



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 26

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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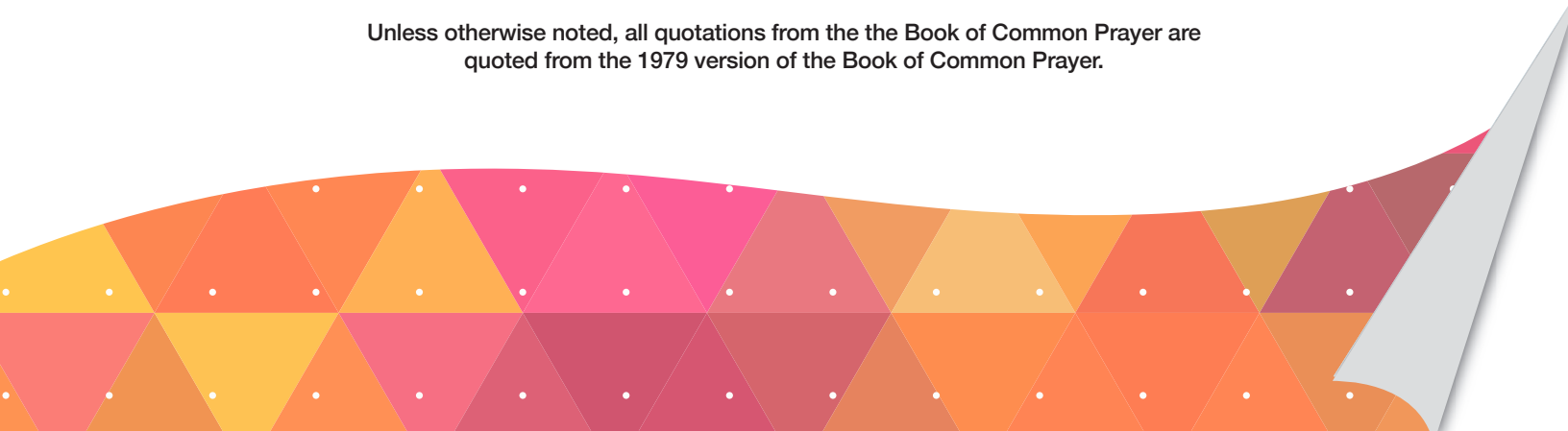
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Jesus Welcomes Sinners Like Zacchaeus

Texts: Luke 19:1-10

Big Idea: We are all welcomed into Christian fellowship.

Symbol: Chalk, chalkboard, eraser, and heart

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of community by completing a group challenge.
2. Recognize that God invites all into community, even though we sin and hurt others by hearing a re-telling of the story of Zacchaeus.
3. Recognize the importance of forgiveness and community by considering their own needs for forgiveness.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Frostbite

The Story (15 minutes)
**Jesus Welcomes Sinners
Like Zacchaeus**

The Ritual (15 minutes)
**Our Individual Sins, Our Collective
Community, Our Forgiving God**

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Letters of Love

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

• Nothing

• Craft sticks • Cardstock
• Scissors • Tape • Fan

• Copy of Lesson Sheet 26.1

• Soft, instrumental music (optional)
• Method for playing music (optional)
• Paper • Pencils • Large heart
• Scissors • Lesson Sheet 26.2

• Paper
• Pens

• Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today's story is found in Luke 19:1-10 and might be a familiar to your group, especially if you have ever sung "Zacchaeus was a wee little man..." Luke is one of the three Synoptic Gospels (along with Matthew and Mark), who share similar content and likely worked from at least one common source material. This story is only mentioned in Luke's Gospel and continues to reflect Luke's theme of social justice and the universal message of Christ to the world.

Zacchaeus, as a chief tax collector, would have been extremely disliked by Jesus' audience and early Church leaders. Tax collectors were universally reviled by members of the Jewish community as lying, corrupt, and disloyal men. Part of this animosity stems from the tax collectors' required allegiance and affiliation with the Roman government. Furthermore, the fact that Zacchaeus worked out of Jericho meant that he was a very wealthy and powerful tax collector.

