

Let's start by looking at a Jesus encounter in Luke 7:36-50

[Instead of reading these stories straight through, I suggest you tell this story as I've done below, using your imagination to add color, and implementing direct passages of Scripture as you see fit. Note: for direct passages, I have relied mostly on the J.B. Phillips translation.]

One day Jesus was asked to dinner at a Pharisee's house. Do you know who Pharisee's are in Jesus' day? They are well-meaning religious people, but they have a thing for rules, and sometimes this causes them to miss the heart of God that Jesus wants to show them.

The story tells us that when Jesus came into the house, he took his place at the table (you may have seen pictures of middle-eastern people reclining at a low table). I can visualize Jesus and this guy reclining at the table, propped up by cushions, each leaning on an elbow, popping grapes and talking about the big Jerusalem Jets game coming up or the latest issue of Camel and Driver Magazine.... Then something unexpected happens. A woman walks right in, uninvited, (we are told she was known in town as "a bad woman"—a prostitute). She had heard that Jesus was there, so she walked in and went right up to Jesus while he was reclining at the table. She was weeping, and her tears fell on Jesus feet. I'm not sure why

she was crying. I get the impression she is broken, maybe ashamed, and also appreciative of whom Jesus is. She promptly dries Jesus' feet with her long hair (no self-respecting woman would let her hair down in public), then she breaks open a bottle of perfume and begins to anoint Jesus' feet with the perfume.

You can only imagine how shocked the Pharisee was. I imagine him looking around at his people like "how did *she* get in here?", but probably because Jesus was his honored guest, and because Jesus was accepting of the woman, the Pharisee allowed the woman's ritual to continue.

But the Pharisee said under his breath: "If this man were really a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of person is touching him. He would have realized that she is trash and he should not be associating with her."

But Jesus knew exactly who was touching him. And he knew the woman was lavishing love and appreciation on him in return for the love and acceptance he had demonstrated to her [in all probability, at some point previously].

You see, the Pharisee had an attitude problem. Sometimes people ask me what is the biggest challenge with teenagers today? And I say, "They have an attitude problem."

But wait...not the way you think I mean it! What I mean is most teenagers - most people for that matter - have an attitude problem because *they don't understand God's attitude towards them!* They don't realize God's attitude towards them is the same attitude Jesus had toward this woman. They don't know he hung out with the folks who were scorned by society and thought of as the worst people in town. They don't know this God, who in the person of Jesus Christ, was stripped and strung up on a Roman cross because of his love for them, proven in the words he spoke while he was dying: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." They don't know God's true attitude towards us.

**Reality Rule #1:
Jesus knows me
the best and
loves me the
most!**

Here's the crazy thing: when it comes to knowing God's attitude towards us, in this story the prostitute got it right, and the religious guy got it wrong. The prostitute had faith that Jesus was a "safe place," full of unconditional love and acceptance. Because the religious guy, the Pharisee, was so caught up in his own self-righteousness and condemnation of the woman, he missed it. But the woman got it. At the end of the story, Jesus expressly says to the Pharisee that the woman was showing her love for Jesus because she believed he first loved her and had forgiven her. It was an act of appreciation for Jesus' forgiveness. The Pharisee, however, didn't demonstrate appreciation; he missed out on being changed by Jesus' forgiveness, because he didn't think he needed it.³

So let's go back to the hypothetical encounter that I asked you to imagine - you come in one door to a room and spontaneously run into Jesus who is coming in through the other door. Does this story from Scripture help you to grasp the depth of his greeting to you? Think about how it would feel to have him look you in the eyes all the way down to the 30th square, and for you to sense that you were totally known, and more exposed than you've ever been, but at the same time more loved than you have ever imagined. He is looking at you this way right now. He is saying to each one of you, "I knit you together in your mother's womb, you are my masterpiece, so beautiful and so valuable to me." Maybe you are

³ This doesn't mean that the Pharisee wasn't forgiven; he was! The message of the gospel is "You are forgiven, therefore repent!" John Calvin called this evangelical repentance. Calvin said that if we repent *in order to be forgiven* we will be repenting to the wrong god!—a god who loves us conditionally. This conditional god is certainly not the picture of the Father we see so clearly in the prodigal son story (Lk 15: 11ff).

getting the idea through Jesus Christ that God not only loves you, he really likes you. If you are thinking this, you are right!

Here's the first of what we will call our six rules of Reality (let's memorize each one):

Reality Rule #1: Jesus knows me the best and loves me the most!

Close in prayer.

Real Talk Session One: Lk 5: 17-26, The Paralytic

Established: because of what we said earlier about Jesus' incarnation revealing creation, we know Jesus has a grip on every person in this story.

- When and how is Jesus' grip *illustrated* in this story?
- Who "gets it" and who does not "get it" it in the story?
- How does Jesus see this man on the mat?
- Why is what he says to the man important for us to hear and know?
- Imagine you are the paralytic being lowered through the roof, looking up at the faces of the people holding the ropes. Can you imagine the faces of anyone in your life who has brought you to Jesus or pointed you to him? Thank God for each of these people. If you want, share this with the group.

Chapel 2: Twice Mine!

Our first lesson reminded you that you have been in the grip of grace since before you were born. God made you and he rejoiced over you. Looking at the pinnacle of his creation he said, "It is very good." Like a top chef taste-testing his famous recipe, "Ooh la la! Magnificent!"

We have been in the grip of Jesus Christ from all eternity—we are children of light as God's adopted children. You would think knowing this would always keep us on the right path all the time. But it doesn't, we wander into darkness and get lost, even while we are in the grip of Jesus, the Light of the World.

Now if we believe we have been in the grip from creation on, we can't help but wonder if being lost means something different than what the words imply. Let me assure you, "*Lost*" *doesn't mean we are not in the grip!* If it did, then we would have to say we were in the grip at creation, then we escaped it or slipped out of it and got lost, then we got back in the grip later. What kind of grip is that?! That's pretty flimsy! No, I want you to understand again the grip of God is unchanging. When we say, "He's got you," that means he's got you all the way through!

But as human beings, we sometimes do the stupidest things! Even though we are perfectly created in Jesus Christ as God's beloved children, and even though we are always in the grip of Jesus, we keep looking for love in the wrong places. The Bible calls this sin - or lostness.⁴ Lostness is not just what we do to ourselves when we look for love in the wrong places, it's reinforced by what others do *to us* when they are looking for love in the wrong places. We are used, abused, hated, and rejected by others seeking to find fulfillment in themselves. But again, the word lostness is a great irony because we experience it and reinforce it *while we are in the grip!* Yes, even while in the grip, we are darkened in our understanding and we live in ignorance (Eph 4:18, I Pet 1:14, Acts 17:30).

Let's test out our new way of understanding lostness. Have you ever heard the story of a boy and his boat? This young boy constructed a toy boat like no other...(by the way, "toy boat" can be a very difficult phrase...trying saying it really fast five times in a row. It's impossible!). Anyway, the boy created this toy boat and put it out on the lake nearby, admiring it. But as it began to sail away from him, he realized he couldn't reach it. The boy implored, "Come back! little boat, come back!" But the boat sailed to the edge of the lake and fell over the dam. It was lost. Some time later, though, as the boy was walking down the street, his eye caught sight of the boat in a pawnshop window. The boat was in pretty rough shape. But the boy hustled into the shop, took the boat to the counter and told the shopkeeper that it was the boat he had made and that it belonged to him. The pawnshop broker said, "I'm sorry son, the only way to get that boat is to buy it." The boy flipped over the price tag and stared at the cost. Then he raced home, brought back every penny he had, and splashed the coins on the counter. On his way out of the shop, he hugged the little boat close to his chest and said, "Little boat, now you're twice mine! I made you, and I bought you back!"

A great story, right! This story has been used to illustrate the gospel and Jesus' relationship to you, and like all illustrations, it has its strengths and weaknesses. But we want to be accurate to the gospel so let's look at how this story illustrates the gospel and truth and how it falls short. First the positives:

- a) Like the boy, Jesus creates us and admires what he has done.
- b) Like the boat, we get lost—we ignore the one who made us, knows us the best and loves us the most.

⁴ I am thinking especially of sin as essentially unbelief (Jn 16:9).

- c) Like the scene in the pawnshop, Jesus gives everything he has, even his life on the cross, to redeem us and take us home. We are indeed twice his – he made us and he bought us back!

