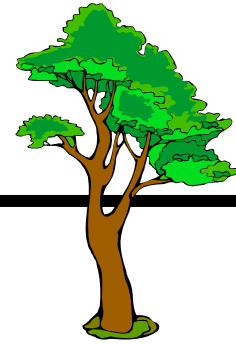


Get Ready!

The Short Guy and Jesus

By: Daniel Smead



Text

Luke 19:1-10

Key Quest Verse

“All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a “sinner.”’
Luke 19:7.

Bible Background

Jesus had a pattern in His ministry of supporting outsiders, whether their exclusion was based on their health, their sex, their nationality, their profession, or their life history in sin. This pattern extended to Jesus’ loving treatment of tax collectors. Those government workers were outsiders due to their professions, in large part because of the link their profession had with Rome and with sinful behaviors like theft. The chapter prior to our Bible story provides some context for this. In Luke 18:9-14 we have a parable where Jesus used a humble tax collector as a positive figure, in contrast to a religious person who wrongly thought he had his life all together. In Luke 18:18-27 we hear of a man who likely would have been approved by his neighbors for his behavior, but who was prevented from following Jesus by his attachment to his wealth. It is apparent that Luke intends to contrast that rich ruler of chapter 18 with the tax collector Zacchaeus in chapter 19. Zacchaeus was a man whose neighbors rejected him but who was not tied to his wealth and chose to serve the Lord, surprising his neighbors. (Luke probably intended similarity of language to help his audience link the accounts. The Greek text of the story describes the first man by the word *archon*, for ruler. In chapter 19 Luke describes Zacchaeus with the word *architelones*, for chief tax collector; that is the only appearance of that word in the New Testament.)

Of course Jesus’ own attitude about taxation was unexpected to His hearers (Luke 20:20-26). His famous position on the subject was that the people should give to Caesar what had Caesar’s image (Roman coins) and give to God what had God’s image (human beings — ourselves). Throughout His ministry Jesus was most concerned with people’s needs, even though His demonstration of that concern sometimes offended people. Where the gospels show Jesus associating with tax collectors frequently we find the Lord eating meals with them. Being willing to eat with someone (an innate aspect of staying in their home and receiving their hospitality) was significant in that culture. Today’s story is one of the cases when Jesus being comfortable to eat with someone offended others around Him.

*Get Ready!***Bible Background cont.****More information on tax collectors**

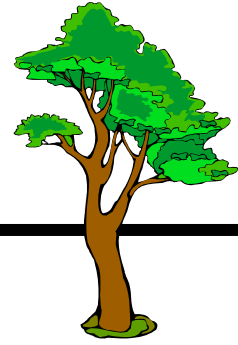
The Jewish citizens of Roman-controlled Israel viewed tax collectors very negatively. Jews who took on that role working for the nation's foreign occupiers could be viewed as collaborators. Not only did these tax collectors work for the Romans, but they could become wealthy from the job. And not only might such a person be wealthy, but it would be expected (or at least suspected) that he was corrupt.

The title "tax collector" has been applied to more than one job in Roman-controlled Israel. Jesus called Levi away from such a task, in an event which sparked its own controversy because of Jesus' openness to eating with tax collectors (Luke 5:27-39). Jericho was an important city trade wise, receiving shipments from the east, so if this was the kind of tax collection Zacchaeus was involved with in today's Bible story a lot of money would have gone through his office. But the author favors the idea that Zacchaeus worked in a different capacity, as part of a group with both "high" tax collectors and their deputies who were responsible for regions of the country. The class of deputy tax collectors may itself have included two levels, supervisors and direct agents with the people; it has been asserted that Zacchaeus' role was as "chief" tax collector in only the one city, as middle management. were toll collectors, taking fees from people as they used the roads to transport goods for sale.

