ZACCHAEUS



MEMORY VERSE

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

WORD OF THE WEEK—POTENTIAL: Potential means possible but not yet happened; the possibility, chance, or promise that something will develop and become real. When we use the word "potential" to describe people, we are talking about who they can become. Often we speak about someone "showing potential," meaning we can see little signs that something good could develop in a person in the future.

This week's lesson is based on Luke 19:1-10; *The Desire of Ages,* pp. 552-556; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary,* vol. 5, pp. 851-853. **Extra Reading:** *The Bible Story,* vol. 8, pp. 49-52.



SUNDAY

Searching for Happiness

Money, money, *lots* of money . . . Oh, how Zacchaeus enjoyed making money! What work did he do to make money? Read Luke 19:2.

Zacchaeus was a short Jewish man, but his job made him feel big and important. He was in charge of all the tax collectors in the busy city of Jericho. Tax collectors, sometimes called publicans, were to collect a certain amount of money from everyone. Then they were to pass it on to the Roman government. If they could make people pay extra, they were allowed to keep it.

That's exactly what Zacchaeus did. He saw everyone who came through his tax booth as a potential way to make extra cash. Some coins for the Romans, some for his pocket; some for the Romans, some for his pocket. Pretty soon he was a very rich man.

But he was not happy. Even though Zacchaeus was a Jew, his own people hated him. They knew he was a thief, a cheat, and a liar. They even stopped him from attending the synagogue when he tried to worship there. Zacchaeus had learned the hard way that stealing and cheating don't help you make friends. He was a lonely and unhappy man.

King Solomon, a very wealthy king, also learned that chasing after money instead of seeking God does not bring joy or contentment. He wrote, "The person who loves money will never have all the money he wants. The person who loves wealth will not be satisfied when he gets it. This is also useless" (Ecclesiastes 5:10, ICB).

Our wise and loving God knows that we can easily be tricked into thinking that having lots of money will make us happy. He knows we will be much happier when we treasure God instead. He promises to meet our needs too. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Do: Working adults in most countries pay taxes to the government. Find out what taxes are used for where you live.

Pray: With your Bible open at Matthew 6:19-21, ask God to help you treasure His ways and a future in heaven with Him.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Read* ***Matthew 6:19-21****. How well did Zacchaeus put this advice into practice?*
- *Where would you like your treasure to be?*



MONDAY

Hope

The people smiled and chatted excitedly in the busy market of Jericho. Jesus. His name was on everyone's lips! The people swapped stories as they bought their oil and olives. They listened as news came from the many traders and travelers who passed through their city. And they passed on the stories with wide eyes and big smiles as they lined up to pay their taxes to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus listened carefully as the coins clinked together in his money box. Hope began to stir in his heart. He overheard amazing stories about how Jesus gave blind people their sight and healed people who lived with disabilities. He heard that Jesus spoke beautiful things about God's kingdom, that He treated poor people with kindness, and that He even had a tax collector as one of His disciples! When Zacchaeus heard that startling piece of news, he began to wonder if Jesus might see potential for good in him too. He longed for a better life.

John the Baptist's words had been repeated up and down the country: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). What else may Zacchaeus have heard and recalled? *Read Luke 3:12, 13.*

The Holy Spirit was at work in Zacchaeus. His heart softened, and he began to believe that even he could repent and change his ways.

God always sees potential for change in people's hearts. He helps them see that potential for themselves, even if other people around them don't believe their lives could ever change for the better. "For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). The Holy Spirit may be working in the hearts of those around us, even though we may not see it at the time.

Mission Challenge: With your family present, ask this question to someone older in your community: "What is a special memory you have of when you were my age?" Actively listen to the good things that have happened in their lives. Then share something good that God has done for you.

Do: If you know the song "Change My Heart, O God," sing it now. You could also sing your memory verse and teach it to your family.

