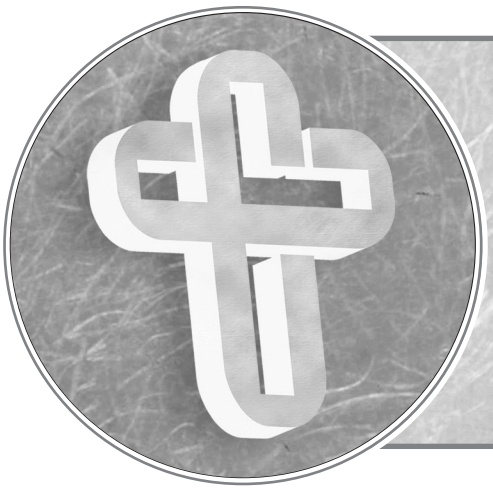


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
SEPTEMBER 13 2025

Jesus and me

Scripture Story: Luke 19:1-10.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 61.
Key Text: Luke 19:8, 9.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Zacchaeus offers a classic case study about transformation and salvation. Clearly, after his encounter with Jesus Zacchaeus was a changed man. He surrendered half of his possessions to the poor and paid back four times the amount to people he had defrauded. His story is a great example of how a Christian is sanctified.

Often we try to grow spiritually by muscling up our willpower and trying to be good. This works about as well as clenching your fists and trying real hard to change the color of your skin. Sweat and strain all you'd like, but in the end you're sure to feel exhausted and defeated.

So what's a better approach to sanctification?

Follow the example of Zacchaeus. His righteousness was a natural response to his encounter with Jesus. By being *with* Jesus, he was changed to be *like* Jesus.

Use this lesson to teach your students about the futility of trying to "act" spiritual. Help them understand that spiritual growth is not about trying or acting; rather, the focus must always be on nurturing an ongoing friendship with Jesus. Challenge them to put their trust in Him. Invite them to take risks and step out on that limb of faith. As they do, they will discover the adventure of kingdom life. And they will experience the miracle of transformation from the inside out.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Be taught that spiritual life is not about trying to be holy; rather, it is all about a relationship with Jesus. *(Know)*
- Be urged to put their trust in Jesus. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to engage in the spiritual practices that nurture a friendship with God. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Law of God, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 19: "The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb.

8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Or use this as an alternate activity:

Pass out a card to each person and instruct them to write a definition of salvation. Following their definition, have them write what is required to receive salvation. Collect the cards and read each one to the class. Have the students try to guess the author of each card. To make it interesting, spice up the stack with a few cards that may have notions of salvation that are not biblical. Let the young people know that some of the cards are from outside the class members and if they believe the card to be "planted" by the teacher they can vote accordingly.

Illustration

Share the following story and the bridge leading into the lesson.

Here is a story[1] that touches on the futility of willpower.

One person bakes a batch of cookies and shares them with friends.

"We ought to stop eating," the friends say as they keep eating.

"We must stop," they resolve, as they eat more.

"We need more willpower," they decide as they grab another cookie.

"What is willpower?" one asks, swallowing another bite.

"Willpower is trying very hard to not do something that you very much want to do."

"Well, let's put the cookies way up high in that tree," says one.

"But we can climb the tree and get them," answers another, taking another bite.

In desperation, the cookies are thrown on the ground: "Here birds, come get the cookies!"

"Now we have no more cookies, but lots of willpower," the friends agree.

"Well," the cookie maker replies, "you can keep all the willpower. I'm going home to bake a cake!"[1]

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Use the following discussion to follow up the story about willpower and cookies:

What "cookies" tempt you? Pornography? Alcohol? Pride? Gossiping? Bullying? Gluttony? Harmful substances? Sexual impurity? Selfishness? Laziness?

We all have our "cookies." These are the bad habits that sabotage our spiritual lives. But no matter how much willpower we can muster up, these "cookies" will not go away.

In seeking a deep life with God, willpower is not the answer. You can try real hard to stop sinning, but it's only a matter of time and you're back to the case of "cookies." You see, the experience of salvation is not about trying real hard to be good. It's all about living in the presence of our God who is good. As we live in His presence, we are then changed into His likeness and the "cookies" no longer hold the same power over us that they once did. A great case study that illustrates this principle is Zacchaeus.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following discussion outline in your own words to process it with them.*

Opening up:

Who brings out in the best in you? Why?

Digging in:

Verse 1: The text tells us that Jesus "was passing through" Jericho. Do you think this was coincidental or a divine appointment? Explain your answer.

Verse 2: Do you think Jesus knew the "dirt" on Zacchaeus (i.e., that he was a deceitful tax collector)?

Verse 3: In your opinion, what was it about Jesus that attracted Zacchaeus to go to such lengths to see Him?

Verse 4: What insights into the character and personality of Zacchaeus do we get from this part of the story where he climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of Christ?

Verse 5: What do you make of the emphatic statement of Jesus when He said, "I *must* stay at your house"?

Verse 6: How can we welcome Jesus "gladly" in our lives today?