The Roman Empire used several systems for taxation over the years, and it is unclear what the details were of the system used in Jesus' time. In an earlier period people would bid for the tax collection rights to an area — almost like leasing mineral rights from the government in the hope of striking it rich, people could pay for the opportunity to mine the population for profit. Even to enter that profession required wealth, because a successful bid was to be paid regardless of any successful collection of taxes. Effectively, whatever the licensed tax men succeeded in collecting above their bid amounted to their "pay." This earlier system resulted in companies forming, with stockholders, who would seek the contract to collect taxes in a region. The corruption of the system led to it being ended in Emperor Augustus' time (sometime prior to AD 15), and tax collecting became a civil service role. The idea of collecting taxes being a money making enterprise for the tax collectors apparently lived on, as can be seen from John the Baptist's instruction in Luke 3:12, 13 that the tax men were to take no more than they had been ordered to. John's statement is itself open to further interpretation, because at this time the taxes taken from an individual citizen year-to-year were not necessarily related to the value of their property or their income, but rather were just a part of the set annual total to be provided by the region to the central government.

*Get Ready!***Bible Background cont.**

Not only was the designated sum for a region not necessarily in line with the strength of the local economy, but a lot of control was left with local officials to decide what part of the total each individual was to pay. With the ambiguities of the tax “billing” system corrupt officials could milk their roles and might rake in whatever the market could bear. We might infer that John would desire the tax collectors not just to take no more than the assigned total, but also to fairly distribute the tax burden on all of the citizens. (In a later period of the empire the economic system fell so far out of balance that the role of tax collector was made hereditary — tax collectors had long been held responsible for the collection of the taxes, but it became so difficult to get the money that no one wanted the job. The wealth of those held responsible for an area’s taxation was sucked out, and even when bankrupted they were subject to imprisonment for failing to fulfill their task.) But a lot of control was left with local officials to decide what part of the total each individual was to pay. With the ambiguities of the tax “billing” system corrupt officials could milk their roles and might rake in whatever the market could bear.

Get Ready!**Lesson Quest****What I want my students to:**

Know: Jesus does not look down on or diminish people, He takes the initiative to make something greater of them. Jesus calls each of us to have fellowship with Him, openly and without shame, and we should try to relate that way with others as well.

Feel: The importance and value of standing up for Jesus.

Do: Arrange their lives to be in keeping with loyalty to Jesus, whether they recognized His call some time ago or are only becoming conscious of it now.

Leader's Devotion

The title of this lesson alone, “The Short Guy and Jesus,” may have been sufficient for you to guess that the Bible story involved the tax collector Zacchaeus. He is one of the most likely people in the Bible to be referred to simply by an aspect of his appearance. Even children learn to sing about his height. But Jesus took no notice of Zacchaeus’ size when he met the man, rather emphasizing His desire for a relationship with him. Perhaps it is not coincidental that Jesus first encounters Zacchaeus under circumstances where Jesus looked up toward him, not down at him. Jesus did not seek to gain a psychological advantage with this shorter man who was already despised by his neighbors. In fact Jesus, who was the center of attention, quickly directed His own positive attention on Zacchaeus, though the result was not fully favorable among the onlookers. As He so often did, Jesus allied Himself with the outsider and honored him with His desire for fellowship. It seems that Zacchaeus responded to this opportunity splendidly, even while his neighbors were offended by Jesus’ overture to him.

How often do we have difficulty looking past the appearance of a student? Hopefully we can move past such surface concerns. But how often do we let the apparent personality or background of a student interfere with our teaching them, and our loving them? That may be more difficult for us to get around, just as Zacchaeus’ background as a tax collector was hard for his neighbors to get around. Jesus saw things in people that were not on the surface, and not in their public images. That loving willingness to step out to people is an aspect of Jesus’ life that we need to bring into our own lives. We also need to demonstrate it to our students so that they can carry it with them into schools and homes and workplaces. Many potentially fruitful relationships are blocked by accepting what people seem to be like and becoming inattentive to evidence that suggests something else. We need to remain open to people, and to God’s Spirit.

Get Set!



Option A

CAREER DAY

Materials: Chalkboard and chalk or markerboard and marker (a writing surface visible to all students).