But now let's look at how this illustration falls short of the gospel truth:

- a) The boy loses sight of his boat when it sails away and drops over the dam; but Jesus never loses sight of us—we are never outside of his care.
- b) The boat sails away from the boy and gets lost, but we cannot get away from Jesus and his grip is always on us—we are never lost to Jesus.
- c) Jesus gives his life to show that not even death can separate us from the love of God. Death would seem like the worst form of lostness, but Jesus proved his redeeming power over death by rising from the grave. We are never lost to God, even in death (Rom 8:38-39). Even better than the closing exclamation of the boy to his boat, the “twice mine” Jesus says to us is his way of saying “you are doubly mine”... “My death and resurrection proves you have always been mine, and I never let go.”⁵

Twice mine doesn't mean there was a time when you didn't belong to Jesus, twice mine means by his creation and redemption you belong to Jesus two times over—you are doubly his! Because we have already been created and redeemed (bought back) by Christ, we can now describe our lostness inside of the context of “twice mine,” twice Jesus! Think of it in terms of a sandwich; we can only understand our lostness when we see it between two slices of belonging- and those two slices are creation and redemption!⁶

I want you to get this point: No amount of lostness can shake Jesus' grip on you. In fact, all the lostness that you feel, and even the death that we will all experience, takes place *while you are in the grip*. We can be sure that even when you die, Jesus will never let go of you, just as we are sure that in Jesus' death, the Father never let go of him.

So let me now tell you a story about you from the Bible! When Jesus tells us a parable, he asks us to see ourselves in the story. You are in this story. See if you can find yourself....

Luke 15: 1-7

“Now all the tax-collectors and ‘outsiders’ were crowding around to hear what he had to say. The Pharisees and the scribes complained of this, remarking, ‘This man accepts sinners and even eats his meals with them.’ So Jesus spoke to them, using this parable: ‘Wouldn't any man among you who owned a hundred sheep, and lost one of them, leave the ninety-nine to themselves in the open, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will put it on his shoulders with great joy, and as soon as he gets home, he will call his friends and neighbors together. “Come and celebrate with me,” he will say, “for I have found that sheep of mine which was lost.” I tell you that it is the same in Heaven—there is more joy over one sinner whose heart is changed than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need for repentance.”

⁵ Remember that our creation in Christ is the first “mine.” Here I want “death and resurrection” to be thought as a piece; together (death/resurrection) they demonstrate the second “mine” of the “twice mine.” However, Christ's one redemptive work (death/resurrection) is certainly two-fold. Christ's death destroys all that hurts us and hurts our fellowship with God, while his resurrection proves that nothing, not even death, can break God's grip on us.

⁶ By the way, this demonstrates that our original belonging is much deeper than our “original sin.”

Repentance? Why would Jesus say this is a story about repentance? Does the lamb repent? All the lamb did was wander away and get lost! The point is that Jesus is asking US to repent when we hear this story. But what does that mean? Repentance means to see clearly and be changed by seeing clearly. Let me repeat that because it may be different than what you think repentance is about. Repentance means to see clearly and be changed by seeing clearly.

In this parable, Jesus is asking us to see our lostness *and* our foundness. He wants us to see the whole sandwich! To put it back into our theme analogy for the week, we are meant to see our lostness while we are in the grip of Jesus, where we are found. If we see this clearly, he knows our hearts will be changed.

So what again does a repentant response look like for the one who has “eyes to see” this story? To repeat above, Jesus wants us to see our lostness while we are in the grip of Jesus, found. That means we see ourselves as the lost lamb on Jesus’ shoulders, which is carried home, and we celebrate the grip! We celebrate, exclaiming, “thank you Lord for bringing me home. Thank you for continually finding me and for continually bringing me back, reminding me over and over that I belong to you—reminding me over and over of the futility of trying to live as if I can do it alone. I am lost without you.”

So that is the parable of the lost and found sheep. It is a story about you. How do you like it?! Do you see yourself? This parable gives us the opportunity to repent and believe under the sound of the gospel, but in contrast, what are the *unrepentant* responses we might have listening to this story?

1. “I’m glad I don’t have that problem of wandering away. I’m in the fold with the good sheep.”
2. “That story doesn’t apply to me. I am not some kind of lost, helpless sheep trapped in the briars. Why do you say I need to be rescued?”
3. “I don’t listen to the Bible. I can’t relate to it.”

And here might be the most subtle but dangerous unrepentant response:

4. “That’s great! I’ve been rescued and brought home by Jesus. Now that I’m home free I can do whatever I want to do!”

This person is right that she has been brought home, forgiven, redeemed, and that everything has been accomplished for her by Jesus. But this person is making a big mistake. She starts by acknowledging the Shepherd as the leader, but then she turns right around and makes herself out to be the leader (“Now I can do what I want to do”)! This attitude violates the internal logic of the parable; the premise of the whole parable is the leadership of the Shepherd, it never switches over to our leadership! Indeed, the same Shepherd who rescued us is the one we must continually depend upon.

We do not want to make the mistake of twisting the leadership dynamic into something backwards, like “Jesus rescued me, but now I’m my own person and I can do what I want.” To do this is to forget that there is always an element of lostness in our lives that we must acknowledge, even as Christians. We never get past lostness to pure “foundness” in this life.

Again, the tendency is to think of lostness as coming before foundness.⁷ We commonly think of sin, then grace; sin and then redemption. But don’t forget the sandwich! Don’t forget creation! Some of you

⁷ The reason we think this way is because that is the way we often experience it. When we go from “lost” to “found” we do not think of the underlying “foundness” we’ve always had. Because of the power of our conversion experiences, we often allow the center of gravity to shift too much to the so-called “Jeff event” and away from what has already been done for us in the “Christ event.” We then might start thinking of “home” as a place we were *rescued to*, but lose sight that it is also a place we were *lost from*. See my chapter “Sheep or Persons: What Luke 15 Has to Say about Agency and Persons with Disabilities” to see how the sheep parable fits together with the lost and found language of the prodigal son parable that follows it.

remember Ephesian 1 from last summer....you are in the grip of grace as God's beloved child before you were even born!

If we could see clearly, we would know that we have always been at home in Jesus' grip, even when we've felt lost. In fact, it makes no sense to say somebody is lost unless they have a home in the first place...to say it another way, you can't be lost without a home! The reason we can say foundness actually comes before lostness is because foundness is directly related to what came first, your found-ation in life, your home in the grip of Jesus. That's why the Bible says trying to build your house on the sand is so wrong—it is because you already have a right foundation, anchored in your foundness! To say it another way, foundness is the assurance of your eternal foundation; we need this truth of foundness, like an ointment, to be worked into our hearts and mind by the Holy Spirit.

**Reality Rule #2:
Jesus is my Good
Shepherd who
rescues me and
carries me
home!**

How are we doing with our new understanding of lostness?

I want to use one final example.⁸ Avril Lavigne's biggest album was her first one in 2002, when she was 17. And this album also included what some rank as her greatest single, "I'm with you." Listen to these lyrics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aFied2YYVg>

Who is the "you" she is talking about when she says, "I'm with you?" Avril is so lonely in this song, she's ready to go with whoever will pass by, you or you or you. A friend of mine remembers when he first heard this on the radio in the car and he shouted back "Avril, you are not alone! Someone HAS found you!" Picture me screaming at the radio, "Avril, you belong to the Good Shepherd who has carried you home! Jesus is with you, and when you feel lost, he keeps carrying you home, again and again!" We want Avril to know the truth, and today I want *you* to know the truth!

Reality Rule # 2: Jesus is my Good Shepherd who rescues me and carries me home!

Put this on Holy Spirit repeat!

Close in prayer.

⁸ The song *Amazing Grace* is another example. We can understand Newton's lyrics "I once was lost, but now am found" as our transformative Holy Spirit experience of seeing clearly the truth of our foundness, even though for many years we may have lived in ignorance, as if Jesus didn't matter to our lives, defining ourselves by our lostness. Apart from grace, which is prior, Newton wouldn't have seen the futility of his life, "'twas grace that taught my heart to fear."

Real Talk Session Two: Luke 23:32-43 Thieves on the Cross

Are these two thieves lost or found? Yes! Both are both! Discuss how this is the case.

One is not repentant. He doesn't look to the leadership of Jesus. He simply wants to use Jesus for his own selfish agenda, "Get me where I want to go." The other thief is repentant. His attitude is the opposite, "I want to go where you are going." Both thieves are lost, and both are found, but the second thief sees Jesus for who he really is, and therefore discovers his own foundness in Jesus. Even though physically speaking Jesus' hands, like his own, are nailed to a cross, the second thief can celebrate the grip Jesus has on him! This man understands that the Shepherd might not rescue us *from* death, but that he always carries us through the tunnel of death and out the other side. As long as we are with Jesus, in life or in death, we are at home. We are in the grip.