By inviting Zacchaeus down into the community and later inviting himself over to the tax collector's house, Jesus was emphasizing that societal and socioeconomic divisions no longer mattered. Christ embraces all, especially those most misunderstood by society.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today your group will explore the big idea that *we are all welcomed into Christian fellowship*. Zacchaeus is a powerful example of Christ's earthly mission and ministry. Throughout his life, Jesus constantly welcomed unexpected people into community (children, women, outcasts, sick, etc.) As we confess Jesus is God incarnate, Christ's emphasis on welcoming all gives us a glimpse into God's vision for the world. We are called to welcome all into community, regardless of what society tells us about them.



What's the Symbol?

Today's story reminds us that no one is perfect and everyone deserves grace. Participants will use the chalk and chalkboard to confess their sins, later erasing them and placing a heart in the middle of their community to remind themselves of God's love for each of them and expectation that we embody that love in our own communities.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual invites participants to write down three sins they have committed in the past week on cutouts shaped like a human body in pencil. Participants will then arrange their confessions in the shape of a circle, with empty space in the middle. A heart will then be placed in the middle of the circle, as the participants erase their collective sins from the human body cut outs. This moves participants through a liturgy of confession and forgiveness, while emphasizing the importance of community.



Setting Up Your Space

Today's story reminds us that no one is perfect and everyone deserves grace. Participants will use the chalk and chalkboard to confess their sins, later erasing them and placing a heart in the middle of their community to remind themselves of God's love for each of them and expectation that we embody that love in our own communities.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us to see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high and low points of your week? Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Frostbite

Materials:

- Craft sticks
- Cardstock
- Tape
- Scissors
- Fan

During the session:

- Place all materials on a table and then welcome the group, saying: **Today we are going to talk about community. I wonder how well we, as a community, can work together on a creative project?**
- Show students the craft sticks, tape, and scissors. **Imagine that this room has been transformed into the Arctic tundra. In order for us to survive, we need to shrink ourselves and build a shelter, using only these materials.**
- Pick someone to be the leader. Tell the leader that their hands have frostbite and that they will not be able to help the group build. Even worse, everyone else has snow-blindness and cannot open their eyes.
- Instruct the team to work together to build a shelter that they think will withstand the harsh Arctic winds. Give the group about 10 minutes to work.
- **When time is up, test out the structure by turning on the fan.** Then, ask the following questions:
 - **What was difficult about this challenge?** [Answers will vary, but may include: one person couldn't use their hands, everyone else in the group couldn't see, it was difficult to communicate, etc.]
 - **Was it easy or to work together as a team? Why?** [Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]
 - **What would you do differently next time?** [Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

Jesus Welcomes Sinners Like Zacchaeus

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 26.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 26.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 26.1
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God welcomes all into community, God knows we are flawed and forgives us unconditionally, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: sometimes we can be too quick to judge other people and exclude them; we are sinners; even with our imperfections, we still seek to know Jesus, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: the world creates divisions in community, we are called to break down these divisions and live in community, etc.]*



THE RITUAL

(15 MINUTES)

Our Individual Sins, Our Collective Community, Our Forgiving God

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*)
- Method for playing music (*optional*)
- Paper
- Pencils
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Copy of Lesson Sheet 26.2
- Large heart

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 26.2 for each participant. Cut out a large heart from a sheet of paper or poster board.

