

The Call of Zacchaeus

Background Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Children's Sunday School Lesson

Written by: Ann Tonks
Calvary Baptist Church,
Lexington, KY



Purpose

To help children understand that God calls all people to do God's work.

Bible Story

Jesus Called Zacchaeus

Memory Verse

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. 1 Samuel 3:9b (NIV)

Bible Background

Read Luke 19:1-10 prayerfully. First, read it as though you were one of the people from whom Zacchaeus extracted tax monies. Then read it from the perspective of Zacchaeus. Think about the two points of view.

The Roman government had devised a plan to collect taxes from the people. Those who were interested bid for the jobs. The jobs of tax collector were mainly filled by Romans, but sometimes the Jewish people were hired. A chief tax collector was one who hired other people to collect the taxes for him and he supervised their work. Tax collectors were well known for collecting the taxes imposed by the Romans, then adding some on the top for themselves, often quite a bit. The Bible says that Zacchaeus was a rich man; he may well have added considerably to the tax burden already prescribed by the Roman government. You can understand why the people in Jericho disliked him.

When Jesus called Zacchaeus to his service, he called a person that the people of that day thought to be most unlikely. Zacchaeus, as a chief tax collector or publican, was a hated person among the people in Jericho. And Zacchaeus had another attribute. He was short in stature. When he tried to see Jesus with others in the crowd, he could not see above their heads. Perhaps they purposely excluded him. But Zacchaeus was not without ideas. He climbed a sycamore tree. Imagine the thoughts of the crowd. "That Zacchaeus. He will do anything to get attention."

But Jesus saw more in Zacchaeus than was apparent to those in the crowd. And when Zacchaeus met Jesus, he immediately changed his way of thinking. Zacchaeus answered Jesus' call by doing what Jesus wanted him to do.

Girls and boys love the story of Zacchaeus. But they can also relate to his predicament. They often find themselves in situations where their playmates and friends may not like them, even if it is only temporary. They can understand that

the people may not have liked Zacchaeus, but Jesus did. Jesus saw something in him that apparently no one else did. And Zacchaeus immediately responded to Jesus. He knew what Jesus would want him to do and he did it. Have you ever found yourself in such a position? How did you respond?

People are called for a purpose. The Bible has many stories of people God called. He called Moses to help him free the Hebrew nation from Egyptian slavery. He called David to rule over his people. He called Samuel to give a message to Eli. Jesus called his disciples to spread the Good News. He called Paul to preach salvation in Christ.

What has God called you to do? As you teach, help the children understand that God wants and needs people to do God's work on earth. God calls people, girls and boys included, to tell others about God, to show God's love to others, and to live in God's ways.

Pray that God will help you to be ready to do God's work. Think of jobs God has chosen you to do. Thank God for allowing you to answer that call and do God's work. Reread the Bible story and memory verse to remind you how God works in peoples' lives.

Pray for the girls and boys you teach. You never know when God may already be working in the life of a child. Your job is to help them understand what God tells them in the Bible.

Preparing the Environment for Learning

1. Think of ways you can make Jesus' call to Zacchaeus real to them.
2. Print "The Call of Zacchaeus" on a large strip of paper. Obtain at least one picture of Zacchaeus and Jesus. Place the title banner and the picture in a focal area of your room.
3. Print the memory verse on a large piece of construction paper and place it on the wall.
4. Make two or three memory-verse puzzles. Print the verse on several pieces of construction paper and cut them up as jigsaw puzzles. Place each puzzle in an envelope. As the first children arrive, suggest that they work the puzzles. Use them again during the Bible study time.

Preparation for Introductory Activities

1. For "I Hear You!" prepare the room in case the girls and boys want to hide. Move the bookcase a little out from the wall. Place a table against a wall with one or two chairs in front of it. Drape tablecloths over tables or chairs to make hiding places. The game can also be played without the children hiding.
2. For "Bible Treasure Hunt" (older children) print these Bible references on strips of paper, one reference per strip: Genesis 10:28-22, Exodus 3-4, 1 Samuel 3, 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Jonah 1, Matthew 4:18-22, Acts 9:1-19.

Preparation for Bible Study Time (Large Group)

1. Place a bookmark in your Bible at Luke 19 and 1 Samuel 3:9b.
2. If you choose to sing, choose some songs about Jesus that the children enjoy. Sing them before you pray.

Preparation for Application Activities

1. Listening to God Mobile

Collect a large box, construction paper, scissors, colored markers, glue, string, and several outdated learner guides.

2. A.M.A.G. Buttons

Obtain poster board or heavy cardboard, several safety pins, colored markers, scissors, and masking tape. Cut several four-inch circles from poster board or heavy cardboard.

Guiding the Learning Session

A. Introductory Activities (10 minutes)

(Small Group Activity with Younger and Older Children Participating Separately)

1. I Hear You! (Younger Children)

Welcome the younger children as they arrive. Tell them that they will play a game called "I Hear You!" Each child will call (not shout) another child's name. The child whose name was called will answer, "I hear you." The first child will then call someone else. Several children can all play at the same time, calling out the names of their friends and answering each other. Encourage the children to move to different places in the room as they play. Some may want to hide, which would be fine. As children arrive, include them in the game.

2. Bible Treasure Hunt (Older Children)

Welcome the older children as they arrive. Distribute the Bible-reference strips. Guide the children to locate the passages and determine whom God called. They may work alone or in twos or threes.

B. Transition to Large Group

When all the children have arrived and played for a few minutes, call them together and ask them to tell you what they were doing. Ask the children to name other people who might call them (parents, teachers, brothers and sisters, playmates). Ask the children to tell some of the reasons they may be called (time to eat, bedtime, recess is over, need help). Tell the children that God also calls people, even girls and boys, when God has something special to say to them.