How has your life reflected both attitudes of the two thieves at different times?

The two thieves' decisions were made at the end of their lives. Think about how making either decision (using Jesus for my agenda v. submitting to Jesus' agenda) could make a difference in someone's approach to life *now*. How might either perspective play out for life, family, career, and future?

Chapel 3: Into Our Personal Space or All up in my business

Review the two Reality Rules so far.

I thought we'd start today by reinforcing our second Reality Rule. Check out this song about being carried home on Jesus' shoulders. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40wYfjv6yt8>

Now for Reality Rule #3: **Jesus chooses me and embraces me at my worst.**

While I don't know every one of you well, I think I know something about you. Tell me if I'm right. If you really think about it, I would guess that your deepest desire is to be loved unconditionally and to know you belong. Am I right? At least I know that is true for me. This is why we want you to begin to sense deeply your foundness—your home—in Jesus Christ as we have been discussing this week.

Have you ever had the feeling of being chosen for something? Have you ever had the feeling of being *not* chosen? Maybe on the school playground? For a school play? [Give other examples, if desired.] Many of us have hurtful experiences of being left out. In human experience, for one person to be chosen often means others are *not* chosen. But choosing some and excluding others is not the way God works. In the grip of Jesus Christ we are all chosen!

To be chosen is also described in the Bible as election, or adoption. Have you ever seen the movie *Like Mike* with Lil' Bow Wow? A true classic! There is one heart-wrenching scene at the orphanage where the kids live. The orphanage hosts an "open house" where prospective parents can come and basically shop around in hopes of finding a kid they want to take home with them. This is NOT what adoption means in the Bible. God our Father does not stand back and say, "Hmmm, I wonder if he's got good upside potential; I'm not sure this one will pan out; I'm not sure about that one—she seems like damaged goods; that one's not pretty enough, or strong enough. Hmmm, not sure this one has what it takes to be my son." No, hopefully by now you are beginning to understand God does things differently. If Jesus, God the Son, stepped into this room he would look at each of you individually and say, "You are mine. You belong to me...and you belong to me, and I love you, and you, and you..." until every one of you heard it. The scene in *Like Mike* is heart-wrenching because it is so opposite to God's way of choosing.⁹

Here I want to warn you against another idea—that somehow Jesus' attitude towards you is different from the Father's. To split Jesus and the Father, as if Jesus has a smile towards you and the Father has a frown (or maybe that Jesus talks the Father into loving us and accepting us)—that would be a huge mistake! Instead, Jesus came to show us the Father's heart and the attitude that God has *always* had towards us. Jesus is the true Chosen One in whom we are all chosen (Eph 1:4-6). Because you are in the grip of Jesus Christ you can know for sure, even if you've had negative experiences with your earthly father, that you have a Heavenly Father who loves you and to whom you belong. And if you've had good experiences with your earthly father these are only pale reflections of the Heavenly Father who loves you perfectly, who chooses you and who will never let you go.

Let's look today at Luke 5:1-11.

Like the parables, Jesus wants us to see ourselves in the lives of the people he encounters in the gospel stories. Don't get caught up on the fact that some of the people described might be different from you

⁹ Even though many kids are left out, adoption in human terms is still a beautiful thing as long as the particular event serves to remind us of a universal truth—that in God's adoption nobody is left out. It is tragically unfortunate when God's economy of adoption is pictured to be just like ours (where some are chosen and others not). These human projections onto God must be rejected!

(male, female, younger, older, etc.). Instead, think about the people as human beings just like you with the same feelings and needs that you have.

This account starts out with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. If you ever have a chance to go to the Holy Land, you should do it! Compared to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee is relatively unchanged from when Jesus was there. By this time in his ministry Jesus was already drawing huge crowds. People were attracted to him. I imagine his eyes flashing with life and his words dripping with love. Are people at your school attracted to Jesus? If not, what is wrong? I believe it's not because Jesus is no longer relevant or engaging, it's simply that people have a distorted view of who Jesus is. If they saw him clearly, even the most unreligious types would flock to him like these people. If we are not drawn to Jesus, it's because we don't know him. I hope you are being drawn more and more to Jesus this week. I hope you are getting to know him more personally.

So picture Jesus on the shore, and the crowd surrounding him like a semi-circle and pressing in on him, suffocating him, pushing him into the water. I can see Jesus saying something like, "Ok folks, chill, chill. I don't want to ruin my new flops (Rainbows/Chacos)." At that moment, the Scripture tells us, Jesus got up on a nearby fishing boat to get some relief from the advancing crowd; he asked to be pushed out a little from the shore so that he would have a better platform to see and teach all the people. Now let's take note of a very important sentence. It says here "He went aboard one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon" (v.3).

This Simon is different from Simon the Pharisee who we talked about earlier. This is Simon Peter, a fisherman. Now Galilean fishermen were tough, strong guys; they manned heavy fishing nets and battled the weather to work their trade. Simon was a particularly rough character. Just to give you an idea, we see Simon later cursing out a servant-girl and trying to behead a guy with his sword (he ended up just slicing off the guy's ear). Simon was a braggart whose actions often didn't match his words. So again, it says there were at least a couple boats there, but Jesus got into Simon's boat, "the one belonging to Simon."

Then, when Jesus was finished speaking to the crowd, he told Simon to "Push out now into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon's response is exasperated. I can imagine him saying "Jesus, we just came *in* from fishing, remember? When you got on our boat a while ago we were cleaning our nets from our night on the sea. And what do you know about fishing anyways, aren't you a carpenter?"

But after his initial reaction, Simon has a great response: "Lord, we've worked hard all night and not caught a thing, but if you say so, I'll let down the nets." *If you say so.* This is a statement of faith, because from what Simon can see, this doesn't make sense. It's like your friends who say it doesn't make sense to wait until you are married to have sex, or it's like your own heart when it tells you not to forgive someone who has hurt you. Like Simon, you can say, "Lord, I don't really understand why you are asking this, but if you say so."

But then there is a turn in the story, because when Simon Peter and his buddies put the nets into the deep water, they catch so many fish that the nets begin to tear and the boat begins to sink! It is at this point that Simon realizes Jesus is much more than an ordinary man or even a great teacher. Can you imagine Simon looking incredulously at the ripping nets, and then at Jesus, then back at the nets? He'd never seen anything like this! This is a miracle that defies description, and Simon, in the holiness of the moment, senses this as a divine encounter. He reacts, exclaiming, "Get away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Simon didn't see how God's holiness could have anything to do with him. Simon knew his own shortcomings, and in his way of thinking, holiness could have nothing to do with Simon and his sinfulness. You see, just as we talked about in our first chapel, Simon had an attitude problem.

But note Jesus' words to Simon, because these are some of the most important in Scripture. Vs. 10, "Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid." Simon had said, "Get away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man," and it was like Jesus was saying, I know, sinful people are all I have to work with! Don't be afraid.

Remember, Jesus pursued Simon. Remember how Scripture made the point, "He got in the boat belonging to Simon." The Holy Son of God invaded Simon the sinner's personal space, and it was a beautiful moment. Jesus got into the boat belonging to Simon to prove Simon belonged to Jesus.

Are you involved in things you are ashamed of? Do you lie to your parents? Do you hate somebody? Do you hold grudges? Do you go to church, but live a double life? Don't be afraid, Jesus is with you.

Do you watch porn? Do you do get wasted? Don't be afraid, Jesus loves you. You belong to him, and he will never let you go.

Are you involved in the occult? Do you worship Satan? Are you an atheist? Don't be afraid, Jesus is in your boat; he is in your life.

Do you struggle with thoughts of suicide? Anxiety? Depression? Are you a cutter? What about an eating disorder? Don't be afraid. He's got you.

We'll close with a song about Jesus' with-ness and how his incarnational grip reminds us, "Don't be afraid."

Behold! Jeremy Camp family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbFcZNY6geY>

Reality Rule #3: Jesus chooses me and embraces me at my worst!

Close in prayer.

**Reality Rule #3:
Jesus chooses
me and
embraces me at
my worst!**

Real Talk Session Three: Lk 8:26-40 “Legion”

Remember the story of Jesus invading Simon Peter’s personal space by getting into his boat? What does Jesus do that is similar here?

What is gripping Legion when Jesus meets him?

How is Jesus’ grip illustrated? How does it prove stronger? You could say Jesus chained this man a different way, with his love, i.e. with a chain that could not be broken.

