

# The Call of Zacchaeus

Focal Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Youth Sunday School Lesson

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## Luke 19:1-10

<sup>1</sup>Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup>He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup>So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

<sup>7</sup>All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

<sup>8</sup>But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

<sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

## Bible Background

Such a familiar story is easy to dismiss. However, there are some subtle points that teens can discern and apply to their lives.

**Setting:** Note that this story of Zacchaeus occurs as Jesus has set his eyes toward Jerusalem and has told the disciples all that will occur there (Luke 18:31-34). Not understanding but willing to follow, the disciples go with him toward Jericho. Outside of the city gates, Jesus meets a blind beggar and heals him. Certainly, word of this travels fast even without cell phones!

vv. 1-2: Jesus is passing through Jericho on his final trip to Jerusalem. Zacchaeus lived there; he was a tax collector or publican.

Rome controlled a vast group of countries they had taken over. Heavy taxes were levied to keep the government ruling. Roman officials would appoint local people to collect these taxes and set an amount. The appointees would then tell the citizens how much to pay... and add more to the total to pad their purses.

Jews despised the taxes and the tax collectors as the money went to support a government they saw as ungodly. And when the tax collectors were some of their own Jewish kin, they felt great hatred for them, even lumping them into a category with thieves and murderers.

Zacchaeus was a “chief tax collector” probably indicating that he was over a district with other tax collectors reporting to him...and giving him a cut of the profits. Needless to say, he was a wealthy man.

vv. 3-4: Obviously Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus and was anxious to see him. A couple of things stood in the way: huge crowds (remember the blind man outside their city gate being healed) and his short stature. Neither of these hindrances stopped him... He ran (unusual for a wealthy man in the Middle East to do) and climbed a tree (surely undignified for his position in the Roman community).

A sycamore-fig or balsam tree in some translations was an evergreen that could grow to a height of 40 feet. The branches tended to grow laterally so it was easy to climb.

vv. 5-6: It appears that Jesus knew Zacchaeus. Had others talked about him? Did some of the crowd point and call his name? Or was this a divine appointment? When Jesus looked up into the tree and called his name, he told Zacchaeus, “I must stay at your house today”—the term “must” indicating a divine necessity or plan.

vv. 7-8: When the crowd began to “mutter,” consider this as complaining. Perhaps there was outright disbelief that one who called God “Father” would also go to dine with such a sinner. Zacchaeus heard these complaints; he knew what he had done wrong. The attention of Jesus seems to have caused him to look at himself. Zacchaeus declared he would give half of all he owned to the poor, and for those he had cheated, he would repay four times the amount.

The Mosaic law was clear: a thief had to restore what he took plus 1/5 (Lev. 6:1-7). If something was stolen that couldn't be restored (for example, a sheep that was eaten or sold), the thief had to repay four times the value (Ex. 22:1). Zacchaeus didn't try to avoid the law—he exceeded it by repaying more than the law required.

vv. 9-10: The response of Jesus, “Today salvation has come to this house,” was not affirmed because Zacchaeus gave money to the poor. Salvation came because Zacchaeus had a change of heart and life. The call of Jesus was answered with a new man in Zacchaeus.

The phrase “this man, too, is a son of Abraham” is for the crowd. Because the Jews had so despised one of their own in the role of tax collector, Jesus is reaffirming Zacchaeus' place in the Jewish community. And Jesus reiterates his mission: “the son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” The response of Zacchaeus stands in sharp contrast to the Rich Young Ruler who would not follow the call of Jesus on his life and went away sorrowful (Luke 18:18ff).

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## Teaching Outline

**Thinking Ahead:** Teens often think God's call is only to become a missionary or a pastor. As a result of this study, teens will see that:

- God calls each of us to follow him through Jesus Christ.
- God calls people for specific experiences like a mission trip or to be in a particular ministry in your area for a short time.
- God calls Bible teachers to teach in your church.
- God calls and uses anyone regardless of their past.
- God's call may come when a person is not expecting it.
- God calls some people into a vocation that is a lifelong commitment to a Christian profession.

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## Early Arrival Exercise

As teens arrive, ask them to write on whiteboard or large sheet of paper every profession they can think of: dirty jobs, big money makers, helping careers, jobs that bring fame, even notorious jobs, etc.

### Step 1

Divide teens into small groups (2-4) and give each team a marker and paper. Ask the teams to come up with a list of actions to complete to become the winner of American Idol. If you have access to YouTube, you can even show some of the tryouts. (Leader note: some entries on the list may be: sing from an early age, go through tryouts, have people vote for you, learn from criticism, etc.) Have teams read their lists aloud.

Explain that not everyone gets to win on American Idol, and even the winners are not always huge musical successes. However, in God's way of doing things, God selects people who sometimes seem unlikely to be the instrument God will use for a particular task. Zacchaeus is that kind of person.

