

The Great Divorce Small Group #2 “Out of excuses and into Grace”
LEADER’S GUIDE
Ver 1.1

Covers: *The Great Divorce* Chapter 4

Main Scripture: Luke 18:9-17

Main Idea: All of us have sinned and fall short of God’s glory. You can make excuses or you can be excused but you cant have both. We cannot enter through the gate of heaven with our self-righteous pride intact. The idea that we have any rights before God is a wall that shuts us out from the very thing we want. Depending on God as a child depends on their parents, trusting in God’s goodness and mercy and grace is the only way to enter into the kingdom of God.

Participants that were not able to hear the sermon can hear a fairly close rendition of it at www.levpres.org/the-great-divorce-podcasts/

How to use this Guide: This study includes a section for each of five basic steps – THE OPENER starts where your people are, THE BOOK gets them into *The Great Divorce*, THE CHALLENGE gets them to share honest things about their own lives, THE SCRIPTURE helps them dig into a scripture that can help them with this issue, THE TAKEAWAY allows them to create a plan as they go back into their world. THE PRAYER creates space for prayer partners or small groups to pray for each other by name as an end to the group.

During THE BOOK section, we encourage you to have two people read (or act out) the script found at the end of this guide to the rest of the members.

THE OPENER:

ASK: We are all tempted to make up excuses for our behavior or things that happen. What is the worst excuse you have ever given or which has ever been given to you ?

OR

ASK: Do you remember in the sermon when the pastor talked about the Red deer who still had a wall in their head? They could not cross over to freedom of the wide open spaces beyond - because they could not let go of the map that only existed in their heads. As you think about your past and your present, have you ever held onto any maps (ways of thinking about the world) that are neither helpful nor true ?

THE BOOK:

SAY: In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis has pairs of people who knew each other on earth, meet on the front lawn of Heaven. One has come up from Hell and the other has come down from High Heaven. The people from heaven seem solid while the people from heaven seem unsubstantial. Today we meet the Big Man who is full of excuses because when you are full of pride you have to

be full of excuses. Once again we get the gift of being read to, so X and Y are going to read excerpts from chapter 4 to refresh our memories! As they do, try to imagine the scene and what the people are like.

[Two readers read Condensed Script #2 located at the end of this study]

TEACH: Many times Lewis has ghosts say far more than they think they are saying. Note the Big Man says "I'll be damned." In the book the ghost says "anyone's bleeding charity" but the solid person says "Ask for the Bleeding Charity" with capitol letters. What point do you think Lewis is trying to make with this subtle difference? [It is precisely the bleeding sacrifice of Jesus that we need to cover our sin, his Charity or Love that saves us from what we deserve].

ASK:

1. As the Big Man walks back, what kind of things do you think HE would say are the reasons he is not staying.
2. According to him, who is to blame ?
3. What hints make it clear he is in utter denial when he says "*I done my best all my life, see? I done my best by everyone, that's the sort of chap I was...*"
4. A A key exchange between the two people is this: "*I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity...*" "Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought."

Why would this be so hard for the Big Man to accept ?

5. What would it cost him to accept the grace of Heaven (there is a cost) ?

THE CHALLENGE:

As you think about your own life, has there ever been a specific time or times when you had to lay down all your rights before God and surrendered to his Mercy ? If so, can you share with us what that time in your life was like ?

THE SCRIPTURE

SAY: God's word can help us see the difference between prideful self-righteousness and humble surrender to God. {Have someone read Luke 18:9-17

Luke 18:9-17

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I

get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." 15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

TEACH:

The Pharisees took the scriptures very seriously and worked very hard to live very noble, moral lives. The tax collectors worked for the occupying force of Rome, extracting money from the conquered Jews. They were considered traitors to the faith and immoral opportunists.

ASK:

1. How is the Big Man of the Great Divorce like and unlike the Pharisee ?
2. Think about your own sacrifices and efforts to be good. In some ways is what Jesus is teaching here seem unfair ?