“Legion” is a false identity. Does Jesus change Legion’s identity? Don’t answer yes too quickly. Think about this one!

Jesus restored “Legion” to his right mind. How can you relate to Legion?

What do you feel is gripping you so tightly that it makes you someone you don’t want to be?

What do you think Jesus has to say to you, based on the story?

See these links about a man in his “wrong mind.”

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2006/10/24/amnesia-sufferer-found-in-denver-reunited-with-washington-fiancee-family.html>

<http://www.ktre.com/story/5576877/amnesia-victim-reunited-with-fiancee>

What similarities do you see with the “Legion” story?

What other themes from our week does the modern day story (2006) touch on? Lostness, identity, home, confusion, etc.

Chapel 4: The Tale of Two Grips

We ended yesterday with a story about Simon Peter and to begin today, I'd like to share another Simon Peter moment that is actually recorded in another gospel, Matthew (14:22-33). This one also includes a boat, but this time Simon Peter is in the boat in the middle of a storm. Then, in the midst of the storm, Simon and the other disciples saw Jesus coming to them, walking on the water! The Scripture says they were scared out of their minds, thinking it was a ghost! But then Jesus said something familiar, "Don't be afraid." And who is the brash disciple in the boat that says he wants to walk out to meet Jesus on the water? Simon Peter, of course! The account tells us that Peter actually takes a few steps on the water to Jesus and then begins to sink. He cries out for help – it had to be a really short prayer because it doesn't take long to go from your toes to your nose into the water! "Lord save me!" (or even faster, more like "Lordsaveme!"). What does Jesus do? It says "immediately Jesus reached out and grabbed Simon and lifted him out of the water, and the two of them got back into the boat safely." Again this particular "gripping" incident reminds Simon that he can trust the Savior who always has a grip on him. This is a lesson Peter, and all of us, are continually learning and re-learning!

It doesn't say in the text, but I have to imagine, that when Jesus reached out and grabbed Simon, it was by the forearm, like in our grip illustration. Again, don't be confused by this story to think that sometimes Jesus' grip is on us and sometimes it is not. Like our grip analogy, Jesus' grasping of Simon's arm in the story is just a physical reminder of a spiritual truth. It serves to remind us that Jesus always has his grip on us. In fact, remind the people around you right now—give them the grip and the words "He's got you!"

[Casting crowns song *Who am I?*]

Now back to Luke, chapter 9:37-43 (note: I will complement our text with helpful information from Mark's more detailed version of this encounter, cf. Mk 9:14 ff.)

The story starts, not surprisingly, with a large group of people around Jesus. Suddenly, from the crowd a fearful father cries out to Jesus. "Lord, please come and look at my son...without any warning some spirit gets hold of him."¹⁰ Again, note: "it gets hold of him." This is a different kind of grip than we have been discussing this week. This boy is in the grip of an evil spirit. When the spirit "gets hold of him" it makes the boy convulse, cry out and foam at the mouth. In fact, the father says this has happened to him throughout the boy's life and sometimes the spirit is so strong it throws the boy into water or fire to try to kill him (Mk 9:22). These episodes leave the boy battered and bruised.

Jesus responds with compassion, "Bring the boy to me." One aspect of this story that doesn't come out in Luke's shorter version is the way Jesus interacts with the father. He doesn't just do a miracle or "zap!" heal the boy with the point of a finger. Jesus "enters in" to the situation. He personally engages the father and asks him questions about the boy's history. He listens. Have you ever noticed how love and listening go together? A person who loves you really listens to you, and vice versa.

Now Jesus swings into action only when he realizes the crowd is growing rapidly. It is apparent Jesus doesn't want a circus-like atmosphere for what he wants to do. He says to the evil spirit, "I command you to come out of this boy and never go into him again."

The spirit screams and releases its grip on the boy, but not before convulsing the boy and hurling him to the ground like a rag doll. Everyone thought the boy was dead. Maybe he was, we don't know. He was certainly lifeless.

¹⁰ The JBP version actually translates 9:39 this way— "a hold of him." Fitting for our theme!

All of us have an enemy. His name is Satan and he is called the deceiver, or the father of lies. Our enemy wants us to define ourselves by our mistakes; he wants us to believe that our false self is our true self. He tries to communicate this to us through Hollywood and the media. But our true self can only be found in the one to whom we truly belong. Remember our saying “You don’t know who you are until you know whose you are,” and, as we sometimes add, “Satan ain’t nobody’s daddy!”

The deceiver cannot create anything, but he can cause confusion. He has a grip on every person, and it is not uncommon in this world for any of us, Christian or not, to feel that the grip of evil is the strongest and deepest grip. You may be, or you may know, someone who is enslaved to an addiction. It’s rough, downright brutal. When we sense the grip of our enemy who wants to kill us, our hope is found in a grip that trumps the enemy’s—a grip which is stronger and deeper and more real than the evil one.

So the boy in our story is lying there lifeless.... Scripture then says Jesus grasped [emphasize grasped] the boy’s limp hands and lifted him up. The boy’s strength returned and he stood on his own feet. Then Jesus sent him home with his father (Mk 9:27-28). I’m sure there was some celebrating of the grip going on at the father’s house that day!

Note how Jesus does not simply deal with the grip of the evil spirit, removing what we might call the counterfeit grip from the boy. He does not merely dissolve the grip of the enemy on us. He shows us that his grip, his stronger, deeper grip, has been on us all along. Even when he allows bad things to happen to us for reasons we don’t understand, we are in his grip. Even when we die, we are held in his grip. His grip has nothing to do with our decisions, nor is it dependent on our world’s circumstances. This means the baby whose life is choked away in the womb is just as much in the grip of Jesus as the 90-year-old senior citizen with Alzheimer’s. Jesus knew the facts of a fallen world very well. He said, “In this world you will have trouble, but be encouraged, for I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

In this world some of us will live long lives, others short. Whether this boy died in this story or not is not the point. The point is that by raising this lifeless boy to life, Jesus shows us that even death cannot be the end. Death does not have the last word. You see, when we say “the end,” Jesus says, “to be continued.”

This story is a powerful foreshadowing of Jesus’ own death and resurrection.¹¹

Can you see the similarities?

Jesus, the only son of his father, allows himself to be put under forces of evil that, in the end, will take his life. While Jesus was hanging on the cross by-passers scoffed at him “He saved other people, let’s see him save himself if he really is God’s Christ—his chosen one.” After an excruciating several hours of darkness and agony, Luke describes Jesus’ last words: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” It is at the cross where you could say Jesus understands the most profound agony and sharpest pain of human lostness. He experiences all that we feel so that we might know beyond a shadow of a doubt that his grip is on us even when things are darkest. And here in his own experience, at the end, Jesus entrusts himself to the Father’s hands; we can say he is recognizing not only his grip on us, but the Father’s grip on him.¹²

¹¹ Of course once we know the big picture of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and how Jesus’ epic story includes all of us who ever lived, we will see all of our personal stories in his. Human chronological time is not a hindrance.

¹² Jesus’ cry “My God, my God why have you forsaken me” should not be viewed theologically as representing a rupture of the Trinity. Sin is strong, but it is not that strong! Jesus’ cry from the cross is shrouded in mystery, but at the very least we can be sure that Jesus comprehended all of our experiences of forsakenness and lostness in his own human experience. He absorbed it in himself to bury it and put it away. At the very least, this keeps darkness and light in proper perspective (and lostness inside of foundness). Our assurance

In our first lesson, we talked about Jesus embracing us in all 30 squares of our lives - in all aspects of our lives—the good, the bad and the ugly. He absorbs all the bad in himself and all the death, all the evil things we have done to others, and all the evil others have done to us. In his death, he buries all the bad. Think of Jesus putting a boundary around all evil and wickedness as in a small picture frame, and in his resurrection Jesus showing us a bigger picture for life.¹³ Those of us celebrating the deeper grip, the bigger picture, have genuine hope even while living in this fallen world.

You know how you crop pictures on your phone before posting to social media? It's as if Jesus is saying, "You think you see everything? I came to crop the picture of this world to show you the real, wider picture." The picture Jesus gives us is not only wider than the small picture, it is also deeper. Even when the small frame looks darkest, the grip of Jesus is always there. The cross proves that no part of the darkness is off limits to the loving grip of our Savior—He never loses touch with us! And the resurrection proves that the light, even if momentarily hidden from us by darkness, cannot be kept down or contained! ¹⁴ We can never measure exactly how wide and deep and long and high is the love of God in Jesus Christ, but we can know it is bigger than any frame could hold! We can't see it clearly now, but one day we'll see how Jesus in his death on the cross absorbed and dissolved all of the bad stuff, leaving nothing but the good stuff.