Pray: Thank God for the way the Holy Spirit can change people's hearts and make good things happen in their lives.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *What made Zacchaeus believe that his life could change?*
- *Have you seen or heard about how God has changed the life of someone you know for the better?*

TUESDAY

Battling the Crowds

Excited whispers swept through the busy market of Jericho. Jesus was in town! Zacchaeus gasped to hear the news. Jesus, in his own town! He hurried from his tax booth and joined the endless stream of people that surged like a wave toward Jesus.

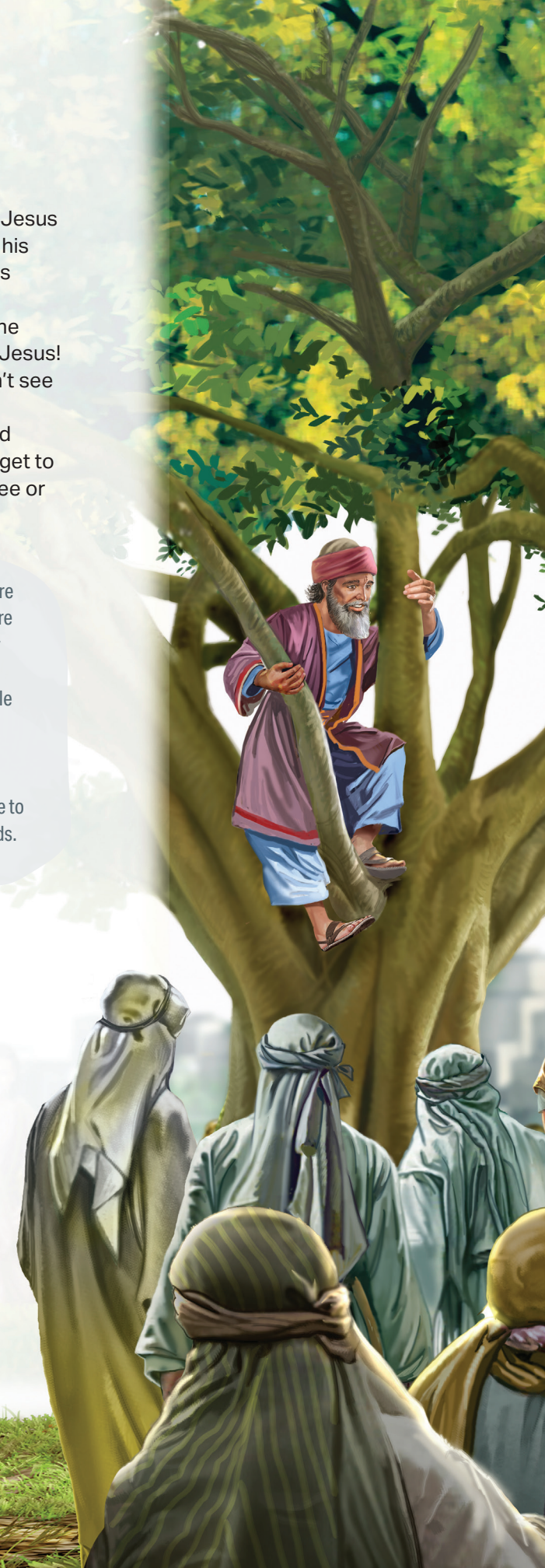
Elbows knocked elbows. Sandals stepped on toes. Noisily the people pushed and shoved forward. Everyone wanted to see Jesus! Zacchaeus moved with the crowd. The people of Jericho didn't see potential in Zacchaeus, but he hoped that Jesus would.

Shorter than most men, Zacchaeus stood on tiptoe and tried desperately to see above the wall of jostling people. He must get to Jesus! But no matter how hard he tried, Zacchaeus couldn't see or squeeze his way through the crowd.

In desperation Zacchaeus broke free from the crowd and ran up ahead. Here, towering higher than any of the men of Jericho, stood a great tree. Quick as a flash he scrambled up the sycamore tree and out onto a wide-spreading branch that overhung the street. Perched there, he eagerly scanned the crowds for a glimpse of Jesus, the one he longed to see. The *only* one he longed to see.

