



# 12

## SESSION TWELVE

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# Jesus and Zacchaeus

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we read about Zacchaeus, a man whose example shows us what overflowing gratitude looks like in the heart of a sinner who encounters the love of Jesus. Zacchaeus overcame obstacles to see Jesus, obeyed Jesus' command and welcomed Him into his home, and then showed incredible generosity as a result of his transformation. Understanding Jesus' desire to seek and save the lost, we see ourselves in the story of Zacchaeus and are called to walk in repentance and give generously to advance the gospel.

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 19:1-10

# THE POINT

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**Jesus came to seek and save the lost.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Do you know what it means to “write someone off”? Basically, writing off other people means that you have given up on them, want nothing to do with them, or have decided that they no longer have any use for you. In other words, you believe they are unsuitable for you to associate with.

- **When have you been tempted to “write someone off”? What caused you to respond this way?**

Essentially, because of his profession, disloyalty, and dishonesty, the rest of the Jews wrote off Zacchaeus. They wanted nothing to do with this sinful man, and they couldn’t understand why anyone else would either. Jesus not only called Zacchaeus by name, but also went to his house and spent time with him.

- **Why do you think it’s sometimes easy to consider yourself as less sinful than other people?**

Despite others’ opinions, Jesus reached out to the outcast and welcomed him into his own family. Jesus did not hesitate to extend a second chance, the gift of forgiveness, to Zacchaeus; neither should we hesitate to reach out to the outcasts, the ones who may seem beyond God’s reach, and lead them to Him, to a second chance, to repentance.

### Option 2

Two of the most recent *Avengers* movies follow Captain America (Steve Rogers) as he attempts to track down and help his childhood friend, Bucky (aka. *The Winter Soldier*), return to the man he was. Bucky and Steve were best friends, they enlisted in the Army together and served on a special team to shut down the enemy, Hydra. During their mission, Bucky fell and everyone assumed he died. Years later, he emerged as a super-soldier brainwashed by Hydra. He created a lot of destruction, leaving only Steve to believe Bucky could be “good” again. Despite the odds and the adamant protests of his colleagues, Captain America refused to give up on his friend.<sup>1</sup>

- **Have you ever wanted to give someone the benefit of the doubt when no one else believed in that person? Describe the situation.**

Just as the Avengers couldn’t understand Captain America’s need to reach out to someone who seemed beyond hope, neither could the Jews understand why Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus, the tax collector. In their eyes, he was beyond redemption. But to Jesus, Zacchaeus was lost, a soul in need of grace and salvation only Jesus could offer.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus came to seek and save the lost.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus** - the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Zacchaeus** - a tax collector known for dishonest practices. He was short in stature, so he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus

## PLOT

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In previous sessions, we examined Jesus' interactions with different kinds of people He met and ministered to. We looked at His calling of disciples, His conversation with Nicodemus, His meeting a woman at the well, and His relationship with John the Baptist. In our passage today, Jesus traveled to the home of a tax collector named Zacchaeus.

## ZACCHAEUS OVERCAME OBSTACLES IN ORDER TO SEE JESUS

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The story of Zacchaeus is recorded in Luke 19, as Jesus entered Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Take a look:

**<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. (Luke 19:1-4)**

Did you notice the characteristics Luke used to describe Zacchaeus? He mentioned two facts: Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, and he was rich. In Jesus' day, the Jewish people despised tax collectors. Why? Because tax collectors were Jews, too, but they collaborated with the Roman officials who oppressed God's people. What's more, it was common practice for Jewish tax collectors to extort money above the Roman tax, and then they would use the extra money to pad their pockets and live in luxury.

Consider this analogy. If you've ever traveled to Orlando, you're probably familiar with their tollbooths. Every few miles or so, you go through a tollbooth and pay a fee so you can remain on that stretch of highway. Imagine if you knew the toll was \$3, but the collector asked for \$10. Wouldn't you be frustrated? You'd want to report the collector to the government officials.

The tax collectors overcharged, but the people had no other options—no one to turn to in order to report these practices. Furthermore, the people saw how these tax collectors lived. Like the description says, "he was rich." Here we have a man who would have been viewed as a traitor—a man whose wealth earned his wealth through sin and oppression.