You may have heard the story about a young girl who asks, "Jesus, how much do you love me?" Jesus outstretched his arms as far as possible and said, "this much."

Now to conclude today I want to turn to a modern day parable of sorts, a movie called *Blood Diamond*. *Blood Diamond* is rated R for violence and language, but I want to show you some PG-13 scenes and discuss with you how it relates to our story of the father and the boy and the two grips.

The story is set in Sierra Leone, a country in Africa. The central characters are a father, Solomon Vandy, and his son Dia Vandy. This first scene shows the close relationship between father and son. This is the way God CREATED it to be - it is GOOD.

Clip 1 (stop at 1 minute!): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUsSVq6sfwQ> (see 0:00-1:00)

As you could guess, Dia is kidnapped by Captain Poison and made into a child soldier in rebellion against the government. Captain Poison is like the deceiver, the evil one. He lies to make Dia think his parents are weak and that he is the one who really cares for Dia and will watch over him. He tries to confuse and brainwash Dia into assuming another identity.

that "nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39) is rooted in both Jesus' inseparable grip on us and on the Father's inseparable grip on Jesus. Are there times when we feel forsaken by God? Yes. Are there times when we are forsaken by God in reality? No.

¹³ Because of the historical narrative of Jesus Christ we know what creation is like by looking back through re-creation! To say it another way, if creation merely sets the table for Christ's work, the grips of creation and redemption would be two different grips, but because creation and re-creation are both in Christ, we can say they are the same grip of the same Person revealed in two ways.

¹⁴ It's the Jesus of the cross who meets us in our darkest moments, identifying with us. I don't want this cropping illustration to mislead us into thinking the darkness completely covers over the light and that the light is only on the edges. Mysteriously, the permeating presence of light intersects the darkness at every point. In other words, the light is always there, even in what appears darkest, just like Jesus constantly remains the Light of the World, even when being made sin and experiencing forsakenness and death. Instead of the cropped picture, a better visual for this might be for the light and darkness to be woven together like a placemat (still with the all-important border of light which determines the deeper and wider Reality of the larger picture). I've done this with Green and grey; see Appendix.

Clip 8: (see second half – not first part!) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaiKMayEUOw> (see from 1:50-2:54).

As a child soldier, Dia lives the lie of his alter ego, acting out of his false identity that Captain Poison has given him. He becomes a hardened killer and turns against the ways of his parents, who he thinks he will never see again.

Then in a pivotal scene he comes upon his father. You can see both grips, one of evil and one of good, in conflict with one another. While Dia points his gun, his father pleads with him. [Read the quote, then show the clip. Otherwise it can be hard to understand the words. There are no words scrolling on this video clip like the others.]

Dia, What are you doing? Dia! "Look at me, look at me." What are you doing? You are Dia Vandy, of the proud Mende tribe. You are a good boy who loves soccer and school. Your mother loves you so much. She waits by the fire making plantains, and red palm oil stew with your sister N'Yanda and the new baby. The cows wait for you. And Babu, the wild dog who minds no one but you. I know they made you do bad things, but you are not a bad boy. I am your father who loves you. And you will come home with me and be my son again.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygU3F1ho3gg> (see all 2:36)

What do you think the father means when he says "you will come home with me and be my son again." Do you think in this father's heart there was ever a time when Dia was NOT his son? The father is talking about a fresh start to an old truth.¹⁵

We as children of God are never disowned, we are never truly lost from God, but sometimes we can be so caught up in our lostness that Scripture can describe us as "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3) or "sons of the devil" (Jn 8:44). In the movie, Dia is brainwashed to think that Captain Poison is his father, this is a false belonging, a false adoption, a lie that even Dia believes so strongly that he begins acting like a "son of Poison."

**Reality Rule #4:
Jesus loves me
this much [arms
outstretched] to
give me a bigger
picture for life!**

Here is the bottom line. Each of us has two identities.

We have a false identity that the "father of lies" wants us to believe in. That's when we define ourselves by what we think about ourselves or by what other people say and think about us. In our false identity we are lost. The enemy communicates "You're mine" in a threatening, negative way, as one who is intent on destroying you. It's like Satan is saying, God doesn't love you, just look at the evidence around you, look at how messed up you are, look how messed up the world is. You are mine, and you might as well let me show you how to "get mine" while you can.¹⁶

The voice of the Accuser can be very strong and convincing. But we have a true identity as good sons and good daughters of our true father. This is the bedrock of who we are, because of *whose* we are. We are in

¹⁵ This scene cannot help but remind us of the Prodigal Son story of Luke 15. When the rebellious son returns home, the father exclaims "My son was lost, but now he is found." Remember what we said about lostness and foundness. Instead of thinking about a before and after sequence, lostness and foundness are more like two simultaneous dimensions of our lives. By the Holy Spirit we see clearly how being found connects back to our foundness, our found-ation, in Christ.

¹⁶ Of course Jesus faced this temptation to "get mine" throughout his life, especially at the cross. But against the "get mine" mentality Jesus was intent to "give mine." When others told him to save himself, he refused for our sakes.

the grip of Jesus Christ, our human brother and Son of God, and because of that we are God's beloved children. The Holy Spirit continually moves in and through our lives and it is in him that we have ears to hear and eyes to see clearly that we are his, that we have a home – that we are found!

We have two identities. Now, think about it; if we were not sure we have a fresh, true identity in Christ, we would never loosen our allegiance to the false, stale one. We would stay loyal to the false one and dress it up as best we can. But like Dia Vandy, when it strikes us that we have a true, better and constantly renewed identity as children of our true father, in repentance we find power to deny our false identity (our "fake ID!"). Again, it's by seeing who you ARE that you can confess who you are NOT. As the country preacher says, "Be who you are, cause if you ain't who you are, you are who you ain't!" and that's not a good place to be. Jesus is constantly calling us to be who we are in him.

Reality Rule #4: Jesus loves me this much...(arms outstretched)...to give me a big picture for life

Close in prayer.

Real Talk Session Four: Lk 7:11-17 The Widow at Nain

Two large crowds converge at an intersection outside of town

What are the two crowds representing? [one for life (following Jesus) and one for death (funeral)]

Who wins? Both crowds are described as large.

These two large crowds do not represent a kind of "tug of war," even though at first glance they might seem to be equal opposites. Jesus raises the boy to life and hands him back to his mother. This shows that in Christ, when death and life meet, life wins every time.

Which crowd are you in? Again, the answer is both.

Have you ever thought about the fact that you are in two crowds?

How does each crowd define you?

Which definition or identity do you desire to live into? Why?

See *Green and Grey* poem in Appendix, and also another visual to demonstrate the "big picture."

Chapel 5: Come Holy Spirit!

Yesterday we ended with the truth that you have two identities and you are in two grips - the grip of lostness - or evil, and the grip of foundness - with our foundation in Christ. This idea of the two grips takes some getting used to. But once you get it, you begin to see evidence of both grips everywhere and in everyone. This helps explain how we can see so much good in unbelievers and so much evil sometimes in Christians.¹⁷ The two grips on our lives which are opposed to each other are in constant conflict with one another. But this is not like a tug-of-war. The first grip - evil - is a fact, but the second grip - love - is truth, or Reality. Everything we do is inside the Reality of our foundness - the grip Christ has on us. We even experience the fact of our lostness inside the Reality of our foundness, knowing that because our foundness is rooted in Christ, it always has the upper hand. This truth is something we can rejoice in even during the hard times—Jesus will never leave us or forsake us.

But wait. Wouldn't it be better just to stay positive and focus on the good grip? Why even mention the inferior grip if it is not really Reality? That kind of approach sounds right at first, but what happens when the bad grip shows itself in painful, terrible ways? When we act out of our lostness - our false self - or when someone else acts out towards us from their false self, it can be really ugly and hurtful.¹⁸ This is what we see around us all the time, people acting out not knowing who they really are in Christ and not respecting the God-given identity of others. In fact, acting out of our false self or seeing others act out of their false selves can be so devastating that it might convince us that "the pretender" is actually in charge, and the highest power in our lives. That is why it's important for us to know the truth, so we can live in that truth - that Reality. We must be prepared for the devil's attempts to convince us that the false is really the true. As Scripture says, "We are not unaware of the devil's schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11).¹⁹

We have been talking about Jesus' grip on the people he encounters in the Gospel of Luke. As we put ourselves in these stories, imagining ourselves as the woman of ill repute, the thieves, Simon Peter, the boy possessed, we sense Jesus' grip on all of our individual lives. But it is a lot easier to think about Jesus' grip when he is physically present (think about how funny it would look if all of us walked around and a human Jesus, as if multiplied a zillion times, was actually gripping on to the arm of every one of us!) But if Jesus is not literally holding on to the arm of each one of us, where is he? What is his location?

