

Going Deeper

Your weekly guide to understanding God with others

Close Encounters - Part 3

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Introduction

Levi's close encounter with Jesus was a spontaneous interaction of grace and redemption. Levi (who later became known as the disciple Matthew) was a despised tax collector, hated by his own Jewish community. Yet Jesus saw through his pain and rejection to bring him into a place of forgiveness, restoration and purpose. Our past mistakes do not stop us from knowing Jesus, nor do they define us. How have you encountered Jesus in your life? How can we be instruments of grace to help others encounter him too, especially those who are marginalized by society?

Read: Luke 5:27-32

Discuss: Select a couple of questions to discuss.

1. Have two people in the group read the above passage from two different translations, then have another person retell the story from memory in their own words. From the passage, what stands out to you as personally applicable to yourself?
2. Why was Jesus criticized for socialising with tax collectors and 'sinners' (which tends to refer to prostitutes in that day)? Have you ever found yourself in the company of society's outsiders (e.g. refugees or homeless people)? What did you learn from such interactions?
3. When Jesus called Levi, he "left everything and followed him." Have you had to make a sacrifice in following Jesus? What was the outcome?
4. Levi became part of the family of God and one of Christ's twelve disciples. How did you experience community when you became a Christian?

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5. Levi was given new life and a sense of purpose, leaving his old life behind. Did you experience a new sense of purpose when you became a follower of Jesus? Share this with the group.
6. People often need to 'belong before they believe'. What does this mean? Why do you think this is the case? Consider this in the light of Luke 5:31.
7. It was said that most of Jesus's interactions and impact occurred outside of the temple and synagogue; He met people in the streets, market places and other community meeting places. How can we too bring the gospel beyond the four walls of a church building?

Respond

Levi held a 'Matthew party' where he invited other tax collectors and sinners to meet Jesus. What can you do this Christmas to invite someone to experience the message and love of God? Begin by praying for God to place a person on your heart. Ask God to show you the best way to engage with them – perhaps they could be invited to the Christmas production or join your Christmas lunch? Perhaps the Life Group could hold a New Year Party and invite them along? Plan how you and your small group can reach out to the 'Levi's' you may be in contact with this Christmas and New Year.