Our loving God works in our hearts to help us seek Jesus first, as Zacchaeus did. When we seek Jesus, we will look for ways to be close to Him.

Do: As a family, measure one another and compare your heights. Have taller members of your family block you from being able to get out a door. Think about how frustrating it must have been for Zacchaeus not to be able to see or get past the crowds.



Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Read **Matthew 6:33** again. How well did Zacchaeus follow the teaching in this verse?*
- *What would it look like for you to seek Jesus first?*
- *What sort of things might be "added to you" (Matthew 6:33) when you seek Jesus first, as Zacchaeus did?*

Pray: Ask Jesus to help you seek Him first, at the beginning of each day.

WEDNESDAY

SURPRISE!

DO: Zacchaeus wasn't expecting Jesus to invite Himself for dinner. Who could your family invite for dinner—someone who wouldn't be expecting an invitation? Plan to share a meal with them.

Perched up high, Zacchaeus watched the noisy crowd as it moved closer and closer toward the sycamore tree, his eyes fixed on Jesus.

Suddenly Jesus stopped. Elbows and shoulders bumped and knocked as the crowd in front and behind Him was forced to suddenly stop too.

Quietly Jesus looked up. He had heard the silent longing in Zacchaeus' heart to meet Him, just as if Zacchaeus had shouted it loudly above the noise of the crowd. Jesus would not walk past him. He looked straight into the eyes of the tax collector with love and understanding.

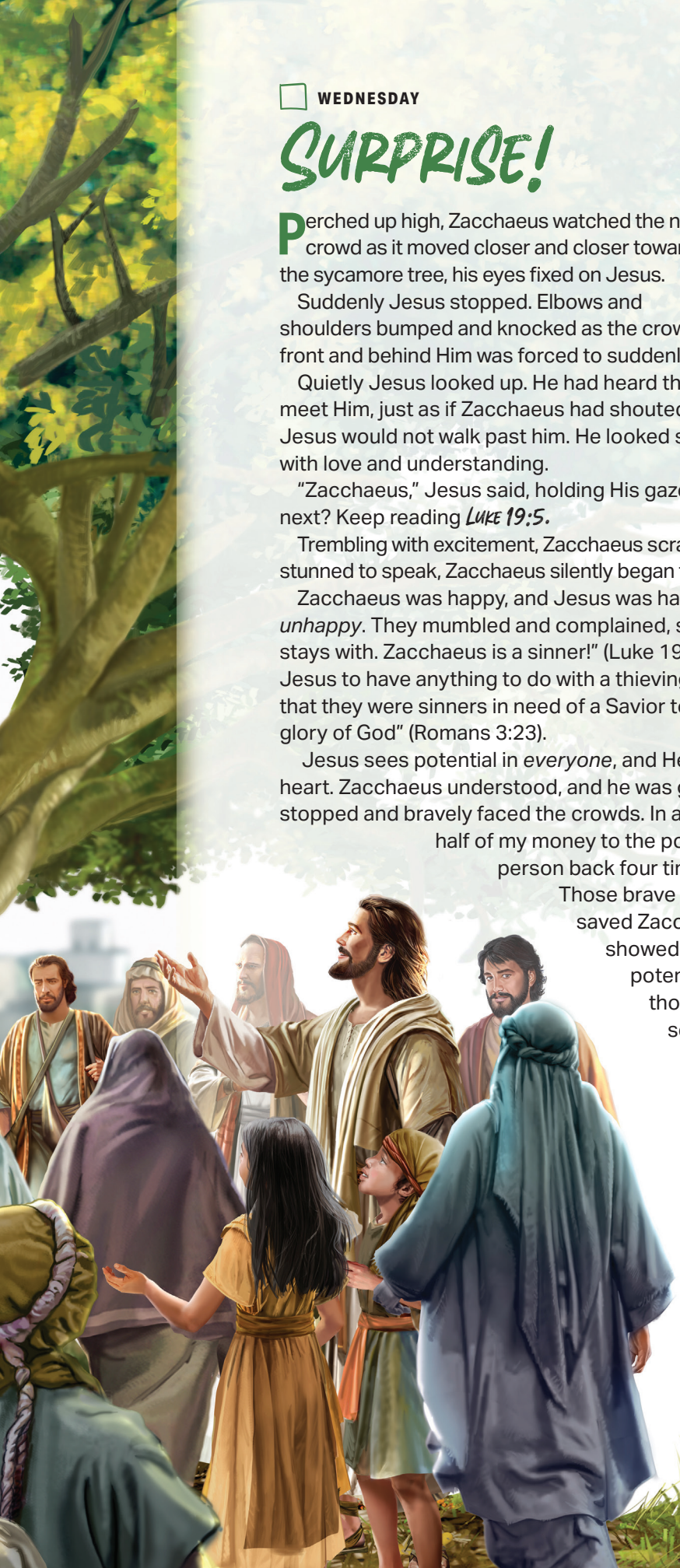
"Zacchaeus," Jesus said, holding His gaze. He knew his name! What did Jesus say next? Keep reading **Luke 19:5.**