C. Bible Study Time (30 minutes)

Point out the title banner and memory verse. Tell the children they will hear a story about how Jesus called someone to follow him.

Tell the Story

Ask a child to open your Bible. Tell the children that the story today is about Jesus and how he called a man to follow him and obey him. Suggest that the older children take notes during the story and make up some questions about it. Tell the story in your own words.

Jesus Called Zacchaeus (based on Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus and his friends were on a journey. They walked everywhere they went. Sometimes it was hot. Sometimes it was dusty. Sometimes they got tired and they would rest.

Everywhere Jesus went, people wanted to see him. They wanted to hear him speak. They knew he would tell them about God. Jesus came to the city of Jericho. Many people in the city saw Jesus and knew who he was. They started to follow him. Suddenly, crowds of people were following Jesus.

A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a tax collector and he was very rich. Many people did not like the tax collectors. They thought the tax collectors took extra money from them. But Zacchaeus did not care. He had heard that Jesus was coming to town and he wanted to see him.

So Zacchaeus ran to one spot. But he could not see Jesus. He ran to another spot. But he could not see Jesus there either. There were too many people. And Zacchaeus was a short man. What could he do? Zacchaeus had an idea! He ran a little way down the road and he climbed up into a sycamore tree. He looked down the street and he saw Jesus coming toward him. Zacchaeus was glad. He could see Jesus.

Zacchaeus watched as Jesus walked down the road closer to him. When Jesus got to the sycamore tree, he looked up straight into Zacchaeus' face and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. For today I am going to stay at your house." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down the tree. He was so happy! He welcomed Jesus joyfully!

But many of the people along the road were not as happy. They began to complain to one another. "He's going to stay with a sinful man," they said to one another. Jesus heard them.

Zacchaeus stood right where he was. He knew that he had taken too much money from the people. He looked at Jesus. "Lord," he said, "I will give half of everything that I have to poor people. And if I have taken anything extra from anyone, I will give four times as much back to them."

Jesus said to the people, "Today salvation has come to this house. Zacchaeus is the same as you are. For I, Jesus, have come to save all the people."

Review the Bible Story

Show the teaching picture to the children. Ask them to describe what is happening in the picture. Correct any misinformation the children may have about the story. Assign the children to two or more teams for the question period. Tell them they must discuss the answers as a team before they answer. Ask these questions to the teams in turn. If one team cannot answer, the other team may have a turn.

1. Why were crowds of people following Jesus?

A: They wanted to see him and hear what he was going to tell them.

2. Why could Zacchaeus not see Jesus?

A: He was too short; he could not see over the heads of the crowd.

3. Why did the people not like Zacchaeus?

A: He collected taxes and took more money than he needed to.

4. Why did Jesus stop at the foot of the tree where Zacchaeus was?

A: He saw Zacchaeus and he wanted to talk to him.

5. What did Zacchaeus do when Jesus called him?

A: He climbed down the tree.

6. What did Zacchaeus say to Jesus?

A: That he would give half of his money to the poor and give back four times as much money as he took from the people he cheated.

Use "wondering" statements such as: I wonder what Jesus thought when people began to grumble. I wonder what Jesus ate at Zacchaeus' house. I wonder if Jesus spent the night at Zacchaeus' house.

If the older children made up some questions, use them as well. Make sure they cover all the information in the story.

Application

Ask a teacher to come to the front of the group. Ask him to turn his back to the group and put his hands over his ears. Tell the group not to answer when the teacher calls out a name. Instruct the teacher to turn back to the group and call out a child's name. Tell him if the child does not answer to call another child's name. Tell him to call out four or five names before stopping. Then ask the teacher to tell how he felt when no one answered him. Remind the children that just as they answer when someone on earth calls them, they need to learn to listen for when God tells them something. Ask the children who looked up the Bible references to tell the names of other people in the Bible God called to do something special. Ask the older children to tell what God wanted each Bible person God called to do.

Ask: "How do you know if God is telling you to do something?" (Reading the Bible, listening to Bible stories, and learning about God.) Remind them that the Bible verses they learn and the stories they read all help them know what God wants them to do. Tell them that at any time God may tell them to be kind and love others. Ask the children to name some other things God may be telling them (obey parents, honor parents, help others, be friendly, and tell others about God).

Learn a Memory Verse

Ask the children to form small groups. Give each one a memory-verse puzzle. Guide them to use the verse on the wall to help them solve the puzzles. As the groups solve the puzzles, guide them to say the verse aloud. Ask them to guess which of the Bible people God called answered with the memory verse (Samuel).

Pray (and Sing)

D. Application Activities (20 minutes)

1. Listening to God Mobile

Tell the children they will think of things God may be telling them to do. Guide them to print "Listening to God" and "Church, Home, Playground, School, Store, and Car" on different sides of the box. Lead them to look through the outdated learner guides to find pictures of things that they might do (be helpful, be friendly, be kind). Guide children to sort the pictures according to church, home, school, on the playground, in the car, and at the grocery store. They will glue the pictures on the box in the appropriate spots. Tell the children that they may overlap the pictures. When the box is covered, ask the children to tell about the pictures they selected. Fasten the string to the mobile and hang it in the room. As the children work, talk to them about some of the things God may want to tell them.

2. A.M.A.G. Buttons (Ask Me About God)

Tell the children that one of the things God calls us to do is to tell others about God. Tell them they may make "A.M.A.G." buttons to give them opportunities to tell people about God. They will each print "A.M.A.G." on their buttons and color them in any way they wish. When the buttons are finished, tape a safety pin to the back of each one. Tell them that when someone asks them what "A.M.A.G." means, they will say "Ask Me About God," and then share a fact about God.