

Transforming Grace – Zacchaeus



Luke 19:1-10



Today's Bassline explores the family story of Zacchaeus. Known for his small stature, Zacchaeus was also wealthy, corrupt, and despised by his neighbours. Yet Jesus saw him, called him by name and chose to stay at his house. This was a radical act of grace that led to real change. Together we'll discover how Jesus welcomed an outsider into God's family and how his transforming grace can reach anyone, including us. We'll consider how we can extend that same welcome to others.

You will need:

- Flip chart and pens
- Chair
- Paper and pens



Beat

Ask:

- Which celebrity would you most like to meet?
- To what length would you go to meet them?

Leader's notes:

To start off today's Bassline, the young people will need to guess if the following fan stories are true or false. The 'true' questions are based on WatchMojo.com Top 20 Craziest Celebrity Fan Stories.

Quiz

1. A man was arrested after trying to swim over a mile to Taylor Swift's Rhode Island home.
True

2. At a concert in Los Angeles, someone put a baby on stage for the K-pop group Nmixu. **True**
3. A fan mailed Harry Styles a giant frozen fish to get his attention. **False**
4. Justin Bieber had to escape fans in speedboats who chased him across a harbour in Norway. **True**
5. Dolly Parton once came home to find a baby named Jolene left at her gate. **True**
6. A superfan built a treehouse outside Justin Timberlake's house and lived there for a week. **False**
7. A fan created a \$50,000 robot that looked like Scarlett Johansson. **True**
8. Shawn Mendes received a box of live frogs from an over-excited fan. **False**

Say:

We've seen how far people will go to get close to someone they admire. Today's Bassline centres around a man who went to surprising lengths to meet Jesus.

 Bridge

Ask:

- Why do you think people sometimes go to such extreme lengths to meet celebrities, even risking danger or doing something unusual?
- What do you think they're really looking for by getting that close? Attention, belonging, meaning, excitement?

 Amplify

Say:

The story of Zacchaeus is a firm favourite for Sunday schools across the globe. It is rarely used as a focus for adult teaching, even though it carries an important message about the transforming grace of Jesus. Let's see how Zacchaeus is presented in this children's animation.

Leader's notes:

Ask the young people to write down the key points of the story and note how Zacchaeus is presented in this version. When the clip is finished, collate the group's ideas and list them on a flip chart. You will return to these later in the Sound Check section.

- Tax collectors were hated because many people thought they were liars and cheaters.
- Zacchaeus looked sad as a passerby booed at him.

- He was presented as a cheerful, quirky character excited to see Jesus.
- The crowd's animosity was consistent throughout the clip.
- Jesus invited Zacchaeus down from the tree and welcomed him.
- The people criticised Jesus for being with a sinner.
- Zacchaeus promised to repay those he had taken money from.

Watch:

Zacchaeus – Saddleback Kids (1:53)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BjtbJFz2ug>

Ask:

From the clip, what is your overall impression of the way that Zacchaeus is treated?

Say:

This clip makes Zacchaeus look like a victim of the crowd's unkindness. He is short and unable to see Jesus, he is left out, and he needs a friend. There's even a suggestion that he is misunderstood in the line, 'Tax collectors were hated because many people thought they were liars and cheaters.' While it's true that people didn't like Zacchaeus, there is so much more to this story.

Read:

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

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

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

⁸ 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.'

⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

— (Luke 19:1-10)

Ask:

What key information do we discover in Luke 19:1-2 that wasn't included in the children's clip?

Say:

The children's clip told us that Zacchaeus was very wealthy and collected taxes. However, Luke tells us he was a chief tax collector, a key player in a corrupt tax system.

In Zacchaeus's world, paying taxes was a heavy burden. Jewish people had to pay not only their Temple tax but also Roman taxes. Rome often used a system called 'tax farming'; wealthy men, like Zacchaeus, would pay Rome a large sum up front and then make their profit by overcharging their neighbours. On top of this, customs and tolls were collected at every gate and border, making trade and travel painfully expensive. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus became rich by profiting from this system of corruption, skimming off both his own collections and the work of those under him. To ordinary people he wasn't just disliked; he was despised, seen as a traitor working for the enemy and treated as ritually unclean.

Discuss:

- How does knowing this change the way we see Zacchaeus, compared with the children's version of the story?
- What would the modern-day equivalent of a chief tax collector be?
- Why do you think people feel such anger towards those who exploit others for wealth?
- Having heard about his occupation and character, why do you think Zacchaeus was so keen to see Jesus?
- What did Zacchaeus do to see Jesus?