Procedure: Discuss with your students different professions and what people think of them. First ask them to list kinds of work people do (depending on your class size maybe ask for three jobs from each student, avoiding overlaps, or aim for a total of 20). List jobs on the board (perhaps have a student handle that for you). Then ask the class to discuss which of the jobs they would most like to have (you might place the students' initials by jobs they name, or put check marks by ones that are being considered). Then ask them to discuss which of these jobs are viewed positively and which are viewed more negatively (not just in their own views, but in public perception). You can put plus and minus signs by the jobs, and some jobs may be in both categories for a variety of reasons: lawyers are both respected and disdained; being a pastor may be viewed more highly by your class, but it may be acknowledged that it is viewed lowly in the world; some jobs are difficult or hazardous but pay well or are well respected. If by this point the job "tax collector" or "IRS agent" has not appeared on the list ask students to name additional jobs that people sometimes frown upon; likely it won't take long for them to come up with it. Add the new suggestions to the list and proceed to the next step. (If tax collecting just doesn't come up, you can add it yourself either before or after the next step, saying "Well, what about the IRS, how do people view its workers?" You might mix this in with other suggestions of your own.)

Compare the list of jobs your students are considering for their futures with the opinions they attributed to the public about those jobs (based on salary, difficulty, reputation, etc.). Ask your students how they think the public perception of a job affects their own interest or disinterest in it.

Address the issue of tax collecting specifically, if it has not come up yet. Ask the students to identify why people have problems with the Internal Revenue Service (or whatever your nation's tax department is). If the students are familiar with the VeggieTales program "The Toy Who Saved Christmas" you might remind them that even this Christian program for young people jokingly put IRS agents below bank robbers and Vikings in terms of the character Larry's desire to have one in his home. Is fear the issue? Do people fear the IRS who has not done wrong because they are wary of errors? Is there resentment of paying taxes, or frustration about how the tax burden is distributed or what the money pays for? Are these attitudes reasonable? After students share their thoughts proceed to the closing.

Tell your students the following: **People often are uncomfortable with the idea of taxes in our country. But imagine if the IRS worked for a different country, one that had conquered our own, and was responsible for taking money away from our citizens to support an oppressive foreign ruler. Imagine that IRS agents were not from that conquering nation, but were citizens of our country who chose to work for the outsiders. Imagine that these tax collectors were commonly thought to be corrupt, getting wealthy by taking more than they gave to the government, and getting away with it. That gives you some idea of the situation in Jesus' time, when the popular perception of tax collectors was much worse than it is here today. Our lesson relates to a tax collector named Zacchaeus, who you may well have heard of. We don't know how he got his job, but we know that it didn't help him be viewed well by his neighbors.**

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Get Set!



Option B

MUSIC TIME

Materials: None

Procedure: Ask your students to sing the “Zacchaeus” song, using the accompanying motions. (If you happen not to know the motions yourself, you probably won’t have to go far to find someone who can teach you both the words and the motions. If you can’t find someone who knows them, mainly the motions are hand movements. First they relay that Zacchaeus is “wee” by holding up a hand to mark off height or even just using two fingers separated a few inches; then singers mime climbing as with a ladder; then block sunlight from the eyes to “see” while swiveling the head to scan the distance; then make walking motions with hands to illustrate Jesus passing in front of one’s chest; then singers lean back while holding a hand against sunlight to show Jesus looking up in the tree; then wag finger upward when saying “You come down,” in time with the words; then return to walking motions for “going to your house today.”).

Ask your students to briefly consider the song, after they have performed it, for what it says about Zacchaeus. Does it give a positive impression of Zacchaeus? In particular, what is the effect of the song emphasizing Zacchaeus being a “wee little man”? [Some might say it portrays him as a comical figure (perhaps not a figure to respect); some may see it as an analogy to the smallness of his character; some may see it simply as explaining why he needed to climb a tree.] What about the finger wagging motion when Jesus calls Zacchaeus to come down? [Again it may imply Zacchaeus is comical; or it may be used to treat this adult man like a child being scolded.]

Consider as a group whatever insights your students have to offer. In particular you may ask them if they think the song portrays the situation of the story in the way it happened originally. Students don’t need to commit themselves now, the intention is just for them to start thinking these issues through, but suggest that Jesus might not be the sort of person to make a grown man feel like a child when He is inviting Himself over to his home.

[Note: this opening activity pairs well with Activity 2, which involves the same song.]