TEACH:

Like the Big man and the Pharisee, we tend to compare ourselves to other people rather than God's perfect laws and thus conclude "I'm pretty good, I've got my rights, I deserve heaven because..." This approach is a dead end that leaves us cut off from a genuine relationship with the God revealed by Jesus. It not only wont get us into heaven, it cuts us off from a living relationship with Jesus now.

ASK:

Why do you think Luke placed verses 16-17 right after verses 10-14 ?

THE TAKE AWAY

We asked earlier if anyone had ever had one or more moments when they completely surrendered to God, with no excuses, no explanations, no sense of rights, just asking God for forgiveness and mercy. What kinds of things might make you hesitant to commit to such complete surrender ?

THE PRAYER

Take time praying for each other – both recounting things that have been shared, and asking God's spirit to help them completely surrender to God's will in their lives. Ask that your prayer partner would be able to see and experience the beautiful, bleeding charity of Jesus Christ.

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EXTRA STUFF - IF YOU NEED IT

1. In Chapter 4, what scenes most struck you ? What about them did you find so moving or interesting?
2. What do you think about the implication that a murder is in heaven while a non-murder is not. How does looking at it from earth versus looking at it from heaven change the sense of "fairness" ?
3. Read Proverbs Chapter 16 and try to identify every characteristic there captured by the people described in Chapters 1-3 in The Great Divorce.
4. In the Podcast, Langdon argued pride and excuses always go together. Considering what the bible says about human nature, why would excuses always be required when we see ourselves as righteous ?

The Great Divorce Sunday School Class Scripts

GATHERING #2 - Chapter 4

CONDENSED READING for two readers

The main reader reads all the non-bold words, the second reader reads the words in bold which are also indented. {bracketed} words signify an action or attitude and should not be read.

“As the solid people came nearer still I noticed that they were moving with order and determination as though each of them had marked his man in our shadowy company. ‘There are going to be affecting scenes,’ I said to myself. ‘Perhaps it would not be right to look on.’ With that, I sidled away on some vague pretext of doing a little exploring. A grove of huge cedars to my right seemed attractive and I entered it. Walking proved difficult. The grass, hard as diamonds to my unsubstantial feet, made me feel as if I were walking on wrinkled rock, and I suffered pains like those of the mermaid in Hans Andersen. A bird ran across in front of me and I envied it. It belonged to that country and was as real as the grass. It could bend the stalks and spatter itself with the dew. Almost at once I was followed by what I have called the Big Man—to speak more accurately, the Big Ghost. He in his turn was followed by one of the bright people.

‘Don’t you know me?’ he shouted to the Ghost.

I found it impossible not to turn and attend. The face of the solid spirit—he was one of those that wore a robe—made me want to dance, it was so light hearted, so established in its youthfulness.

‘Well, I’m damned,’ ‘I wouldn’t have believed it...’ said the Ghost.

It’s a fair knock-out. It isn’t right, Len, you know. What about poor Jack, eh? You look pretty pleased with yourself, but what I say is, what about poor Jack?’

‘He is here,’ ‘You will meet him soon, if you stay.’

‘But you murdered him.’

‘Of course I did. It is all right now.’

‘All right, is it? All right for you, you mean. But what about the poor chap himself, laying cold and dead?’

'But he isn't. I have told you, you will meet him soon. He sent you his love.'

'What I'd like to understand, is what you're here for, as pleased as Punch, you, a bloody murderer, while I've been walking the streets down there and living in a place like a pig sty all these years.'

'That is a little hard to understand at first. But it is all over now. You will be pleased about it presently. Till then there is no need to bother about it.'

'No need to bother about it? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

'No. Not as you mean. I do not look at myself. I have given up myself. I had to, you know, after the murder. That was what it did for me. And that was how everything began.'

'Personally...' said the Big Ghost with an emphasis which contradicted the ordinary meaning of the word,

'Personally, I'd have thought you and I ought to be the other way round. That's my personal opinion.'