At the very end of the book of Luke, after Jesus has risen from the grave, Jesus went with his followers to a hill outside of Jerusalem. Let's pick up the account from 24:45.

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."

¹⁷ In Scripture, just like the two grips existing in one person, sometimes the two grips are represented in one sentence. Notice how this is the case on either side of the comma in Rom 3:23-24, where the "all" applies to both! See also Rom 6:23.

¹⁸ Romans 7 shows us the power of the false grip, i.e. the flesh or sinful nature, even in the lives of Christians.

¹⁹ It's baffling to me why the devil is mentioned so little in evangelism and discipleship when he is mentioned close to 100 times in Scripture.

So where is Jesus now? Heaven! Then why are the followers rejoicing and worshipping if Jesus had left them? It says they were worshipping Jesus joyfully; it seems like they are celebrating the grip, but Jesus is in heaven and they, the followers, are still on earth. What are we missing?

The key is in one of the verses in the middle of the passage. Jesus says, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised.” What Jesus is sending us is the Holy Spirit. Shortly after his ascension into heaven, the book of Acts (also written by Luke) tells us that Jesus pours out his Holy Spirit from heaven on all people (Acts 2:17). This is what we call the day of Pentecost. Here we see the beauty of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all working together, one God in a community of three Persons! The pouring out of the Holy Spirit reminds us that God is sharing his Trinitarian life of community with us: Jesus the Son has brothered us. Father has adopted us. Spirit convinces us that it is true! The Spirit wraps us up tightly in the assurance that we belong to Jesus Christ; that is what Jesus calls above “being clothed with power from on high.” The Spirit gives us the power to live into our true identities as Jesus defines us, not as the world defines us or even as we define ourselves. The Spirit power enables us to swim upstream against a culture that tells us to live for ourselves and “get mine.”²⁰

The connection between the Spirit and Jesus Christ is so strong that sometimes the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9, I Pet 1:11). It is because Jesus poured out the Spirit on everyone that we can say that while Jesus is in heaven, he is also everywhere present by his Spirit. He doesn’t need to be physically present, holding on to everyone’s arm, because by the Spirit he is closer to us than we are to ourselves!

This song *Everywhere*, by Third Day, is a good reminder:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4b-KqLiWQk>

To better understand the presence of Christ by the Spirit, let’s turn to another passage in Luke 7 (1-10), this time about a Roman centurion. Centurions were officers in the Roman army. How many troops were under a centurion’s command? (that’s right, 100, a century). From the passage we learn several things about this officer: 1) he had servants in his household, 2) the centurion was very fond of one of the servants who was horribly ill and at the point of death, and 3) the centurion was well respected by the Jewish leaders in the town. Typically, Romans worshipped many “gods,” but the Jews believed in only one God (the God of the Old Testament). But the Jews in town respected the centurion because the centurion respected *them*. The centurion had even used his own money to build the Jews a building—a synagogue—where they could worship their one God.

Because of the good deed the centurion had done, when the centurion’s servant fell desperately ill, the centurion’s Jewish friends attempted to return the favor. They decided to go find Jesus to see if Jesus could help the centurion’s servant get well. It says in verse 4: “When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this.” Note the word *deserved*. Hold on to that.

When they got to Jesus, his response was basically, “OK, let’s do this thing; let’s go to this guys house,” and he started walking that way. You would expect that of Jesus, right?

²⁰ We have spoken of the two grips on our lives as the false grip and the true grip, the bad grip and the good grip, the counterfeit grip and the real grip. Another way these grips can be described in Scripture is by the words flesh and Spirit. The flesh is our sinful, broken nature. We have already established that our true nature is good as created by God—that includes body, mind and heart. So “flesh” should not be confused simply with “body.” Our created bodies are not bad. Instead, the flesh describes *the grip of evil* that infects and corrupts the human body, mind and spirit. The Spirit, on the other hand, signifies our true nature as created and redeemed sons and daughters in Jesus Christ.

But you would never expect what happens next. If you didn't know this story, you wouldn't foresee the remarkable twist to the plot. On the way, Jesus was intercepted by a messenger who relayed a statement from the centurion. This is the statement the Centurion sent:

"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for 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. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

This pagan Roman knew what authority meant, and he believed that Jesus was the chief authority of the universe—that Jesus could command life and death the way Roman officers commanded their troops. Ironically, this Roman believed in Jesus' authority more than the Jews did! Sure enough, when the messenger returned to the centurion's house, the centurion's servant was healed. To those involved, it seemed like Jesus had healed the servant from a distance. But remember what we said about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit allows Jesus to be everywhere at all times, in all places.

In view of the Holy Spirit's role, then, we can say that everyone in this story is in the grip of Jesus Christ. The centurion is in the grip. In fact, he could never have had any faith at all unless it had come from Jesus being with him by the Spirit. The Jews are in the grip of Jesus by the Spirit. They are God's chosen people to illustrate for all of us what it means to be chosen, even though in this case it is not the Jews who celebrate the grip but the centurion.²¹ The sick servant is in the grip of Jesus, too. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is just as near to the servant at the house as he is to the messenger on the road. Because of what Scripture tells us about the Holy Spirit, we can know that the servant is healed not by magic, and not by some impersonal "force," but by the presence of God the Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

This story reinforces the truth expressed earlier that Jesus is everywhere by the Spirit. And that He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. This has always been the case, whether we believe in Jesus or not. In fact, Scripture testifies that when God created us he breathed his Spirit into us (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4)! There is nowhere we can flee from the Spirit, not even hell itself (Ps 139). Not only that, if God was to remove his Spirit from any of us at any moment, we would simply shrivel up like raisins and fall dead to the ground.

Now it's important for us to emphasize that Jesus is just as near to people who do *not* get well as he is to people who do get well. All of us are in his grip. In other words, while we can claim that those who get well in this world are healed precisely *because of* Jesus' presence by the Spirit, we would never want to reverse the logic and say people who do not get well suffer *for lack of* the Spirit's presence. Still, why Jesus heals some people in this world and why he doesn't heal others is a huge mystery.

Somebody once wrote a book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. But the man who wrote it made a critical error. The author didn't include the one truly good person, Jesus Christ, who had the worst things happen to him. Betrayed by one friend, abandoned by other friends, blamed for something he didn't do, bullied, made fun of, abused in every way—physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually—strung up naked on a cross to tie a tortuous death of slow suffocation, a spear thrust through his ribs when he didn't die soon enough. Bad things do happen to good people, but God understands our suffering, God undergoes the worst, in order to overcome and give us hope.

²¹ Like Jesus, the True Israelite, the Jews are chosen specifically and exclusively for the larger purpose of others' inclusion. This is the truth of Romans 9-11. God chooses Jacob over Esau to preserve the line of the One who will bless Esau and every human being with his mercy (11:32).

When Jesus Christ was crucified, we can say God was crucified. Only God could become everything humans are here on earth in our suffering and death, and still remain himself. A fancy way of saying it is that only God can be immanent (at the lowest levels within and “below”) and transcendent (at the highest level “above”) at the same time.²² If God didn’t come to us as fully human he couldn’t have identified with us or understood us; if God didn’t come to us as *more* than human, he couldn’t have helped us. It would have just been one human commiserating or empathizing with another.

**Reality Rule #5:
By the Spirit,
Jesus is closer to
me than I am to
myself!**

Have you ever had a friend who said “I feel ya” when you share a burden? Maybe they’ve had something similar happen to them, and they can understand your burden better than most people. It feels good when people come alongside us and empathize with us, but even if they have suffered very similar circumstances, they can’t really understand our hearts perfectly or get in touch with what is deepest in us. Jesus our human brother is the only one who can really say “I feel you” 100%, because he is also God. When we remember that God the Holy Spirit is closer to us than we are to ourselves, we can understand that by the Spirit Jesus steps into every human being’s suffering and experiences it even more deeply than we do! Scripture tells us that in our suffering the Spirit “groans” in us with words deeper than we can utter ourselves. It’s good to know that the Spirit and Jesus are both praying for us! (Rom 8:26, 34).