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY

Get Set!



Bible Story

Teacher Tip: Provide markers for students to highlight portions of the story in their Bibles.

Luke 19:1-10 (NIV)

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 being a short man he could not, because of 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 what was lost.”

Read the following to your students: **This can appear to be a very simple story. Guy hears Jesus is coming. Apparently having heard something about Jesus, guy wants to see Him but is too short to look over the crowd. Guy climbs a tree for a better view. Jesus recognizes the guy, a well known sinner, and says He wants to talk to him. Impressed or touched by this statement, the guy publicly repents of his sinful lifestyle. How many of you have heard the story described something like that?** [Allow time for your students to respond.]

Luke doesn’t give us the necessary background to let us be sure that the story is like that, but even if it is there are some other points to tie into it from history and from what Luke tells us elsewhere about Jesus’ work, particularly just before He came into Jericho. Zacchaeus was involved with collecting taxes for the Roman government, as a chief tax collector. This would have given him a lousy reputation in Jericho. Tax collectors not only served a foreign power, but they were known for greed and theft. Just one chapter earlier, in Luke 18, we have a parable about a tax collector and a Pharisee where the tax collector is the one who gets God’s favor because he truly repents. That story wasn’t just about true repentance, it was supposed to surprise Jesus’ audience with its suggestion that one of these despised sinners, who had betrayed their nation and abandoned their relationship with God, would repent and would be accepted by God.

Of course Zacchaeus was also short. It can be very tempting to do some amateur psychological analysis on Zacchaeus and suppose that his height had something to do with his behavior toward his neighbors, accepting a job as a Roman tax collector and gaining monetary power while surrendering any hope of respect from his peers.

Bible Story cont.


We can't be sure about how he originally entered his role in society, but we can figure that by the time he met Jesus he felt generally rejected. It has been suggested that Zacchaeus climbed the tree because he had no expectation of being allowed through the crowd to see. It has even been suggested that based on his past relationship with the people he had been taxing Zacchaeus was embarrassed even to let them *know* of his interest in Jesus, and that he may have been trying to hide himself in the tree as well as use it to gain a view. In the end, it feels like Zacchaeus needed someone to show that they could still love him, that there was hope for him. Zacchaeus needed to get a sign of being able to be in God's favor.

So why was Zacchaeus interested in seeing Jesus at all? On his way into town Jesus had just healed a blind man so he could see. Even before that event a crowd was following along, interested in Jesus, but performing that kind of miracle was bound to attract even more attention. Maybe that was all there was to it, perhaps Jesus was just an interesting distraction. Or maybe there was more. We know that tax collectors had previously gone out to hear John the Baptist when he preached at the Jordan, not far from Jericho. Maybe John had planted seeds in Zacchaeus' life even before Jesus came to town.

Zacchaeus was short, but he had been cut down further than his height. Because of his work for the Romans his neighbors looked down on him; even his inclusion in the promises God made to Abraham was being denied. Though apparently wealthy, he felt poor. He was a victim of language and attitudes which diminish people. But Jesus does not look down on or diminish people, He takes the initiative to make something greater of them. Perhaps the fact that this wealthy man was prepared to climb a tree is a hint of where he was mentally on that day, but if Jesus had not turned to HIM would anything have come of it?

In any case, what ended up happening turned a lot of people's expectations on their heads. Even Zacchaeus was desiring simply to SEE who Jesus was, he wasn't seeking to offer an invitation to Jesus to stay and eat with him, he wasn't necessarily even expecting the chance to HEAR Jesus now (though Jesus seems often to have taught while He walked, Zacchaeus was in no position to follow along and hear Him). Jesus knew what Zacchaeus needed in this situation and surpassed Zacchaeus's own perceptions. Jesus was willing to associate with Him; He didn't offer some special teaching, or a healing, but Zacchaeus' life changed. It seems that he was ready for this encounter in a way he couldn't have realized before.