Verse 7: Why do you suppose the people responded differently to Jesus' acceptance of Zacchaeus than they did to His healing of the blind man in Luke 18:43?

Verse 8: Based on this verse alone, what word do you think best describes the personality of Zacchaeus? (A) Extremist; (B) Impetuous; (C) Generous; (D) Sympathetic.

Verse 9: What does Jesus mean by the word "salvation"?

Verse 10: Compare this verse with the three parables in Luke 15.

Applying it:

Suppose you were teaching this lesson to a group of children. What one specific thing would you encourage the kids to do this week in order to put this story into action?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

- **The Setting:** The setting for this story is Jericho. Listen to William Barclay's description of this city: "Jericho was a very wealthy and a very important town. It lay in the Jordan valley and commanded both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Its gardens of roses were known far and wide. Men called it 'the City of Palms.' Josephus called it 'a divine region,' 'the fattest in Palestine.' The Romans carried its dates and balsam to worldwide trade and fame.

  "All this combined to make Jericho one of the greatest taxation centers in Palestine."[2]
- **The Main Character:** Today, Zacchaeus might be thought of as the tax commissioner. As such, he would have been very powerful in his day. Moreover, he controlled the passage at the Jordan River, which was the only place to cross during certain seasons of the year. Thus, he could charge travelers exorbitant tolls to pass through. By doing this he became very rich. Luke often mentions tax collectors such as Zacchaeus (see Luke 3:12; 5:27; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10), and in each case they are postured in a positive light—consistent with the way Jesus unconditionally loved and accepted these social outcasts.
- **The Central Theme:** The real story here in Luke 19 is one of transformation. It reminds us that it is possible to be changed into the character of Christ. Zacchaeus demonstrated that he had been transformed from the inside out. He pronounced that he would give half his possessions to the

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Making the Story Come Alive

Regardless of the age of the students, one of the most effective methods of teaching truth is through stories. It is no surprise, then, that Jesus—arguably the greatest teacher in history—shared transcendent truths through stories.

This lesson is simply a story. To share this or any story consider these tips:

- **Stimulate the senses** so the listeners can feel, smell, touch, hear, and see vivid pictures.
- **Describe the characters and settings** to help them sympathize with the character's feelings.
- **Research the history and cultural meanings**.
- **Live with your story** until the characters and setting become as real to you as people and places you know.
- **See it!** Visualize the sounds, tastes, scents, and colors in the story. If you don't see it clearly in your imagination, the students won't see it either.

poor. Furthermore, he would use the other half of his funds to make restitution for the money he gained by gouging taxpayers.

In setting things right Zacchaeus went beyond his legal obligation. Only if the robbery was a violent and calculated act would the thief need to pay four times the amount stolen (see Exodus 22:1). In the case of an ordinary robbery and the original goods could not be returned, then double the value had to be repaid (see Exodus 22:4). If voluntary confession and restitution was offered, then only the original value plus one fifth of the goods had to be repaid (see Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:7). Zacchaeus decided to do far above and beyond the demands of the law. He was a changed man.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Interview someone in your church that your students may not know very well. Have this person share their conversion story. Ask them to describe what life was like before they met Jesus, and how things changed after they accepted Christ as their personal Savior. While the details and the setting will obviously be different, chances are good that the story will be very similar to the story of Zacchaeus.

Summary

Share the following story in your own words:

The story of Zacchaeus illustrates the power of God to instantly change a person. For many, however, the change is stretched over the course of a lifetime. Young people need to know that in either case, regardless of the timing, the transformation is genuine.

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[1] Adapted from Arnold Lobel, *Frog and Toad Together* (Columbus, Ohio: Newfield Publications, 1972), pp. 30-41.

[2] William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 234.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapter 61.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
SEPTEMBER132025

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Luke 19:1-10.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 61.

Jesus and me



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keytext

"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.'

"Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house.'"

(Luke 19:8, 9, NIV)

flashlight

"It is when Christ is received as a personal Saviour that salvation comes to the soul. Zacchaeus had received Jesus, not merely as a passing guest in his home, but as One to abide in the soul temple. The scribes and Pharisees accused him as a sinner, they murmured against Christ for becoming his guest, but the Lord recognized him as a son of Abraham. For 'they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.' Galatians 3:7" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 556).

what do you think?

Make a check mark by the things below that you believe are essential for a person to have salvation.

____ attending church every Sabbath
____ confessing sins
____ getting baptized
____ repenting of sins
____ treating others as you wish to be treated
____ reading the Bible and praying every day
____ accepting Christ as your personal Savior
____ participating in Communion
____ volunteering to help "the least of these"
____ being a part of a Christian family
____ witnessing to others about Jesus
____ dressing like a Christian
____ living without sin
____ being born again
____ giving money to the church
____ believing in Jesus

did you know?

In Jesus' day the Jews hated tax collectors for the following reasons:

1. Tax collectors overcharged and could keep the extra money. This was how they got paid. Like most tax collectors in his day, Zacchaeus got very rich by ripping off his own people.