We can’t count on good health or long lives in this world. That’s why we continually go back to the one thing we CAN count on, and that is the big picture of Jesus Christ. Things may get worse for us before they get better. In fact, like the best man who ever lived, we may tragically die, but the resurrection of our lives is assured in Jesus’ own resurrection. That provides us big picture security—a picture which doesn’t include the evil and brokenness and pain we experience here on earth. In face of all the evil and darkness of this world, the Great Physician carries us through, promising healing and wholeness in himself.

But let’s go back to the centurion story one more time to extract another critical lesson. We’ve established that the centurion is in the grip of Jesus, and that the centurion appreciated Jesus’ far reaching spiritual powers. But let’s go back to that word *deserve*. The Jewish leaders said the centurion *deserved* to have his servant healed because he had done good deeds. One of the ways that people get lost, even though they are inside of the grip – is that they think they *deserve* the grip. That’s why the Jews sometimes (I’m thinking especially of the Pharisees) have a hard time understanding the grip of grace, because they are operating in an economy where “you get what you deserve.”

Remember Simon the Pharisee and the prostitute from our first chapel story? It’s just as easy, maybe easier, for do-gooders to get lost as it is for people who do bad things. It’s hard for “good people” to celebrate the grip because they are too busy celebrating themselves! They would rather admire themselves than give credit where credit is due. Someone once said a person wrapped up in himself is a pretty small package! Or maybe you’ve heard the jingle, “I love me, I love myself, I have my picture on my shelf!” Simon the Pharisee was in the grip of Jesus, like all the rest of us. However, Simon’s self-righteousness prevented him from celebrating the grip, because he didn’t perceive he had a need.

But what does the centurion say? See how this contrasts to Simon the Pharisee: “Lord, I do not deserve for you to even come under my roof.” Some of us like to be in authority, or at least be the authority for our own lives, but the centurion understood that being under authority is a good thing, as long as it’s the

²² I put these in quotes because they are better described as dimensions than they are “up and down” levels.

right authority! You see, the centurion recognized the authority of Jesus (we could say the authority of Jesus' grip), and he also recognized that he didn't deserve the grace of God. That is a healthy combination.

As we mentioned earlier, we are in the grip from our creation, but we never deserve it. We are all created GOOD, but we didn't deserve to be created at all! We are created as beloved daughters and sons, but we didn't deserve to be adopted or included in the life of Father, Son and Spirit. You see, under the grace of the grip, we can be, at the same time, confident *and* humble. We can be confident in our created goodness, in the grip of Jesus, but also humble because we know that all of our goodness comes by God's grace alone. To the extent we think we are good in and of ourselves, we are buying into the devil's lie, thinking and acting under the influence of the false grip. To the extent that we think we are too bad for Jesus to embrace us, we are also buying into the devil's lie—he's already with you! Jesus thus addresses both the people full of shame and the people full of pride.

One of Jesus' most poignant sayings is Luke 5:31-32: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This one statement captures the whole breadth of what we have been saying this week. Like the lost sheep parable, for instance, we are invited to see ourselves in this statement. If we think we're healthy and righteous, and don't have a need for a doctor, we will fail to appreciate the grace of God. We will not celebrate the grip we are in; we will miss being transformed. To say it another way, we don't see how Jesus as the Great Physician applies to us.

The fact is, we are all lost, we are all sick; we are all in the grip of sin and evil. To be called to repentance is to see that THAT grip is not permanent, it is not ultimately real, and that the grip of the Great Physician is the truth of our lives. Even though we are wracked by sin and brokenness, in the grip of Jesus we are already good, healthy, and whole in our created and redeemed selves. This is what gives us the combination of humility and confidence.

But again, how do we live in the truth of who Jesus is and who we are in him? By the Holy Spirit! Since Jesus is not here physically, he is here by the Spirit. And Jesus tells us very clearly to ask for the Holy Spirit! Remember the Holy Spirit is everywhere present; we ask for the Holy Spirit because he is here, not because he is not here!

Jesus puts it this way (Luke 11:11-13):

"Some of you are fathers, and if your son asks you for some fish, would you give him a snake instead, or if he asks you for an egg, would you make him a present of a scorpion? So, if you, for all your evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Come Holy Spirit!

Reality Rule #5: By the Spirit, Jesus is closer to me than I am to myself!

Close in prayer.

Real Talk Session Five: Lk 8:41-56 Jairus' Daughter

How is this story similar to the centurion story?

How is Jairus different from the centurion?

Jairus is a very important man in town. The woman in the crowd is not important. What is Jesus' attitude towards the woman? What is Jairus thinking while Jesus is talking with her?

How does Jesus show his authority in this story?

Does either character think they deserve Jesus' attention?

Which characters are you most like?

Chapel 6: Celebrate the Grip!

Who do you think of as admirable leaders in our country or our world? Why do you say that? What are some of these leaders' outstanding qualities?

[probably nobody mentioned knowing how to fail successfully, or learning from mistakes, as being admirable qualities of leaders they know]

I've got a two part question for you: a) of all Jesus' disciples, which one does Scripture describe as failing the most? And b) which disciple did Jesus choose to be the leader of the church? The answer to both? Simon Peter! Hmmmmm! What can we learn from this?

Of course, Simon's biggest failure was at the end of Jesus' life, when Jesus told the disciples he was going to be arrested and killed. Simon boasted defiantly, No way! I'll go to prison or die before I let that happen! I've got your back Jesus!

Does anyone remember what happened a few hours later, when Jesus was on trial? Simon denied three times that he even knew Jesus! That is when he cursed out the girl who thought she recognized him as being a follower of Jesus. Scripture tells us that when the rooster crowed Simon remembered Jesus' words, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." At that point, it tells us, Simon and Jesus made eye contact. "The Lord turned his head and looked straight at Simon, and into his mind flashed the words the Lord had said to him, 'You will disown me three times before the rooster crows.' And Simon went outside and wept bitterly."

What was it that Simon saw in that intense moment when, after he had failed, Jesus looked straight at him. No words were spoken, but what do you think Jesus' eyes were telling Simon? Did Jesus give him "the look," the look of scorn? We might imagine Jesus' eyes communicating "you are worthless", "I knew I couldn't trust you," or "three strikes and you are out."

If I was Jesus, I might have thought, "you said you had my back, and now you stab me in the back?"

But I think what Jesus' look communicated was much different. I think it was more like, "Simon, don't be afraid. I chose you. You belong to me. No failure can change that. I am still in your boat." Simon was broken. He wept over this kind of undeserved love. He wept over the fact that he had hurt the one who loved him the most.

Why do I think this is what Jesus' eyes were saying? I want to go back a few verses in this same chapter, where the disciples were still gathered before Jesus' arrest, and in the same scene where Jesus was telling the disciples about what was going to happen to him and predicting Simon's betrayal. At one point Jesus says, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith would not fail. But when you return, strengthen your brothers." But wait. Is there something odd about this? Jesus says he was praying that Simon's faith would not fail. But then Simon went right out and denied Jesus three times! What failure! Maybe Jesus is not very good at prayer—because his prayer for Simon obviously didn't work! Or is there something else?

Look more closely. Jesus is saying he is praying that Simon's faith won't fail, not that Simon won't fail. In other words, Jesus is saying, don't stop trusting my love and faithfulness, *even when you fail*. In our terms, Jesus is saying to Simon, when you fail, remember the grip. I am more faithful to you than you could ever be to me. That's why Jesus follows with, "when you return, strengthen your brothers." Jesus is saying to Simon: when you realize that I am not changing my mind about you when you fail, and when you return to the idea that I define you, not your failures, you will be strengthened; you will lead your brothers and sisters in this gospel truth, so that they too may grow strong in the faith.

It takes time to learn to let Jesus love us through our failures, but when this good news gets into our bones, we will be empowered to change and to lead others in the way of Christ's unconditional love.

I said it takes time to learn. Well here's a question to see how you are learning. Which person is growing more in his or her relationship with God? The one who is praying (even fasting) regularly, reading God's word, going to church, giving money to the church, OR the one who is lying, cheating, stealing, someone you might call a corrupt business-person? Which of these people is growing more in his or her relationship with God? (wait momentarily for various answers) It's a little tricky. Based on what I have said, you really can't tell who is growing more, can you?

Here's how Jesus puts it (Lk 18:9-14):

Jesus was speaking to certain people who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on others: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, the other was a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this with himself, 'O God, I do thank you that I am not like the rest of mankind, greedy, dishonest, impure, or even like that tax-collector over there. I fast twice every week; I give away a tenth-part of all my income.' But the tax collector stood in a distant corner, scarcely daring to look up to Heaven, and with a gesture of despair, said, 'God, have mercy on a sinner like me.' I assure you that he was the man who went home justified in God's sight, rather than the other one. For everyone who sets himself up as somebody will become a nobody, and the man who makes himself nobody will become somebody."