Trembling with excitement, Zacchaeus scrambled down the tree. The crowd parted. Too stunned to speak, Zacchaeus silently began to lead Jesus toward his home.

Zacchaeus was happy, and Jesus was happy. But some in the crowd were very *unhappy*. They mumbled and complained, saying, "Look at the kind of man Jesus stays with. Zacchaeus is a sinner!" (Luke 19:7, ICB). They didn't think it was right for Jesus to have anything to do with a thieving man like Zacchaeus. They didn't realize that they were sinners in need of a Savior too. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Jesus sees potential in *everyone*, and He had seen good things in Zacchaeus' heart. Zacchaeus understood, and he was grateful—so grateful, in fact, that he stopped and bravely faced the crowds. In a clear voice he said to Jesus, "I will give half of my money to the poor. If I have cheated anyone, I will pay that person back four times more!" (Luke 19:8, ICB).

Those brave words showed the crowd that Jesus had saved Zacchaeus and changed his heart. They also showed that Jesus had been right when He saw potential for good in the tax collector. Even though we are *all* sinners, God loves us. He sees potential in *everyone*.



THINK . . . THEN TALK ABOUT IT

- *Why do you think Jesus said He would go to Zacchaeus' house?*
- *What might He have hoped the crowd would learn from this?*

PRAY: Thank God for changing your heart.



THURSDAY

Salvation

Jesus' smile was broad and bright. He had just heard Zacchaeus say that he would give half his money to the poor, as well as make things right with all the people he'd cheated. Jesus knew that Zacchaeus meant every word, and that he would truly obey the Bible-scroll verses: "Blessed is he who considers the poor" (Psalm 41:1) and "You must not cheat each other" (Leviticus 25:17, ICB). Jesus was happy to see that Zacchaeus would now let God help him become a giving, kind man who would live up to his potential.

Then in front of the whole crowd Jesus smiled and said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). Jesus was letting the priests and rabbis in the crowd know that Zacchaeus was one of Abraham's descendants too—they shouldn't think they were better than Zacchaeus! What else did Jesus say? *Read Luke 19:10.*

Jesus had come to save sinners! The rabbis, priests, and rulers were sinners, just like Zacchaeus. But Zacchaeus had listened to the Holy Spirit telling Him to change. He had been sorry and had done everything He could to meet and know Jesus. Jesus now said he was saved; he was one of God's precious children.

Zacchaeus and his family had been shut out of the synagogue because the rabbis really didn't like them. So Jesus went to their house to show them how much they were loved and accepted by Him. He taught them about God's kingdom of peace, and their hearts began to heal.

Zacchaeus was the happiest man in Jericho that day, for Jesus had visited him, loved him, and welcomed him into the family of God. The lost sinner was saved!