Say:

Verse 4 tells us he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree. In his culture, wealthy and powerful men did not run. Behaviour like that was seen as shameful, and climbing trees was something children did, not chief tax collectors! Zacchaeus was so desperate to see Jesus that he was willing to lose face and look foolish in front of the whole crowd.

Discuss:

- What does Zacchaeus's willingness to run and climb tell us about how much he wanted to meet Jesus?
- How did Jesus respond to Zacchaeus when he saw him in the tree?
- Do you have any sympathy with the way the crowd reacted? If so, why? How do you think you would have reacted?

Say:

Notice what Jesus does in verse 5. He doesn't wait for an invitation; he invites himself into Zacchaeus's house. In that culture, sharing a meal meant acceptance and friendship. No religious leader would ever have entered the house of a tax collector. Jesus took the initiative. Grace starts with him, not with Zacchaeus. In response, Zacchaeus makes a bold, costly promise. He doesn't just feel sorry, he takes action.

Ask:

What does Zacchaeus commit to do in verse 8?

Say:

Under Jewish law, if you cheated someone, you were required to pay back what you had

taken plus an extra 20 per cent (Leviticus 6:5). In extreme cases of deliberate robbery, the law demanded four times the amount (Exodus 22:1). Zacchaeus doesn't just settle for the minimum; he chooses the harshest possible penalty for himself. This shows us that his repentance is real. The grace of Jesus didn't just make him feel sorry; it completely transformed the way he lived. Zacchaeus moved from greed to generosity, from corruption to justice. Meeting Jesus changed everything.

(However, Zacchaeus says, 'IF I have cheated anybody ...'. And you may like to do the maths of the cost of paying back FOUR TIMES the amount. Perhaps Zacchaeus was more of an astute businessman and not so much of a cheat after all, in spite of what people thought of him.)

Read:

9 Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

— (Luke 19:9-10)

Ask:

- What does Jesus mean when he says, 'Today salvation has come to this house'?
- Why is it important that he calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham?

Say:

This is the heart of the story. Jesus restores Zacchaeus's identity and belonging. The man who was hated by his community is now welcomed into God's family. Grace sought him, saved him, and transformed him publicly. This is transformative inclusion. Jesus not only forgave Zacchaeus but brought him back into God's people. His mission, then and now, is to seek and save the lost.

Bridge

Say:

Just one chapter before the story of Zacchaeus, Luke tells us about another wealthy man, the rich ruler (Luke 18:18-25). He had done everything right on the outside, but when Jesus asked him to give up his wealth, he walked away sad. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, appeared to have done everything wrong, yet when he met Jesus, he responded with joy and generosity.

Ask:

What do we learn about grace from this contrast between the rich ruler and Zacchaeus?



Sound Check

Say:

Let's look back at the notes we made from the children's clip.

Ask:

- How is Zacchaeus presented in the clip compared with what we've discovered from the Bible?
- Which details listed on the flip chart still hold true?
- Which ones need to be challenged or corrected?
- What have we learned about Zacchaeus that the children's story left out?

Leader's notes:

Ask the group to imagine they've been asked to create a new children's version of the story, one that keeps it simple but doesn't miss the deeper lessons.

Work in small groups to create a retelling of Zacchaeus's story for children. Encourage creativity, as the group could write, sketch a comic strip, act it out, or make it rhyme like a children's book. If time allows, invite groups to share their versions.

Ask:

- What did you choose to highlight in your retelling?
- Why is it important for children (and adults!) to hear these deeper lessons?

Say:

Zacchaeus's story is not just for children! It is about transforming grace and transformative inclusion. Jesus sought him, saved him, and brought him back into God's family. And perhaps there was a lesson for the people who despised Zacchaeus too.

 Bridge**Ask:**

What does Zacchaeus's story teach us about the kind of transformative grace and inclusion that is possible in this world?

Selah

Leader's notes:

Place an empty chair in the middle of the room.

Say:

This empty chair represents Zacchaeus, a man who was pushed away by others but welcomed by Jesus. Let's pause and reflect on what that means for us.

Ask:

- If Zacchaeus were here today, how would we welcome him?
- Who is the 'Zacchaeus' in our world – someone others push away, but Jesus would invite in?
- How can we make space for them in our lives?

Leader's notes:

Invite group members to come forward, one at a time, and sit briefly in the chair. As they sit, they can take a moment of silent prayer, asking God for courage both to receive grace where they need it and to show grace and inclusion to others.

Say:

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Zacchaeus's story reminds us that no one is beyond his transforming grace. He calls us to join him in making space for others to be welcomed in.

Coda

Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from the story of Zacchaeus that you never noticed before?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.