[Note: This issue may come up with students, so it is addressed here. Whether or not Zacchaeus had currently or previously been stealing is not the point. The point is the relationship he desired with God and accepted through his ties to Jesus. The issue of taxes and how they were collected was what distracted the crowd from recognizing the truth. Understanding these background issues can help us to understand the story better, but the degree or nature of a person's sins are not key when they become a disciple of Christ, rather their repentance is important. Jesus declares in Luke 19:9, 10 that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house that day, and that he had been lost. This would be true even if he had never stolen, he was still a sinner and he had been living in separation from the community of Israel. The metaphor of "lostness" that Jesus is employing relates to such parables as the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son (all in Luke 15). In these images nothing is lost and then found in isolation. The sheep and the coin each are returned to the company of others like them. The son is returned to a family. Luke's gospel does not portray "individual salvation," rather salvation is presented as participation in a community. (The fact that the community under discussion comes to be identified as the church rather than maintaining the simple title "Israel" is another non-issue for the moment.)]

Go!**A Public Stand****CREATIVE WRITING**

Materials: The worksheet “A Second Take on Zacchaeus”, pens or pencils

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **Zacchaeus is normally thought of as having been a thief who met Jesus and almost immediately repented and promised to return his ill-gotten goods. In our activity we are going to be considering an alternate interpretation of Luke’s account, an interpretation that presents Zacchaeus as having been at least a comparatively righteous man even before he met Jesus (if that is the case, conceivably it was because he previously had met John the Baptist). Read the top paragraph of your worksheets, and then write your answers to the questions below. When you’re done with that we will discuss these ideas as a group.**

Procedure: Hand out the worksheets and writing instruments. Allow time for the students to complete the questions, then ask them to discuss what they decided about the story. Did the idea of someone being despised by his neighbors for false reasons bother them a lot? Are they personally familiar with something like that happening? Ask them to consider what life was like for Zacchaeus in the years prior to meeting Jesus, if what the worksheet suggests was in fact the case. Have students offer their suggestions of what Zacchaeus’ life must have been like.

Close

We can’t be sure what Zacchaeus went through in his life, but we can guess that after meeting Jesus he felt a new sense of responsibility for his behavior and that the position he had in society was something he had to wrestle with. Maybe this was even good preparation for whatever he faced as a disciple of Christ when times of persecution came in later years. It is easy to imagine that Zacchaeus would have been pointed to as a good example of a person committed to following Jesus despite having the potential to achieve worldly success by a different route.

Let’s pray: Dear God, thank You for sending us Jesus. He looks at who we really are, not simply how others see us. And He never wants to make us feel small, rather He is always willing to help us grow to become more than we were before. Please help us to stand up in defense of Jesus, as He defends us. In Jesus’ name we pray these things. Amen.

Go!



Lyrical Challenge

MUSIC

Materials: Paper and writing materials; knowledge of the words and tune for “Zacchaeus was a wee little man”; optional: audio or video recorder and media with which to save your students’ modified versions of the song

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **Zacchaeus is known to people today mainly through a song that doesn’t address the complete story as we have it in Luke. We are going to try an experiment in our own creativity and our perceptions of this biblical account, and try to create a new version of Zacchaeus’ song. This may cover more of what happened by changing the words as they now are, or adding a second verse, or both. It could be framed with a different tune, or as a rap, if that is where your musical inclinations are. Perhaps it will provide an application of the story for the modern day, or try to give a more full image of who this Zacchaeus was.**

[Note: This activity can easily go for more than one week. You could set this activity up as a song contest, allowing students a week to prepare before having them present their work. If you are open to using this activity over more than one week you might choose to have your students visit other classes to perform their compositions, or perhaps arrange for a “recital” in a Sunday School opening time or some other forum.]

Procedure: Review the song about Zacchaeus, which is provided here broken down by syllables, with some syllables bold which receive special stress, and italics on phrases that are spoken rhythmically. Perhaps perform it as a group, or have one volunteer sing it. Don’t forget the motions, as making some adjustment to them may be among the suggestions your students develop. If you need to be reminded of the motions you can check in Option B earlier in this lesson.

Zac-chae-us was a wee lit-tle man,	9	
Yes a wee lit-tle man was he .	8	
He climbed up in a syc-a-more tree	9	
for the Lord he want-ed to see .	8	
And he said / <i>Zac-chae-us, / you come down</i>	9	(three threes, the final two parts spoken)
for I’m go-ing to your house to- day ,	9	
for I’m go-ing to your house to- day .	9	

Go!