### Step 2

Have a teen read Luke 19:1-10 or share the reading among several youth. After reading, ask the teens if they can give a definition of these words:

- Publican or tax collector
- Jericho
- Pharisees
- Zachariah

After each is attempted, have a teen read the definition on the cards (*Appendix 1*).

### Step 3

Have teens re-read verses 1-4 and tell every characteristic about Zacchaeus that they can find obviously written or subtly implied. Make a list of these. You may want to give a small candy or gum to each student who finds a characteristic.

Read verses 5-6. Ask teens to see if the following sentences are true or false:

A. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for dinner.

A: True

B. Jesus already knew Zacchaeus' name because the crowd told him.

A: See suggestions in Bible Background section.

C. Jesus called Zacchaeus a putrid thief and felon.

A: See verse 9.

D. Salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus because he gave money to the poor.

A: False. He changed his heart and life to follow Jesus is the correct answer.

### Step 4

Let teens choose one of the following ideas to complete:

**Comic Strip Group:** Ask teens to choose a partner. Give teens a strip of paper and ask them to divide it into four equal parts. Fold or cut the paper to resemble a comic strip in the newspaper. Instruct pairs to draw off the events of the encounter of Zacchaeus with Jesus using stick figures.

**Blog Entry Group:** Teens may choose to work in pairs or alone. Write a blog entry of this day in the life of Zacchaeus incorporating the sequence of events as well as feelings you think Zacchaeus may have felt. Have someone prepared to read their entry to the group.

**"How Could God Use That Person?" Group:** Review the stories of unusual people that God has called for specific tasks, such as Joni Earickson Tada, Ken Medema, and David Ring (*see Appendix 2*).

### Step 5

Look at the list of professions written on the wall in the early arrival activity. Ask teens to mark which could be used for self and which could be used for God. Is there a profession that cannot be used to glorify God? Is there a profession to which God would not call a person?

### Step 6

Empty a bag of M&M's into a small bowl. Hold the bowl over the head of a teen and ask them to blindly choose one

M&M. Depending on the color drawn, have the teen answer the corresponding question.

- **Red:** Where are some places you go that God may use to call you to do something special?
- **Yellow:** What do you think Zacchaeus did after Jesus left Jericho?
- **Green:** What prevents teens from hearing God's call?
- **Dark Brown:** What advice would you give to a person who feels called of God?
- **Blue:** What is something that impresses you about the call of Zacchaeus?
- **Orange:** When did God call you to commit your life to God?

### Step 7

**Closing:** Tell your own personal story of when and how God called you. When did God call you to teach youth?

Encourage teens to find a time and place alone to spend some time listening to God and reflecting on the calling of God in their own lives. Close with prayer and encourage teens to have open hearts and ears to hear God's voice of calling and hearts courageous enough to respond.

### Bibliography

**Bible Exposition Commentary.** Warren Wiersbe. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1997.

**Life Application New Testament Commentary.** Barton, Comfort, Osbourne, Taylor, Veerman. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2001.

**The NIV Application Commentary of Luke.** Darrell L. Bock. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996.

# Appendix 1

## Definitions

Cut apart the definitions and distribute.

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### Publican or Tax Collector

Romans selected these people to collect taxes in the various provinces. They, in turn, would hire others to collect for them, and add on extra charges for themselves. Usually Romans got these jobs, but occasionally a Jew would be chosen, making him despised by the other Jews. They became wealthy!

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### Jericho

This may be the oldest city in the world; its name means "moon." Rich soil and a warm climate make this a place known as "city of Palms"...with wonderful trees growing in the desert.

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### Pharisees

A religious/political party comprised of Jews, this group was committed to keeping the Law of the Old Testament. Many were very strict, missing the *reason* for the law and accenting the *letter* of the law.

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### Zachariah

Name means "Son of Righteousness" or sometimes, "Yah (short for Yahweh) remembered." "Zacchaeus" is a derivative of this name.

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## Appendix 2

### “How Could God Use That Person?”

Joni Earickson Tada, Ken Medema, and David Ring are three examples of people who might seem to be unusual people for God to have called. Yet Joni, Ken, and David have each responded to God’s call and have chosen to use their God-given gifts to minister, despite physical disabilities. Links to their biographies are available below. Review or download their stories for the “How Could God Use That Person?” group to use in Step 4 of the lesson.

#### **Joni Earickson Tada**

Joni’s biography is available in the About Us section of the website [www.joniandfriends.com](http://www.joniandfriends.com).

You may also want to read more about Joni’s life at [www.christianlibrary.org.au/cel/homeschool/joni.html](http://www.christianlibrary.org.au/cel/homeschool/joni.html).

#### **Ken Medema**

Ken’s biography is available in the About Us section of the website [www.kenmedema.com](http://www.kenmedema.com).

#### **David Ring**

David’s biography is available in the About David section of the website [www.davidring.org](http://www.davidring.org) or as a PDF document at [www.davidring.org/pdf/dr\\_bio.pdf](http://www.davidring.org/pdf/dr_bio.pdf).

You may also want to read the entry about David in Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Ring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Ring).