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **Today we heard a story about someone excluded from community because of his reputation and things he may or may not have done in the past. Think about a time when you have felt left out, just like Zacchaeus.** Give participants time to think and reflect. Then, ask participants to share their reflections with the group, if they are comfortable doing so.
- Hand a copy of Lesson Sheet 26.2 to each person. **Thank you all for sharing those experiences, it is hard to feel all alone and without community. Sometimes we exclude others or withdraw ourselves because of past behavior. I want each of us to take some time and think about three times we hurt ourselves or someone else. In the Church, we call this behavior “sin.” Sin is anything that draws us away from God and into ourselves, making us not take into account how our actions will hurt other people. Now write, or trace, those things on the shapes provided.**
- Give participants time to reflect and write. Then, invite them to cut out their shapes.
- After everyone is finished, invite the group to stand in the circle. Ask participants to place their cutouts in the circle.
- **Unfortunately, we sin every day either through things we do or things we ignore because making them right would be too hard. The good news is that, not only does God love and forgive us, but God also gives us other people to keep us accountable and feel supported.**
- Place a large heart in the middle of the circle, on top of the cutouts.
- **This heart reminds us of that deep, abiding love and God’s constant presence with us. Love is a foundational value of our community and something we need to rely on again and again, for ourselves and for others.**
- **Keeping all of this in mind, maybe we shouldn’t alienate ourselves or other people because of times we screwed up. Instead, let’s remember God’s forgiveness and erase our sins.**

THE RITUAL - CONTINUED

- Ask each person to pick up their cutout. Invite them to erase their sins from the body cutout. Then, place the cutouts in the center of the circle once again.
- **Remembering Christ's mercy, let us pray: Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.**

DIG DEEPER (10 MINUTES)

Letters of Love

Materials:

- Paper
- Pens

During the session:

- **Now that we, as a community, have confessed our sins and received forgiveness from God and one another, let's think of people we may need to forgive who are not in this room. Maybe it's a person who said something hurtful. Maybe it's a person who didn't listen to us or respect us.**
- **Hand each participant a sheet of paper and a pen. Invite them to find a place in the room where they can sit by themselves. Write a letter to the person you are thinking about, telling them how what they did hurt you and offering forgiveness. This does not make what the person did okay, but it does tell them you will not hold this thing against them anymore.**
- **Give participants time to write their letters, and then gather the group back together.**
- **I'll let you decide what to do with your letter. Maybe you want to keep it, tear it up, or give it to the person to whom you wrote. Whatever you decide to do, know that forgiveness means we welcome that person back into community and do not hold a grudge against them.**

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen. –A prayer attributed to St. Francis

Lesson Sheet 26.1

Jesus Welcomes Sinners Like Zacchaeus

A story from the Gospel according to Luke:

One time, in a place called Jericho, there lived a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a very rich, powerful man who was the chief tax collector. Then, as is the case now, tax collectors were not very popular with their neighbors. Most people thought tax collectors were crooks, stealing some of the taxes they collected or overcharging people. Zacchaeus, as the chief tax collector, was seen as the worst of the worst. Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming into town and decided to go hear him speak.

Unfortunately, Zacchaeus was a really short man. He got to the place where Jesus was walking by and jumped up and down, trying to see over the crowd that was gathered. Eventually Zacchaeus got so desperate that he climbed into a sycamore tree. Jesus was walking by and noticed him up in the tree, clinging to a branch for support. Jesus yelled up, "Zacchaeus, what are you doing up there? Get down here- I want to spend the night at your house!" Zacchaeus hurried down the tree trunk, thrilled that Jesus knew his name and wanted to spend time with him during his visit.

Some of the other people gathered there were not so happy. They turned to one another and grumbled quietly, "Is he serious? He's going to go be the guest of that guy? He's awful! Zacchaeus is a sinner and we all decided not to hang out with him. Why would Jesus want to go over to his house?"

Zacchaeus heard them and felt ashamed. He didn't mean to cause trouble for Jesus and was embarrassed that his neighbors disliked him so much. He said to Jesus, "I'll happily give half of everything I have to the poor! If I stole from anyone, I promise to pay them back four times as much!"

Jesus looked down at Zacchaeus and said, "Today you have been forgiven, brother. The Son of Man has come to be with all people, especially those who have sinned and asked for forgiveness."

Lesson Sheet 26.2

Cutouts for Ritual