Discuss what the song says about Zacchaeus and what it leaves out. You might write some of these ideas on paper, or a chalkboard, to be recalled by the students later on. For example, the story emphasizes his height, and alludes to his interest in Jesus and Jesus' acceptance of him. It does not refer to his job, or even the crowd. Does it picture Zacchaeus positively overall? Invite students to work on creating their continuation, amplification, or recasting of the story, whether singly, in pairs, or with whatever grouping appears useful.

After your students are ready to share their suggestions each writer or team of writers can share their work with the others in the group. The students may not be ready to perform their work in this class time, you may want to let them carry over to the next week and perform then. If some of your class is shy about public singing you might permit them to have someone else sing their work for the group. Possibly you could record these song performances for posterity (or to pull out in a year for the fun of it, or even to send a copy to the lesson author to create an overall collection). If the songs work out really well, you might consider putting on a musical revue for another class or in some other forum (perhaps a Sunday School opening time).

Close

Thank your students for their efforts (or say that you look forward to hearing their efforts next week, depending on when they will be unveiling their work). Pray something like the following: **Lord Jesus, I thank You for the inspiration and joy that You allow us to have as we serve You. I ask that you will help us to be able to look beyond the limited information we frequently receive about people with bad reputations. Please allow us to see who these people really are inside, including realizing what their needs really are. Help us to reach out to people we can help, and show them Your acceptance and love. Amen.**

[Note: Here is a possible example verse to use in class, if no one in your group attempts an extension of the original chorus with a second verse. This example could be used to help students who are confused about what is intended in this activity to know how their own efforts might work. But don't offer it up front, you want your students to think creatively, not to be swayed too much by what others have done. Also notice that line five exists in two versions, allowing for the possibility suggested in activity one about Zacchaeus possibly not having intended to steal money; probably you should offer the example with only one of the options on line five.

Zac-chae-us was a wealth-y lit-tle man,	10
Yes a wealth-y lit-tle man was he.	9
But af-ter that day he sought wealth no more	10
for the Lord set his heart free (<i>yes free</i>)	9
And he said / <i>I'll re-turn / four times more than an-y theft</i>	13 (increase rhythm in last part)
or	
And he said / <i>I'll re-pay, / quad-ru-ple all I stole</i>	12 (increase rhythm in last part)
and even more be-sides I'll give a- way	9
and even more be-sides I'll give a- way .	9

The rhymes are not as plain as in the original verse, and the rhythm is different. If they wish, students could actually take this for a base point in making a second verse and see if they can make a better match with what precedes it in the original song. Advise them to have fun!]

Go!

Are You Trying To Be Funny?



WORKSHEET

Materials: Worksheet “How Many Tax Collectors . . . ?”, pens or pencils; optional: bring to class a book about humor and Jesus/the church for students to look at, such as cartoonist Charles M. Schulz’s *And the Beagles and the Bunnies Shall Lie Down Together: The Theology in Peanuts*; *The Joyful Christ: The Healing Power of Humor*, by Cal Samra; *Holy Humor* or *More Holy Humor*, edited by Cal and Rose Samra; *The Book of Joy*, by Dr. Sherwood Eliot Wirt; *The Humor of Christ*, by Elton Trueblood.

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **As we know, Zacchaeus received a lot of disrespect as a tax collector. When Zacchaeus was accepted by Jesus that very acceptance was treated by the crowd as evidence against Jesus rather than as evidence in favor of this tax collector. They were firm in their opinions, though we have to wonder how much of a chance they ever gave the man. Since Zacchaeus collected taxes for the Roman government there were special reasons for a negative judgment in his case, but we know that even today this kind of attitude exists toward people who work with taxes, or perhaps as lawyers, or in government. A lot of times the people who are outsiders for one reason or another also are the ones who get mocked behind their backs, made fun of to their faces, and have jokes told about them or “practical jokes” played on them. In this activity we are going to look at what we find funny, and if we believe that we have chosen wisely. In particular, think about how you can avoid getting your pleasure from someone else’s pain.**