What's interesting about Zacchaeus is that he actually wanted to see Jesus. Unfortunately, he wasn't very tall. Perhaps the people who hated tax collectors purposefully blocked Zacchaeus so that he wouldn't be able to get through, maybe as a way of getting back at him for his extortion. Whatever the case, Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus, and so he climbed up into a tree.

Zacchaeus' decision to climb up into a tree was unheard of in that day. Men didn't climb trees. It was not "dignified" for a man with his clout to do such a thing. But Zacchaeus didn't care. He may have been short, and the crowd may have been in the way, but with childlike enthusiasm he did what he had to do. He positioned himself in a way that would allow him to see Jesus.

### TIMELINE

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#### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*

*\*Beginning Summer 2017*

#### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

*Jesus teaches on people's responses when hearing the Word.*

#### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*

## JESUS REACHED OUT TO ZACCHAEUS

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The crowds made it difficult for Zacchaeus to see Jesus, but Jesus looked over the heads of the crowd and saw Zacchaeus.

**5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”<sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.<sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” (Luke 19:5-7)**

Jesus took notice of this man, acknowledged him, and then expressed the desire to spend time in this traitor’s home.

Not surprisingly, the people that saw this interaction were appalled. To be a guest in someone’s home meant you were “in fellowship” with them. It was like having an outstretched arm of love and acceptance or giving a warm embrace. In the onlookers’ eyes, Jesus spent time with one of the “bad guys”—someone who had done terrible and selfish things as part of his career. Why would a righteous teacher, someone who claimed to be the Messiah, want to spend time in fellowship with a man known for his wickedness?

The crowd’s complaints demonstrated their assumption that Zacchaeus was beyond redemption, and so they were puzzled when Jesus wanted to spend time with such a person. They had written off any possibility that God would or could accept him.

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Gracious (p. 85, PSG)

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*God's nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).*

## ZACCHAEUS DEMONSTRATED REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN JESUS

Zacchaeus' response to Jesus involved conviction, confession, and repentance.

**8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:8-10)**

Zacchaeus quickly came down from the tree to welcome Jesus, but maybe he heard the crowd, got convicted, and froze in fear. He stopped walking and just stood there. I can't imagine what went through his mind. Perhaps it was the fact that he knew that the crowd complained correctly: He was guilty of extortion!

Immediately, without being prompted directly by anyone else, Zacchaeus told Jesus he would give half of his possessions to the poor. If he had exhorted anything from anyone, he would pay back four times as much as he took. Zacchaeus was convicted of his wrongdoing—to the point he willingly confessed his extortion and demonstrated his repentance by vowing to make full restoration to those he had victimized.

Jesus responded by saying that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus spoke about the tax collector's salvation. This moment is extraordinary because Jesus saw this man as a "son of Abraham"—meaning he had a covenant connection to the forefathers of Israel. But Jesus claimed the man's salvation was based on his response to Jesus, not his ancestry going back to Abraham. What's more, saving faith expresses itself in a changed life, which is exactly what happened to Zacchaeus.

As Rey De Armas wrote: "Using Zacchaeus as an example, we can see how stinginess is a sign that we do not know the grace of God. Grace is not fairness. Grace is not a karmic state that allows us to repay God for the wonderful acts that He has done for us. Grace is receiving something that we could never deserve... Because we have been shown generosity by Christ, we understand what it means to have someone be spiritually generous to us in our state of poverty. Zacchaeus was relationally and spiritually poor. Jesus was generous to Him and because of His generosity, Zacchaeus was no longer lost but found."<sup>2</sup>

- **Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, and describe the qualities of biblical repentance. In the brief encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, did Zacchaeus possess some of the qualities Paul listed in the passage you just read? (p. 86, PSG)**

### TIMELINE

#### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

*Jesus teaches on how to love one's neighbor.*

#### TWO LOST SONS

*Jesus teaches on God's grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.*

#### PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to seek and save the lost. While we were dead in our sins, Jesus came to die in our place (Rom. 5:8). His substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled His mission. God rejoices when sinners hear the gospel and are moved to admit their guilt, confess their sinfulness, and trust in the finished work of Jesus in order to be saved. Never should we believe that people have gone so far that they cannot be reached by the grace of God.