We've already seen how the Pharisees in Scripture often had a problem with self-righteousness and pride. It's apparent that the Pharisee in this story is very religious, doing all the church things. On the other hand, we have a tax collector. When it came to reputations, tax collectors were at the very bottom of the ladder in Israel, right there with the prostitutes. They were hated because they represented the Romans who ruled the land, and they overcharged the people for taxes and kept the extra for themselves. So to tell this story Jesus picks two men who are polar extremes to make his point. We have the do-gooder contrasted with the evildoer. But Jesus obviously doesn't want us to answer the question about who is growing more in his relationship with God simply on the basis of outside deeds. In this story it becomes clear that being good is not the goal; sometimes "being good" actually gets in the way of a heart to heart relationship with God!

The religious guy was doing some good things, but he's a phony. Did you notice, Jesus even says the Pharisee is praying to himself!! It's the "evildoer" who Jesus sets up as the good example. This man is playing by the rules of God's unconditional love. We could certainly say he is celebrating the grip! This man came humbly to God in prayer, not acting as if he deserved anything. You see, if you are being real with God, talking things over with the God who you know loves you in spite of your failures and shortcomings, you might be a liar, thief, cheat....a corrupt businessperson, but if you keep doing this, you will begin to leave those labels behind. The more honest you are with God, the more real he will be to you, and the more genuine you will be to other people. As you celebrate the grip of Jesus' commitment to you, you will begin to change, to live more and more into your true identity; you will begin to emerge from what smothers you—the reputation that chases you, the image you've falsely adopted for yourself.

**Reality Rule #6:
Jesus is more
committed to us
than we could
ever be to him!**

This transformation is not meant to be an individual, isolated process. God is a community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and God made us to live in community, to repent and believe in community, to confess in community and to celebrate the grip in community.

Here I must make an important amendment to what I said above about going through the motions. Going through the motions can indeed be a negative, empty thing when it's meant to impress God or others. However, we need structure in our lives, and the right kinds of habits of spiritual formation remind us of Jesus Christ's authority—his grip—and our identity as a people in him. Again, because we are by nature communal, created by a communal God ("let us make mankind in our image," Gen. 1:26), we need to participate in community rhythms to be healthiest in Christ; we need to find our identity as part of the whole. In fact, our identity as individuals in Christ is actually secondary to our identity as a part of the larger body of Christ.

We have sunk our teeth into the gospel of Luke this week. As mentioned earlier, Luke also wrote the book of Acts. If you read Acts, you will see just how important the early believers took the habit of gathering together.

"They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. Everyone felt a deep sense of awe, while many miracles and signs took place through the apostles. All the believers shared everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and divided the proceeds among the fellowship according to individual need. Day after day they met by common consent in the Temple; they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy. They praised God continually and all the people respected them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were finding salvation" (Acts 2:42-47).

As you can see, celebrating the grip is contagious! Does that sound like something you'd like to live out in your life back home? If so, which aspects?

Conclusion:

Can anyone remember all six Reality Rules from our week? [Have volunteers come up.] Now let's say the six rules of Reality in a little bit different way, to make it more personal. Instead of a statement about Jesus, I want to give you an opportunity to talk more personally, directly, to Jesus. If you want to, you can put the words "you" or "you are" in place of "is" and let the statement flow from there.... For instance, "Jesus, *you* know me the best and love me the most." And then put thank you on the end. That is your way of celebrating the grip! Or "Jesus, *you are* more committed to me than I could ever be to you." Thank you!

[Create space...take a few minutes for folks to practice talking with God like this if they want to]

Now, if you've starting talking with Jesus in this way, when we break from here I want you to go straight up to a leader from home and tell them "I want to celebrate the grip with you when we get home." Don't keep this to yourself. If that's the way you feel, tell someone! To celebrate the grip is to develop a mindset for living and to practice a worshipful posture of gratitude to God. Tell your friends so that you can hold each other accountable to remembering the Reality Rules. Make plans to celebrate the grip together at home the way we have here at camp and the way described in Scripture (Acts 2:42-47, above; see also Col 3:12-17).

Reality Rule #6: Jesus is more committed to us than we could ever be to him!

Close in prayer.

Real Talk Session Six: Lk 19: 1-10 Zacchaeus

How does the grip get illustrated in this tax collector story?

What can we learn from the bystander's attitudes?

Where is repentance for Zacchaeus?

What do you think is most important about what Jesus says or does?

How do you fit into this story?

Appendix

I. St. Patrick's Prayer

Some people frown on written prayers, but again, forms don't have to be empty, like going through the motions the wrong way. Some people are greatly encouraged by reading the same written prayers over and over. Here is part of a written prayer, or statement of faith, that's been around for centuries. It's attributed to St. Patrick.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through a confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation

St. Patrick (ca. 377)

II. Poem

Another Tool: I wrote a poem to remind me of some of the gospel truth we have been discussing all week.

It's called Green (an accidental connection to St. Patrick!) and grey. Green stands for the grip of grace, every human's creation in Christ; our oneness with the One whose Spirit animates us and who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We talked about how Satan is our enemy, and how he cannot create anything. He can only take what God creates and twist it. It's like he takes the Green and starts spelling it G-R-E but then twists it into GREY. The grey represents the false grip; it's bland and dull. Green is perfect to represent our life in Christ, because it reminds us of life and growth. And even though we're all one in Christ, don't think of all of us as exactly the same. Green represents distinctiveness too—there are more shades of green than any other color! The lyric calls us to recognize the grey but only in the context of the big picture of green. Because of what Christ has done, we can't get any newer, fresher or greener than we already are, but now we have to practice "walking in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Scripture tells us we can be aglow with the Spirit (Rom 12:11). You'll see the Acronym GLOW in the second to last stanza. GLOW stands for the following: Gathering, Listening to the Word and to each other, being Open to the Holy Spirit through prayer, and Worshipping with song and praises to God). These are listed in the Acts 2 passage we looked at (see also Col. 3:12-17). And doing these things can't help but catapult us out to engage with people in our neighborhoods and communities, because we know they are in the Grip too, "Green" like us (I Tim 4:10)! We'll say it again, celebrating the grip is contagious!

Green and grey

Green is grace, grace is Jesus
Grace is Jesus, one with me
Grey is sin that entered in
It wants to steal God's best from me

Grey puts me down oppressively
It causes me to be who I don't want to be
Is the Green really there or is it just a dream?
I need some solid hope in this hurt and pain

Jesus took our grey to the cross
He nailed it there at his great cost
Now the stinky, stale grey is in the grave
And we have fresh Green in Jesus' name

Yet for now I'm such a tangle of Green and grey
Can't be sure of one pure motive in what I do or say
But I can know who I am when I look up above
And I see me raised with Jesus in his arms of love

Green is living, grey is death
Green goes this way, grey goes that
By the Spirit I go with it, GLOWing greener
Hand in hand with Jesus and my brothers and my sisters

Kingdom people enter in and hear the call
The Green is flowing enough for all
Tell everybody while there's still time
That knowing Jesus Christ is the reason and the rhyme!

III. Visual Illustration for Green and Grey and the Big Picture

You need two pieces of construction paper (one grey and one green), scissors, and a cheap picture frame. **Finish the preparation below before showing the campers.**

- A. cut out a piece of grey construction paper and cut a hole in the middle about the size of a quarter
- B. put the grey paper on top of a piece of green construction paper which is just a little bit bigger than the grey rectangle.
- C. put both pieces together in a frame (might want to tape them together so they don't slide), so that the green border can't be seen because the frame hides it. The only green you should be able to see is through the hole in the grey paper.

Now ask:

1. Which color is dominant, the green or grey? Obviously by what you see, it's the grey!

2. But then take the papers out of the frame. Show that the green is deeper and wider than the grey!
3. At first glance, to say green is winning seems crazy, because there is a lot of evidence to the contrary.
4. But after you remove the papers and show them, you see that what looks like the exception is really the rule!

IV. Other Song Possibilities

Your Love Never Fails (Newsboys) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgQ6vWEhH5E>

You're a Good, Good Father (Chris Tomlin) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBmwwwiHrOk>

Cherry Blossoms (Andy Squyres) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqMSPU8e7Uk>

Your Grace Finds Me (Matt Redman) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXZf-rc_XaA