Procedure:

Review the worksheet “How many tax collectors . . . ?” It offers some thoughts about humor and asks the students to consider a few questions. After your class has had time to answer the questions and think about the comments on the worksheet, ask if anyone has a personal story they are willing to share of someone being hurt by joking that was meant only in fun, or perhaps examples (without naming names) where they think that someone uses joking spitefully but the fact that it is humor makes it hard to call them on it. One good example to get into might be the jokes members of different classes in school tell about other classes. Probably pretty much everyone can recall feeling upset at some point about remarks made about their being a Freshman, or some other category, and yet it may well be that the person who made the remarks did not mean them to be harmful. It is also possible that the same people who were hurt told such jokes later and might not have given a great deal of thought to the pain this could be bringing to someone else.

Go!**Close**

Not all humor comes from spite. In fact even much mocking humor is self-mocking, told by people within the group that is being joked about; that kind of humor can build up relationships. People can apply their sense of humor to who they are, where they come from, and what their job entails. But it is also possible for jokes to work cruelty, or for humor to allow people to start taking seriously the idea that someone else is less trustworthy or valuable than them. A tricky thing about this is that humor, by its nature, can easily be claimed not to have been meant with a serious effect. Yet many people have felt pain from joking. In such situations people might not be comfortable with admitting how they feel, since people even risk being mocked for having “allowed themselves” to feel hurt. People declare that sticks and stones break bones but words are harmless. In reality words can break hearts.

We have to ask ourselves how many tax collectors Jesus has to accept, and how many lawyers Jesus has to save, and just generally how many sinners (of whatever other categories) Jesus has to care about as much as Himself before Christians stop carelessly knocking people for their jobs or their nationality or their physical characteristics, and try to actually get to know them. If we were part of that crowd in Luke 19:7 what would *we* have been muttering about Jesus (and would it have been funny)?

Possible prayer: Lord, we sometimes say or hear that words can never hurt us, but in reality they do. Please help us to deal with the pain we have felt in the past and forgive all those through whom pain came into our hearts. Please help us also to be careful about causing pain to others. Help us to see and appreciate joy, and to be able to laugh with light hearts. Guide our hearts and our words, Lord. Amen.



Go!



Seeking Those Who May Be Found

GAME

Materials: Worksheet: “Seeking Who May Be Found!”; pens; Bibles; optional: Concordance(s)

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **Zacchaeus was a lost man without Jesus; in fact, anyone is. Often people don’t realize they are lost, and sometimes when they do realize it they assume they can’t be found again. Maybe Zacchaeus was in the first category before he met Jesus; maybe he was in the second. But once he knew the Lord, he entered the category of “found.” Let’s look in the Bible for some lost things and some found things.**

Procedure: You can set this activity up as a race between students (or teams of students), or simply use it as an individual experience in looking at the Bible and thinking about the many varied stories it contains. If you want to have a race, hand out the worksheets facedown and read the opening paragraph to the class before you allow them to turn over the sheets and begin writing their answers to the questions. Not all of the answers should need to be hunted for in a Bible, but probably few students will know all the answers. For them to find the answers they don’t already know you have the option of giving them a copy of the list of Bible verses below to check on or having them use a concordance to seek out the answers, with the concordance you might give hints, perhaps limiting the number of hints each student may receive (it would be more difficult, particularly with questions 3, 5, and 8, but should not be impossible to track down). You could make it mandatory to write down the Scripture with each answer.

The answers to the questions are: 1) Samson; 2) an axhead; 3) the temple in Jerusalem; 4) David; 5) the Hebrew army (or Phinehas and Hophni); 6) Nebuchadnezzar; 7) his cloak; 8) Jacob; 9) a coin; 10) his birthright; 11) Elijah; 12) the lost.

