

Gathering Guide

for Communities and Friends
God Is Stranger: "You and the Stranger", 6/30/19

The Big Idea

Radical love is home for the selfless, who make compassion such a regular part of life that they don't even notice its impact. Radical love is hidden to the selfish, who craft a life towards their own comforts and fail to see the plight of those in need. Radical love is personal to us, with eternity hanging in the balance, and personal to God, who suffers with those that suffer.

Where we are in the Bible

Matthew 25:31-46 is the last teaching of Jesus before the events that ultimately lead to his death and resurrection. It falls on the tale-end of other teachings and parables that focus on the coming of God's kingdom and judgement, presumably delivered to Jesus' disciples on the Mount of Olives. There are no easy words in these parables, and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is no exception.

Finding a bit of ourselves

- The 'sheep' in the parable aren't even aware of the impact they are making in the routine of compassion and justice in their lives. Do you know people like this? Describe their admirable characteristics and the impact they make on others.
- The 'goats' in the parable are also unaware of Jesus' presence in the people that hurt around them. We often think of sin as wrongful actions, but have you ever thought about wrongful *inaction*? In what ways has the church failed to act when they should have? What could/should the church be doing now that it generally is not? Where have you failed to act when we should?
- Jesus describes the goats' eternal destination as one of "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment." Discuss or reflect on the concept of hell. Why is it hard to grasp?
- Evangelicals tend to focus on having a 'personal relationship with Jesus' as the balance between heaven and hell, but none of that is mentioned here. In fact, both the sheep and the goats recognize Jesus as 'Lord.' In your opinion, do we emphasize the works of charity as described in Matthew 25:31-46 with the same seriousness that Jesus seems to give? Why or why not?

Where do we go from here?

- There is a saying that one can see heaven more clearly when they are knocked flat on their back. Reflect or discuss your own conversion experience, or a time when God specifically came to your rescue.
- Discuss or reflect on a vulnerable people-group that tugs at your heart. Why do you identify with their need so much?
- Brainstorm opportunities to serve the people that you have a heart for. What are some first steps you can take? (If you need some help, visit whfriends.org and click on the 'Outreach' tab.)

Prayer focus

Pray that God would increase your heart of compassion and present opportunities to shine His light...

- To your family members.
- To other believers.
- To those in your neighborhood.
- To co-workers.
- To the poor, hungry, naked, homeless, and imprisoned.
- To those that have wronged you.

Other scriptures to consider

God's focus on the poor:
Proverbs 19:17; James 1:27; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58:6-7; 1Timothy 5:8

God's call to shine and love:
Matthew 5:16; Matthew 5:46;
1Corinthians 12:31-13:13

The Beatitudes
Matthew 5:1-12

