



Discussion questions for personal or growth group use:

Reading: Matthew 9: 9-13 (paraphrase below) – re-told in Mark 2: 13-17 and Luke 5:27-32.

Question 1: Recall the story of your first awareness of the call of Jesus – what was it like? Can you relate to Levi's call or was your story more gradual?

Question 2: What are the things that you have given up in your decision to follow Jesus?

Questions 3: Reflect on the verse from Hosea 6:6 – and have a look at the context. What do you feel it says about what following Jesus is all about? Why does he quote it to the Pharisees?

Question 4: Compare the Hosea passage with these others from elsewhere in Scripture.

1 Sam 15:22-23

Amos 5:21-24

Ps 40:4-6

Micah 6:6-8

Ps 51:16-19

Jer 7:21-23

What do these say about the importance of the Old Testament Law, of ritual sacrifice, of obedience and what it means to follow Jesus in light of these verses?

Question 5: What does this mean you might do differently from here on?

Paraphrase based on Matthew 9: 9-13

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A throng of people is crowding round the rabbi, there's a background chatter of excited voices as men, women and children re-tell the story of the man who came through the roof, lowered on a mat by his friends because they couldn't get in the front door of the crowded little house on the edge of the village by the sea. Jesus had healed him, told him to pick up his mat and walk and he had!! Right before their eyes!

And Jesus kept walking, pausing on the beach to speak to this crowd of enthusiastic followers, of sceptics and religious leaders keeping an eye on this rebel. The informal procession moved towards the next village along the shore and there sat a curious looking fellow, known as Levi, sitting in the small booth on the way into the village. He was the local tax collector, a Jewish man but employed by the Romans to collect taxes to fund their invasive empire. Safe to say, he was a hated man, he charged huge amounts of commission on the taxes people paid and if they refused, they'd soon be sorted out by the Roman soldiers around. He lived a lavish lifestyle, had a huge house and many servants – and mixed with the sort of people who everyone hated too. His rich mates would come round and drink and eat and be merry – their parties were infamous.

Jesus, spots Levi – known as Matthew to us – and boldly walks up to him – which is a bit weird, most people try and walk past unnoticed. And he doesn't say much, he just says "Follow me". Levi gets up, leaves his booth and follows him.

Later that day, there's another of his parties going on, Levi has gathered all his mates, and invited Jesus and his crowd along too – there's music and food and wine for all. Most of the crowd have never been to a house like it, certainly never a party like it. And the Pharisees, the Jewish law keepers were there too – they wanted to keep an eye on this guy – who was now at a seriously dodgy party! So they asked the disciples what Jesus thought he was doing mixing with these sinners, being in Levi's home and sharing a meal together! This was blasphemous, unclean, seriously questionable behaviour!

Jesus heard the commotion, he spotted the Pharisees questioning his new-found followers and answers them back straight – "I've not come for the healthy but for the people who really need help. It's not those who are well who go seeking a doctor, it's those who are seriously ill. I'm like a doctor, bringing healing to people's hearts and souls." And then just to prove something to them, he challenged them with a verse from the Holy Scriptures (he knew his Jewish texts did Jesus) from Hosea 6:6. "Go, look this up, study it and work out for yourselves, 'I desire Mercy, not Sacrifice – acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings'" And then he summed it all up saying, "I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners".

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