Jesus longs to save you too. He wants to come into your heart and stay with you, just as He wanted to go to the home of Zacchaeus. His love and acceptance are for you and for *everyone*, for God has designed us all with the potential to love as He loves.

Do: Create a poster for your memory verse using big block lettering. Put the word SAVE in capitals.

Parent Faith Talk: Encourage your children by sharing with them the potential for good you see in them.

Pray: Thank God for loving and accepting you.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *How do you know that Zacchaeus was truly sorry for his thieving ways?*
- *How would you feel if Jesus came to visit at your house?*

FRIDAY

With Jesus, All Things Are Possible!

When Jesus stopped for Zacchaeus, the thief who was up in the tree, He made it known that He loves all people and sees their potential. He knows that we are all lost sinners without Him. On that day Jesus preached the best news the world had, and still has, ever heard! "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Zacchaeus owned up to his sins and let God start to change him. There were many in the crowd who didn't think their own pride, greed, ambition, mean talking, gossiping, or selfishness was a problem. They didn't know they were lost.

The Bible teaches us that everything that is more important than God is a sin (Exodus 20:3). One day a very rich man walked sadly away from Jesus. He had decided not to follow the Savior because he didn't want to give up his riches. As He walked away, what did Jesus ask His disciples? *Read Mark 10:23.*

The disciples wondered, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). Jesus replied, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

With God all things are possible for you too! You can't save yourself, no matter how kind or giving you try to be. You need Jesus. With the love of Jesus working in your heart, you will want to please and obey God with your words and actions, just as Zacchaeus did. You can count on Him to help you. Others will be truly blessed when they see you living up to the potential God sees in you.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *What might you have said to try to encourage the rich man who walked away from Jesus?*
- *Read **1 Timothy 4:12**. What does this tell you about your potential as a young person?*

Friday Night

Share and Praise

- Teach your family your memory verse song. Then sing it together.
- Organize your family to act out the Zacchaeus story.
- Listen to or sing the hymn "Jesus Saves" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 340).

Family Journal

- One thing I've learned about God's love in the Zacchaeus story is that . . .
- What does this story tell you about the potential God sees in each person?
- How can you help support and foster the potential in other people?

Pray

Have your family hold hands in a circle and pray that God will continue to help each person reach their potential.





SABBATH

The Backward-Bathing Skunk

The man on the riverbank sat as still as he could. A keen nature lover, he was prepared to sit and wait for a long time to catch a glimpse of a bird or animal in its natural habitat.

Finally a skunk ambled out of the woods and toward the river. As the animal walked along, it began to pick up bits of dry grass with its mouth, holding them tightly in its jaws. When the skunk had a mouthful that looked like a large mustache, it turned away from the water and walked slowly backward until its back feet and tail were in the water.

What a funny sight: a mustached skunk, having a backward dip!

Slowly, gradually, the skunk backed farther and farther into the water, until the bottom half of its body was under water. Again he waited.

The man's curiosity was nearly killing him—what was that skunk up to? Gradually the skunk kept backing its body into the river. Finally, only its snout and the dry grass could be seen poking up out of the water.

After a long pause the skunk let go of the bunch of grass, walked out of the water, up the riverbank, and off into the woods.

Running quickly to the water's edge, the man picked up the grass. "Augh!" He immediately threw it back down. It was crawling with fleas!

With a laugh of delight, the man worked out the mystery of the backward-bathing skunk. The skunk had put up with the fleas—those nasty little biters—for as long as it could, then it had gone down to the river. The fleas had slowly crawled onto the leaves as the skunk got wetter and wetter. Washed clean, the skunk came up out of the water a happy critter.

Just as the skunk was tired of having fleas, Zacchaeus was tired of his sinful life. And just as the skunk went to the river, Zacchaeus went to Jesus so that he could get cleaned up. We can go to Jesus to get cleaned up too. He will help us get rid of the sins and guilt we are tired of carrying around.

We need to keep on going to Jesus to get cleaned up, just as the skunk would need to go back to the river for a flea bath one day. The good news is that Jesus loves to clean us up! He always will.

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