'Very likely we soon shall be - If you'll stop thinking about it.'

'Look at me, now,' said the Ghost, slapping its chest but the slap made no noise.

'I gone straight all my life. I don't say I was a religious man and I don't say I had no faults, far from it. But I done my best all my life, see? I done my best by everyone, that's the sort of chap I was. I never asked for anything that wasn't mine by rights. If I wanted a drink I paid for it and if I took my wages I done my lob, see? That's the sort I was and I don't care who knows it.'

'It would be much better not to go on about that now.'

'Who's going on? I'm not arguing. I'm just telling you the sort of chap I was, see? I'm asking for nothing but my rights. You may think you can put me down because you're dressed up like that (which you weren't when you worked under me) and I'm only a poor man. But I got to have my rights same as you, see?'

'Oh no. It's not so bad as that. I haven't got my rights, or I should not be here. You will not get yours either. You'll get something far better. Never feat'

'That's just what I say. I haven't got my rights. I always done my best and I never done nothing wrong. And what I don't see is why I should be put below a bloody murderer like you.'

'Who knows whether you will be? Only be happy and come with me.'

'What do you keep on arguing for? I'm only telling you the sort of chap I am. I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity.'

'Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought.'

'That may do very well for you, I daresay. If they choose to let in a bloody murderer all because he makes a poor mouth at the last moment, that's their look out, But I don't see myself going in the same boat as you, see? Why should I.? I don't want charity. I'm a decent man and if I had my rights I'd have been here long ago and you can tell them I said so.'

(The other shook his head.) 'You can never do it like that,' he said. 'Your feet will never grow hard enough to walk on our grass that way. You'd be tired out before we got to the mountains. And it isn't exactly true, you know.' Mirth danced in his eyes Ashe said it.

'What isn't true?' (asked the Ghost sulkily.)

'You weren't a decent man and you didn't do your best. We none of us were and none of us did. Lord bless you, it doesn't matter. There is no need to go into it all now.

'You!' (gasped the Ghost). **'You have the face to tell me I wasn't a decent chap?'**

'Of course. Must I go into all that? I will tell you one thing to begin with. Murdering old Jack wasn't the worst thing I did. That was the work of a moment and I was half mad when I did it. But I murdered you in my heart, deliberately, for years. I used to lie awake at nights thinking what I'd do to you if I ever got the chance. That is why I have been sent to you now: to ask your forgiveness and to be your servant as long as you need one, and longer if it pleases you. I was the worst. But all the men who worked under you felt the same. You made it hard for us, you know. And you made it hard for your wife too and for your children.'

'You mind your own business, young man, 'None of your lip, see? Because I'm not taking any impudence from you about my private affairs.'

'There are no private affairs,'

'And I'll tell you another thing, You can clear off, see? You're not wanted. I may be only a poor man but I'm not making pals with a murderer, let alone taking lessons from him. Made it hard for you and your like, did I? If I had you back there I'd show you what work is.'

'Come and show me now,' (said the other with laughter in his voice), 'It will be joy going to the mountains, but there will be plenty of work.'

'You don't suppose I'd go with you?'

'Don't refuse. You will never get there alone. And I am the one who was sent to you.'

'So that's the trick, is it?'

"He was outwardly bitter, and yet I thought there was a kind of triumph in its voice. It had been entreated: it could make a refusal: and this seemed to it to be a kind of advantage..."

'I thought there'd be some damned nonsense. It's all a clique, all a bloody clique. Tell them I'm not coming, see? I'd rather be damned than go along with you. I came here to get my rights, see? Not to go snivelling along on charity tied onto your apron-strings, If they're too fine to have me without you, I'll go home.' It was almost happy now that it could, in a sense, threaten. 'That's what I'll do,' it repeated, 'I'll go home. I didn't come here to be treated like a dog. I'll go home. That's what I'll do. Damn and blast the whole pack of you.. .

"In the end, still grumbling, but whimpering also a little as it picked its way over the sharp grasses, it made off."