

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 19:1-10

This passage of Scripture is unique to Luke. None of the other gospel writers mention this interesting little man named Zacchaeus.

Q. Describe a time when you were (or felt) left out.

Q. Describe a time when you were (of felt) unwanted, and/or disliked.

It is important to see the connection of this passage to Luke 18:26-27 (the incident with the rich, young ruler) where Jesus was asked (after stating how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God) *“Who then can be saved?”* To which Jesus replied, *“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”* Luke, the masterful writer, by including this little story of Zacchaeus wanted his readers to harken back to that previous incident.

From the outset we’re told two important details about Zacchaeus: he was a (chief) tax-collector and he was wealthy. So, in other words, he was hated, despised, loathed...and any other synonymous words you can come up with that mean REALLY NOT LIKED. As a tax-collector Zacchaeus was employed by the hated Romans, thus considered a traitor to his people. The role of a tax-collector also afforded with it the opportunity/temptation of skimming off the top, or charging a little extra and pocketing it. The fact that Zacchaeus was wealthy demonstrated that he likely participated in this practice, and being a “chief” tax-collector probably paid decently as well.

We know that Zacchaeus was rich, and in an official role/capacity, so we can see a parallel between him and the rich, young, ruler from chapter 18. The rich, young, ruler, it is safe to assume, was probably more liked and respected than Zacchaeus. And while it is never mentioned, it’s probably also safe to assume that though Zacchaeus had a lot of money, he was probably very lonely.

Another interesting detail about Zacchaeus was that he was short. So, in a crowd, he was at a great disadvantage. But apparently, he was good at climbing trees. (Not that one needs to be good at climbing trees to climb a sycamore-fig tree...they are great/easy climbing trees—I recommend you google an image of a sycamore-fig tree.)

Q. Describe a time when your physical characteristics/attributes were a limitation to you.

This passage with Zacchaeus should also draw our minds back to chapter 15. The same “muttering” is in 15:2 and 19:7...these are the only 2 times throughout the NT that this word is used. Literally, this word means “complaining throughout a crowd”. So, it’s more than simply personal complaining/grumbling...it’s a murmuring that spreads contagiously through a crowd of people.

This draws to mind the classic essay by Soren Kierkegaard called "The Crowd is Untruth". At the risk of over-simplifying his argument: the majority is rarely right; the importance of the individual gets drowned out, if not sacrificed, to the crowd; the power of the crowd vs. the power of truth. And the basis for Kierkegaard's thought was his observations of how often the crowd was against Jesus, but Jesus was the truth, and thus right. The part of this passage that Kierkegaard would likely notice, if he were doing an "inductive Bible study" of this passage (see last's week's discussion guide) is verse 7, "All the people saw this and began to mutter..." He would take note of the crowd, and the sway the crowd usually has toward conformity. Jesus, as we know, was no conformist, particularly for the sake of the individual. Think of all the individuals we have encountered through our journey in Luke whose lives were touched/blessed by Jesus.

In chapter 15 Jesus told stories/parables about His priority to call/reach "sinners". Here in the opening of chapter 19, this is an actual interaction. Jesus didn't just espouse some high and lofty principles of seeking and loving the lost, He actually did it on a real, individual, personal basis. (That probably doesn't shock any of us...we expect that of Jesus, right? But Luke wanted to make sure his original reader(s) understood this.)

- Q. What is something you've complained or muttered about recently? Or, if you prefer to be less self-incriminating, what complaining or muttering have you heard recently?**
- Q. Describe a time when you conformed to the crowd/group. Describe a time when you went against the grain/flow of the crowd.**
- Q. Off the top of your head, list off all the individuals who have been touched/blessed by Jesus that we've seen in Luke so far.**

Verses 8-10 is where we really want to notice the contrast between Zacchaeus and the rich, young, ruler. Both men stood face-to-face with eternal life personified. Both men had a similar barrier (we could even say "idol"). One couldn't let go of the life he had in order to embrace the life that was offered to him. The other willingly let go of the old to embrace the new. For the rich, young, ruler, his wealth and position meant more to him than Jesus. For Zacchaeus, Jesus was worth more than his money and what came with it. One found freedom and eternal life (which may best be described as the "with-God life"), while the other literally walked away from God and stayed in his unseen bondage.

- Q. How have you experienced freedom in and through Christ? What sort of trust does that require you to have?**

And notice what Jesus said, "*Today, salvation has come to this house...*" Q.) Who can be saved? (15:26) A.) People who respond like Zacchaeus. He was so overwhelmed by the acceptance and presence of Jesus, that it overflowed in generous (likely sacrificial) repentance.

Perhaps over the course of our study of Luke you've noticed the slide that we've been using every week for this series. Luke 19:10 is the theme verse for this series, *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Zacchaeus was written off, shunned, and scorned by "the crowd". And let's face it, it's easier for us to find compassion in our hearts for the leper (Ch. 5) or the woman with the flow of blood (Ch. 8) or the blind beggar from last week's passage, than with a rich tax-collector. But the one thing they all have in common with Zacchaeus was that they were all marginalized people. While their specific issues differed, their common need was for connection and belonging, for love and acceptance. Through Jesus and His kingdom, they all had that need met and were welcomed in. The rich, young, ruler, by contrast, didn't seem to have the same "felt need". He likely, in no way, felt ostracized by the society, culture, "crowd". In fact, it would appear that it was his "fitting in", his comfortable and respectable place in society, that turned out to be his barrier to the kingdom. It is truly hard to save someone who does not know they are in need of being rescued.

- Q. In a group context do you usually feel like you fit it? Are you comfortable if you don't fit in? Do you try to "get in with the right people"? Do you try to find those who seem uncomfortable and connect with them?**
- Q. Who, in our modern context, could we liken to Zacchaeus (despised, unwanted, resented, etc.)? How would you respond if such a person came to Riverside some Sunday morning? (Befriend them, or hope they never come back?)**

Outside of Jesus inviting Himself over for dinner to Zacchaeus' house, Luke doesn't mention any other dialogue between Jesus and Zacchaeus. While, surely, they talked about something, it would appear that Luke wanted his readers to grasp the idea that Jesus' welcoming (and somewhat defending) presence made the profound impact on Zacchaeus' life that provoked the response we see in Zacchaeus in verse 8. We often think that it's the words we share with people that are impactful to them (and that's certainly the case sometimes), but we tend to underestimate the power of a warm, welcoming presence with people. People want to know that others want to spend time with them.

- Q. How have you been impacted by someone simply being willing to spend time with you? Who might God be calling you to spend time with?**
- Q. Where, or among whom, do you feel the greatest sense of belonging? Where, or among whom, do you feel really out of place? What makes the difference between the two?**