



spiritual infant

DISCIPLE ME

THE ONE ABOUT CONFLICT

PART 3: Tax Collectors

ICEBREAKER: "GRINDING MY GEARS"

We all have certain kinds of people that *grind our gears* - the ones who just get under our skin for some reason. Go around the group and finish this sentence: "I can't stand it when people ____." It could be funny (like "chew loudly" or "drive slow in the fast lane"), or more serious (like "never admit they're wrong" or "ghost you instead of talking things out"). Continue until your group has exhausted its list.

DISCUSS:

- Why do you think certain people or habits bother us more than others?
- What's your first reaction when someone gets on your nerves - to avoid them, correct them, or vent about them?
- How does it make you feel when you realize *you've probably been that person for someone else*?

Read: Matthew 18:17

In this series of conversations, we've looked at how Jesus calls His followers to handle conflict differently - with honesty, humility, and a desire for restoration, not revenge. We saw that when someone wrongs us, the goal isn't to "win the argument" - it's to "win your brother or sister back."

Now, in this final part, we come to one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible, the final portion of Jesus' teaching on conflict management, where He says:

"If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." — Matthew 18:17 (NIV)

At first glance, that might sound harsh, like Jesus is telling us to *cut people off*. But to really understand what Jesus means, we need a little more context.

BACKGROUND: TAX COLLECTORS

Tax collectors were some of the most hated people in 1st-century Israel. They worked for the Roman Empire, collecting taxes from their own people, often charging extra and keeping the profit for themselves.

They were seen as traitors, corrupt, and religiously unclean. Most Jews wouldn't eat with them, talk to them, or even walk on the same side of the street. So when Jesus said, "*Treat them like tax collectors*," His audience probably thought, "Yeah - avoid them, right?" But is that what Jesus did?

STUDY: JESUS & TAX COLLECTORS

To learn more about how Jesus actually treated a real tax collector, read together Luke 19:1-10, which describes in detail Jesus' encounter with a tax collector named Zacchaeus. As you read, pay attention to the small details: Jesus' tone, His actions, and His timing. What do you notice about *how* He treats Zacchaeus, and what that might teach us about grace in conflict?"

Read Luke 19:1-10

- What stands out to you most about how Jesus approached Zacchaeus?
- How do you think the crowd expected Jesus to respond and how was His response different?
- What do you notice about Zacchaeus' heart change by the end of the story?
- How does this story reshape your understanding of what it means to "treat someone like a tax collector"?
- What might it look like to show that same kind of grace to someone you've been in conflict with?

Conflict reveals what we truly believe about grace. It's easy to be kind to people who agree with us, but Jesus challenges us to love the difficult ones, even when they're wrong, even when they walk away.

When Jesus says, "*Treat them like tax collectors*," He isn't telling us to reject or ignore them. He's inviting us to recognize that their choices and behavior may reveal hearts that are outside the kingdom of God and then to treat them with even more grace, not less.

That's what Jesus did with people like Zacchaeus and Matthew (he was a tax collector too). He extended a radical kind of love toward those who didn't yet belong to the family of God, and it was that very love that made them *want* to belong. Moments of tension, then, become moments for mission. So our posture as those who belong to God's family and who are building His kingdom should always be **open-handed grace**, never a closed door - because the way we love those who seem far from God may be the very thing that helps them find their way home.

CHALLENGE: THE GRACE AUDIT

This week, take five minutes each day to ask: "Who in my life right now feels furthest from God and how can I show them unexpected grace today?" Write one name and one action, and do it. Small moments of mercy can lead to big moves of God.