

### Description

Commitment to Jesus often means making changes in the way you live. Jesus will be with you as you cut out certain habits and behaviors, but will your friends stick around? Learn how to make the transition Jesus is leading you into without alienating your friends—people whom Jesus loves too.

### Goals

1. Help participants feel accepted, safe, and able to ask questions and grow spiritually.
2. Consider lifestyle changes that participants need to make in order to be more like Jesus.
3. Help participants learn how to make changes in ways that will draw friends toward Jesus instead of pushing them away.
4. Help participants recognize when it is appropriate to temporarily remove themselves from bad influences.

### Outline

**Starter:** “Real Christian of Genius”

**Story Part 1:** Carolyn (alternate story: Beth)

**Bible Encounter:** Luke 5:27-32

**Story Part 2:** Carolyn (alternate story: Beth)

**Experience:** “Fire Burns” (supplies needed: small stones), Goal Setting

### Opening

Give a sincere and warm welcome to each person, letting them know you are glad they chose to come to the session. Share the vision for the group, then feel free to use the following language to open the session:

*When you commit to following Jesus, you'll realize he will lead you to make changes in the way you live. This happened to the people who followed Jesus in his time and it still happens today. When God sets up house in you, he starts spring-cleaning. You'll start yearning to live more like Jesus, and you'll become dissatisfied with the ways you don't. Even though you'll have to deal with your addictive, self-centered, or pleasure-obsessed patterns and choices, Jesus doesn't ask you to change them on your own. He'll change you from the inside out.*

*But as you change, you might run into another challenge: The friends you've hung out with, partied with, and maybe even had sexual experiences with may see you changing in ways they're not happy about. Friendships may become awkward or distant. Friends may think you are judging them. So how do you make the changes Jesus is asking you to without alienating the friends you care about, and whom Jesus also loves and wants to reach?*

### Starter: “Real Christian of Genius”

Have you or someone you know ever become so committed to something, even something positive (like healthy eating or exercise) that it became annoying to other people?

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### Story Part 1: Carolyn

Since committing yourself to Christ, have you had any awkward experiences with friends or family who knew you before you became a Christian? What happened and what was that like?

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*It is possible to tell someone what's going on with us as new Christians without turning them away from Jesus. Let's look at someone in Jesus' life who chose to follow him without being apprehensive about making lifestyle changes or introducing his friends to Jesus.*

### Bible Encounter: Luke 5:27-32

**Context:** Jesus traveled through Israel at the start of his ministry, specifically calling 12 men to be his disciples and join his nomadic ministry. While in Capernaum, Jesus invited a tax collector named Levi to follow him. In occupied Israel, tax collectors were members of the community employed by Romans to collect taxes, like the Sheriff of Nottingham amassed taxes for King John in “Robin Hood.” Tax collectors were detested because Roman taxes were excessive, even fraudulent, and collectors were considered villainous. Levi followed Jesus anyway, and invited Jesus to a dinner party at his home to introduce Jesus to his friends.

1. When Jesus called Levi to follow him, what strikes you about Levi's response in verses 27 and 28?
  - Levi's response revealed that he was “all in.” He jumped in with both feet to follow Jesus. He was not partially in; he wholeheartedly responded to Jesus' call even though he didn't know all the details.
  - Levi left everything behind: his possessions, family, and home.
  - Levi welcomed Jesus and wanted his friends to accept Jesus too. This is seen when Levi threw Jesus a lavish dinner party and invited all his friends to come meet his new friend, mentor and rabbi.
  - Your notes:

2. What kind of people did Levi likely hang out with, given his reputation as a tax collector?
  - Disliked: Jews thought tax collectors were traitors who'd sold out their own people for extra money. They made money off other's misfortunes and were likely cheaters, greedy, and opportunistic.
  - Ostracized: Tax collectors weren't allowed to serve as a judge or witness in the courts, and were excluded from the center of Jewish worship, the synagogue.
  - Not God-oriented: It would be hard to think about God much in a profession where you profited from hiking people's taxes for your own gain.
  - People who were trying to make a living, even if it was a dishonest one.
  - Your notes:
  