2. Taxes were so high that some people were forced to sell their children into slavery just to pay their taxes.

3. Tax collectors worked for the Romans; thus, their money paid for Roman soldiers and Roman governors. Most Jews hated the Romans who occupied their land, and did not appreciate paying taxes to them. They especially despised Jewish tax collectors such as Zacchaeus, who were Jews and who had sold out to the Romans for personal profit.

INTO THE STORY

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

"When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

"All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

"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.'

"Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'"

(Luke 19:1-10, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Read verses 1-4. Notice all the details that enrich the setting for this story. For example, note how the text tells us that Zacchaeus was a *short* man; he climbed a *sycamore-fig* tree, etc. List other details that strike you:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Read verses 5, 6. When Jesus arrived in Jericho, He looked up and saw Zacchaeus. But He saw much more than a man. As Duncan Buchanan puts it, He saw "a human being, unloved, unloving, bruised and hurt by the circumstances of life, unsuited to his wealth, . . . unacceptable to those around him, unacceptable to himself."

Read verse 7. Notice the reputation of Zacchaeus as a known "sinner." How do you feel when you sin? After the initial buzz of the excitement wears off and you're alone in your guilt and shame, how do you really feel? Zacchaeus was a known "sinner." In other words, not only did he have to wrestle privately with his faults, but also publicly he was cursed with a reputation of corruption. Assuming that sin strips a person of a healthy sense of self-esteem, what does this suggest about Zacchaeus's self-esteem?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Read verse 8. Reflect on this statement: Authentic spiritual transformation occurs only by being in the presence of Christ.

Read verses 9, 10. What insight does this give us into the character of God?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" **(2 Corinthians 7:1, NIV).**

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin" **(Psalm 32:5, NIV).**

"But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself" **(Psalm 49:15, NIV).**

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" **(1 John 1:9, NIV).**

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" **(Matthew 9:36, NIV).**

further insight

"The very first response of Zacchaeus to the love of Christ was in manifesting compassion toward the poor and suffering."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 555

"Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 555

Sabbath

Read Psalm 32:5.

Reflect on this statement: "As the floor is swept every day, so is the soul cleansed every day by confession."† Would you agree or disagree? Explain.

_____

_____

Sunday

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Think about the radical life transformation of Zacchaeus. He was a different man by simply being in the presence of Jesus. Think of the process of transformation like this: if you want to smell like a caribou (then you need counseling, but besides that), there's only one way to do it—you need to get up next to a caribou.

Similarly, if you want to be transformed into the character of Christ, or as the apostle Paul puts it, have the "aroma of Christ" (see 2 Corinthians 2:15, NIV), then there's only one way to do it: get up next to Christ. You can try to be good and emit the fragrance of righteousness—burn your secular CDs, eat tree bark and tofu, never miss church—but your best efforts will still stink like a soiled sock. Remember Isaiah's words? "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6, NIV).

If you want to radiate the aroma of Jesus and enjoy victory over sin, you must engage in the activity that will produce that smell. For aroma is the inevitable result of activity. So what activities put you into the presence of Christ so that you can be transformed into His likeness?

_____

_____

Monday

Read Luke 19:8, 9.

Consider the *Key Text* in the context of Ellen White's commentary:

"Zacchaeus had been overwhelmed, amazed, and silenced at the love and condescension of Christ in stooping to him, so unworthy. Now love and loyalty to his new-found Master unseal his lips. He will make public his confession and his repentance.

"In the presence of the multitude, 'Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

"'And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.'

"When the rich young ruler had turned away from Jesus, the disciples had marveled at their Master's saying, 'How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!' They had exclaimed one to another, 'Who then can be saved?' Now they had a demonstration of the truth of Christ's words, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.' Mark 10:24, 26; Luke 18:27. They saw how, through the grace of God, a rich man could enter into the kingdom" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 554, 555).

Tuesday

Read John 14:20.

Read the *Flashlight* section and ask yourself these questions:

- Is Jesus a "passing guest" or a long-term tenant in the residence of my "soul temple"?

_____

_____

- How is what others think of me different from how God thinks of me? Which opinion (the opinion of others or the opinion of God) is more important to me? Why?

_____

_____

- What would it mean for me to be considered a part of "they which are of faith"?

_____

_____

Wednesday

Read some additional *Punch Lines* (in parentheses) and rate yourself on each item with a percentage (0 percent being "None," 100 percent being "Yup, that's me all the time!").

____ I seek God first in everything I do. (Matthew 6:33)
____ Following Christ is my highest desire. (Matthew 16:24)
____ I love the Lord with all my being. (Matthew 22:37)
____ I love my neighbor as myself. (Matthew 22:39)
____ I am a living sacrifice to God. (Romans 12:1, 2)

Thursday

Read Psalm 1:2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

The story of Zacchaeus reminds us that the best way (and really, the *only* way) to overcome such sins as greed, dishonesty, and so on is to hang out with Jesus. What would hanging out with Jesus look like in my life? How can I continually live in the presence of Jesus?

Friday

Read Psalm 139:23, 24.

In what ways does my story intersect with the story of Zacchaeus?

_____

_____

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 61.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.