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*Hey leaders! This week we continued our “Off Limits” sermon series. Our prayer is that your group will challenge and encourage one another to allow God’s transformative grace to touch the parts of your lives that have remained untouched for too long. We also recently added NEW features that we hope you find helpful and encouraging! We’ve incorporated sermon quotes into the questions; a practice for your group to try throughout the month; and a “recap” card that can be shared a day or two after you gather.*

**Thank you for shepherding a group of people to Love God, Love Others, and Live Sent!**

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?  
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or [discipleship@rockbridge.cc](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)

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**“There is no saint without a past, no sinner without a future.”**  
[Augustine]

**LEADER RESOURCES || Leader Note** *We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!*

- **Passage Summary**
  - Jesus met Matthew where he was at, not where he should have been. He then gives Matthew an invitation, which he accepts unconditionally. However, Matthew never forgot where he came from. For Matthew, his past did not enslave him, but it reminded him of his transformation. When we truly follow Jesus, we never stay the same.
- **Matthew Ch. 9 Commentary & Jesus Calls the Misfit Tax Collector**
  - Use the commentary and short video for background and encouragement. These would be good resources to share with your group before you gather.
- **Principles For Dealing With Our Past**
  - This would be a good resource to share with your group after you gather.

**ICEBREAKER || Leader Note** *The goal for the icebreaker is to build joy and gratitude together. If you’d prefer, you can ask this question: What are you grateful for or how have you experienced joy this week?*

If you could go back in time and relive one event from your past, what would it be and why?

**BEGIN WITH PRAYER || Leader Note** *Begin your time together by thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, beginning in a posture of humility and dependence!*

Spend a moment praying this passage, beginning your time together in humility and gratitude!

**“You’ve gone into my future to prepare the way, and in kindness you follow behind me to spare me from the harm of my past. You have laid your hand on me!”**

[Psalm 139:5 TPT]

**BIG IDEA || Leader Note** Read this aloud so your group knows what the theme of today's discussion is.

We can ask God this about our past: "How will your grace transform me to become more like Jesus?"

**PASSAGE || Leader Note** Have someone read the passage aloud slowly. Have another person read it aloud again in a different translation or use Dwell to listen to the passage read aloud.

- Matthew 9:9-13

**DISCUSSION || Leader Note** Your role is to FACILITATE the conversation, so keep your group moving and encourage multiple people to share, looking for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two REMINDERS: 1) Every question does NOT have to be answered ... there is freedom to go where the Spirit leads! 2) The answers do NOT have to be read aloud ... they are simply there for guidance!

1. How does Matthew respond to Jesus' call? What does his response teach us about our call to be disciples of Jesus? *Matthew's response is immediate and radical, leaving behind his lucrative profession and following Jesus without hesitation. Matthew's response shows us the importance of obedience and sacrifice in discipleship. It also shows that following Jesus requires a willingness to leave behind our old way of life and prioritize our commitment to Him above all else.*
2. In the sermon we heard, "*Jesus meets us where and as we are, not where or who we should be.*" How does that encourage you in your current season of life? *This is a great opportunity to go first!*
3. What does Jesus mean when He says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"? *Jesus (quoting from Hosea 6:6) emphasizes the importance of genuine compassion and love for others over religious rituals and external displays of righteousness. He prioritizes acts of mercy and kindness towards those who are marginalized or in need. This challenges us to examine the motives behind our actions and cultivate a heart of mercy and compassion towards others.* How might God be inviting to apply Jesus' emphasis on mercy over sacrifice in your daily life?
4. What does Matthew's transformation from tax collector to disciple teach us about the transformative power of encountering Jesus? *It illustrates the transformative power of encountering Jesus, which led to a radical change in his life. Nobody is beyond the reach of God's grace and that His love has the power to transform even the most unlikely individuals. Matthew's story reminds us that encountering Jesus can bring about profound change in our lives, leading us to become more like Him.*
5. How can we emulate Jesus' approach to evangelism? *We can seek out opportunities to share the love of Jesus with others, particularly those who are in need or marginalized. This may involve building relationships with non-believers, showing kindness and compassion, and sharing our own stories of how Jesus transformed us. By reaching out to the lost with love and grace, we participate in His mission of reconciliation and redemption.* Who is God inviting you to reach out to more consistently?
6. What does this passage teach us about the character of God? *It reveals God as compassionate, inclusive, and merciful. It demonstrates His willingness to reach out to those who are lost, regardless of their social status or past sins. This passage also highlights God's desire for reconciliation and restoration, as exemplified by Jesus' interactions with sinners and His emphasis on mercy over sacrifice.*
7. How does Jesus' call of Matthew challenge our understanding of who is worthy of God's love and grace? *Jesus demonstrates that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. Matthew was considered a social outcast and sinner, yet Jesus chose him to be one of His disciples. This challenges our tendency to categorize people as deserving or undeserving of God's love based on their actions or social status. It reminds us that God's grace is available to all, regardless of past mistakes or societal labels.*

8. In the sermon we heard, *“Be careful what you listen to about your past.”* What story about your past are you giving more attention and value to than what God says about who you are? What is a better story to tell yourself about your past and potential future?
9. How does the story of Matthew's call and transformation encourage our own discipleship journey? *This story reminds us that nobody is beyond the reach of God's grace and that He can transform even the most unlikely individuals. Matthew's radical obedience and willingness to leave his old way of life inspire us to respond wholeheartedly to Jesus' call to follow Him. His story serves as a testament to the power of encountering Jesus and the transformative impact it can have on our lives.*
10. How can we cultivate a heart of mercy and compassion in our daily lives, following Jesus' example? *We can reach out to the marginalized and show love to those in need. This involves practicing forgiveness, extending grace to others, and seeking opportunities to serve and care for those who are hurting. By embodying the compassion and love of Christ, we reflect His character to the world and participate in His mission of reconciliation and redemption.*

**STEP OF OBEDIENCE || Leader Note** *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

Because of God's extraordinary grace, we are able to move forward with Jesus, full of hope, purpose and promise! Based on the Holy Spirit's prompting today, **what is a step of obedience that you can take?** Here are a few specific questions to consider as you embrace all of God's grace:

- What sin do you need to confess from the past?
- What can you thank God for in the present?
- How is God meeting you where and how you are now?
- What invitation is God giving you to move forward?

*Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 3-4 for this question.*

**PRAYER FOCUS || Leader Note** *We want to commit to praying for OTHERS as a unified church who is dependent upon God for everything. Be intentional about saving at least 5-10 minutes for prayer at the end of your small group each week to pray for the focused area below.*

### Off Limits

- Pray that God would reveal the areas in your life that need to be surrendered to His transforming power.
- Pray that God would give you and others the courage to surrender the areas that are the biggest strongholds in your mind and heart, so that no area of your life is off limits to Him.

**SPIRITUAL PRACTICE \*Optional\*** *We include a monthly spiritual practice that can be shared with your group after you gather. Our hope is for this to enhance what we're learning and discussing together, so share about your experience with the practice at the beginning of your gatherings or throughout the week!*

Centering prayer is a practice that leads one into the inner room of the soul and can usher you deeper into prayer, opening yourself up to the transforming power of God's grace more readily!

- **Centering Prayer** or [rockbridge.cc/centering-prayer-2](http://rockbridge.cc/centering-prayer-2)