3. The Pharisees avoided Levi's friends and complained about them. What did this reveal about their hearts and about Jesus' heart?
  - In that era and culture, to eat with someone signified a friendship. The Pharisees accused Jesus and his disciples of being friends with notoriously edgy and wicked people.
  - "Sinners" was a term used for those who refused to follow Jewish law and tradition.
  - The Pharisees were afraid of being contaminated by such vulgar, "unclean" men.
  - Your notes:
  
4. Tax collectors were known for being greedy, so what surprising lifestyle changes did Levi make?
  - It is interesting that Levi threw a lavish banquet, indicating a shift in his life from greed to generosity.
  - Tax collectors were known for their cruelty to people whose money they collected. But here, Levi was generous in heart and spirit.
  - Tax collectors were collaborators with Rome, yet Levi hosted Jesus who was considered a potential threat to the Romans (see Luke 23:2).
  - Your notes:
  
5. Imagine you were at Levi's party with his friends and having fun with them. Describe the atmosphere, food and drink, conversations, and jokes.
  - Like most "great banquets," the climate was probably festive, especially as a "large crowd" attended.
  - Tax collectors were probably wealthy, since the economy was robust in Israel at that time. The food was likely plentiful and the wine flowing.
  - There may have been speculation about Jesus, and maybe even questions about God and faith.
  - Just like any party of that day, crude jokes were likely abundant, especially after a few drinks.
  - Your notes:
  
6. Most people don't invite just anyone into their home. Levi invited Jesus to his party, so what does that tell you about Levi's relationship with "tax collectors and sinners" and with Jesus?
  - Levi made a decision not to keep his relationship with Jesus private or secret. He did it right out in the open and in the context of his own community.
  - Having a meal together was a sign and outcome of a deepening friendship. Levi invited Jesus into his life because he wanted to "do life" with Jesus and learn more about him.
  - Levi wanted to connect Jesus to his friends, and his friends to Jesus.
  - Your notes:

7. What do you think the comfort level was like among Levi, Jesus, and Levi's friends at the banquet?
- There isn't a lot of information given, but we assume Levi's friends were comfortable with Jesus. And Jesus seemed at ease with Levi's friends, even defending his decision to eat with them in verse 31.
  - Likewise, Levi seemed comfortable having Jesus in his home and meeting his friends.
  - The Pharisees were the only people who were uncomfortable with the mixed gathering. Everyone else appeared to be building trust.
  - Components of building trust in this story include: spending time together, crossing social barriers, eating a meal together, Levi inviting Jesus into his world, Jesus accepting the invitation to hang out in Levi's community.
  - Your notes:
8. When Jesus didn't shy away from Levi's party, what was he implying to his critics about his mission and who matters to him?
- Jesus hung out with those who needed him most.
  - Jesus came to call sinners to repentance and to give them forgiveness; he made this clear. Jesus intended to invest his time and energy in sinners and tax collectors, the people who needed to hear the message of God's love and forgiveness.
  - Your notes:

### Story Part 2: Carolyn

#### Experience: "Fire Burns," Goal Setting

**"Fire Burns"** Pass out a small stone to each participant, then follow the instructions on screen.

#### Goal Setting

What is one lifestyle change you feel God is leading you to make?

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How do you expect your friends to respond when you make that change?

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# LAUNCH

## How do I make lifestyle changes and keep my friends?

What are some practical ways to keep including your friends in your life without compromising on that lifestyle change?

Allow participants time to think of options. If they appear to be having trouble coming up with ideas, you may want to discuss one or more of the following questions:

- Do you think your friends who are not Christians find you approachable? What are ways to be more approachable?
- Are you accepting of people who live edgier lifestyles? What are ways to show acceptance?
- Would someone who knows you consider you judgmental toward people who don't believe in Jesus? What cautions can be taken against sounding judgmental?
- Are you honest with your friends about the lifestyle changes you're making and why?
- Do you still spend time with the friends you had before becoming a Christian?
- Do you invite your friends to Christian fellowship meetings, go to church with you, or simply hang out or do another fun activity with your Christian friends?

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