We who have embraced Jesus know this firsthand. And because of our encounter with Jesus, we can express our gratitude to our Savior by sharing His story to those whom we come in contact with and by sharing our resources with those who are in need.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **The crowds got in the way of Zacchaeus seeing Jesus. How do people sometimes get in the way of others seeing Jesus today?** *Sometimes we can get in the way with our attitude over certain things, or even with our actions that may, even though permissible, cause others to stumble.*
- **What are some categories of people we may be inclined to think of as "unreachable" by God's grace? How do we biblically challenge this way of thinking?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think Zacchaeus thought it was important to repay the people he extorted money from? What does this decision express about his heart?** *It demonstrates that his heart underwent a drastic change from loving money and the things he could acquire with money, to one of generosity on account of having an encounter with Jesus.*
- **How does the gospel influence our level of generosity toward others?** *The more we realize how much we have been given through the love and grace of God, the more we will extend His generosity to those around us.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Before we judge the crowds too quickly, we should stop ask ourselves if our judgment is hypocritical because we do similar things. What about the times we hold grudges because of other people's sinful actions against us? Or we have written people off as unreachable because they hurt us in some way? Or what about people who pursue addictions, engage in sinful exploits, express hostility or rage toward Christians—have we ever considered them beyond redemption?

- **How should our own salvation help us to understand the salvation of all sinners?** *Stories like this one show us a Savior who pursues all kinds of sinners. We, too, were selfishly pursuing our own dreams at the expense of others, while neglecting the grace of God. Yet, Jesus called us by name and welcomed us into His family.*
- **When we rightly understand God's grace to all sinners, what actions should follow?** *Reconciliation and forgiveness to those who may have sinned against us, compassion toward them knowing that their hearts may still be hardened toward God and His love, and so forth.*



## HEART

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We learn from this account what happens when people meet Jesus and are transformed by His grace in their lives. Zacchaeus loved riches and the lifestyle that came from being rich. However, when he met Jesus, something drastically changed. Jesus' grace and mercy toward him transformed the desires of his heart to the point that he was willing to let go of his riches and his former way of life in response to Christ. This is they type of heart change that happens inside of each person who comes to know the grace and mercy of Christ.

- **How has Christ transformed your life? How have the desires of your heart changed from knowing Him?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is a transformed heart and life a good indicator that someone has Jesus as Lord over his life?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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We must treat every person we meet as someone who might embrace Jesus as Savior. God often calls us to pursue people we may believe are beyond His saving grace; He calls us to show them the way to salvation in Jesus. We may face opposition for building friendships with lost people, but we can learn from the model of Paul's ministry, as he shared both the gospel and himself with the people he encountered (1 Thess. 2:8).

- **What is the significance of Jesus ignoring His opposition in order to spend time with Zacchaeus?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this say about Jesus' heart for the lost? What implications does this have for the way believers are supposed to live?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, directed by Joe Russo and Anthony Russo, (2014; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
2. Rey de Armas, "Do Not Steal," *The Gospel Project: Students*, Summer 2014, 111.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPRescueSpr17](http://lifeway.com/TGPRescueSpr17))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# STUDY PLAN

## YEAR 1

### Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)  
God the Covenant-Maker  
(Genesis 12-50)

### Winter 2016

God the Redeemer  
(Exodus)  
God the Lawgiver  
(Exodus, Leviticus,  
Deuteronomy)

### Spring 2016

God the Savior  
(Numbers, Joshua)  
God the Judge (Judges,  
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

### Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)  
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,  
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

## YEAR 2

### Fall 2016

God the Revealer  
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)  
God the Pursuer (Major  
and Minor Prophets,  
1-2 Chronicles)

### Winter 2017

God the Sustainer  
(Daniel, Ezra)  
God the Provider (Esther,  
Nehemiah, Malachi)

### Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)  
God Among Us (Gospels)

### Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller  
(Synoptic Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker  
(Gospels)

## YEAR 3

### Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King  
(Gospels, Acts)

### Winter 2018

The Spirit Who  
Empowers (Acts)  
The God Who Sends (Acts)

### Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His  
People (Epistles)  
The God Who Changes  
Us (Epistles)

### Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)  
The God Who Makes All  
Things New (Epistles,  
Revelation)