Scripture texts, if you wish to distribute or read them for the students to use (rather than concordances): 1) Judges 16:22; 2) 2 Kings 6:5-7; 3) 2 Kings 22:8, or 2 Chronicles 34:15; 4) 1 Samuel 21:9 (cross reference 1 Sam. 17:51, when he first used it); 5) 1 Samuel 4:11; 6) Daniel 4:24-33; 7) Mark 14:51, 52; 8) Genesis 45:26; 9) Luke 15:8-10; 10) Genesis 25:29-34; 11) 2 Kings 2:17; 12) Luke 19:10

Go!**Close**

The Bible is filled with references to things that are retrieved after a time. Some things are set aside on purpose and found later, some things are taken away but eventually returned; some things are only lost because they were not sufficiently valued by those who had them. That last option is never the case with God, because God understands the value of everything in creation including us. He valued us enough to send Jesus, which means that God actually values people higher than a lot of people do.

Let's pray: Lord, thank You for sending Jesus to find us. Thank You that while we were still sinners You made a way for us to enter your presence. By Your actions You have taught us that You value us. Please help us to value You, and please help us to value each other. In Jesus's name we pray these things, Amen.

Go!



Whosoever Believes In Him

GAME

Materials: Paper; pencils or pens

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **Zacchaeus publicly demonstrated his acceptance of Jesus and his loyalty to the Lord by defending Jesus in front of the crowd. He could not be saved by handling money well, but he could be forgiven for past sins committed in connection with money. That grace of God could enter his life because he chose Jesus over cash.**

I want you to take a few minutes to consider a few questions. What is your relationship with Jesus? Is there anything that has been getting in the way of your choosing Jesus to be your Lord? Are you prepared to speak up for Jesus?

Procedure: Distribute the paper and writing instruments before you read the Quest Connection. Give your students time to consider the questions (repeat them as needed so they can ponder them for a while), then read the following for them.

We don't often run into crowds of people who are doubtful about Jesus because of His associating with us, but in your daily life you may meet people who are doubtful about just who Jesus is. The fact that you claim association with Jesus may be significant to them. Take some time to consider how you would describe Jesus as you know Him, for someone who is wondering about what you think of Jesus. You can write your ideas down if you wish.

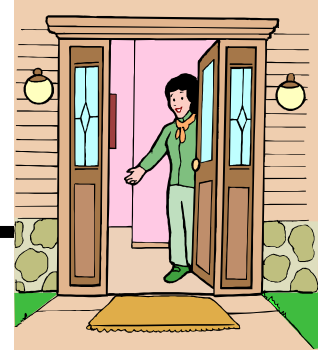
When the students have had sufficient time to consider and to write (if they wish), or when time is running short for the class to meet, you can ask if anyone wishes to volunteer to share what they wrote. Otherwise, proceed to the closing.

Close

It has been said that for some people we may be the only Christian they ever know, or at least the only Christian they ever know well enough to want to talk to about Jesus. That can be a scary thought, we might wish for it to be someone else that they choose to talk to. We might think we don't know enough, or that we aren't good enough, or that people don't respect us enough to listen to us. But Zacchaeus spoke when he had just met Jesus, while he was a tax collector for the Romans, despised by his neighbors, and his words have survived to be heard by us today. It is hard to tell what God will choose to use you for.

Go!

Just A Normal Day



CREATIVE WRITING

Materials: The worksheet “Just a Normal Day”, writing instruments

Quest Connection

Read the following to your students: **Zacchaeus didn’t expect big events on the day he met Jesus, but that day changed his life. Jesus is like that, when He enters a person’s life everything may be made different – how that person looks at the world, what seems important, who his or her friends are, and more. Has that been your experience? In this activity you are going to try to imagine what it would be like to have Jesus walk up and say He wanted to spend some time with you.**

Procedure: Hand out the worksheet and writing instruments, and give your students time to answer the questions. Some sections will call for your input as the teacher, so be prepared to provide it. When your class has finished with their worksheets bring the group back into discussion of what they decided.

Ask for volunteers to tell about some of the things they would be doing with Jesus. Maybe some of them have humorous or intriguing items in their schedule for Jesus to go along to. Or maybe some of them were excited at the idea of asking Jesus to do something with them that they would not have done on their own but they felt more comfortable doing with him along (like speak to a friend about God). If they are comfortable doing so, let them tell about things they would not want to be doing with Jesus.

Discuss the fact that really Jesus is with us all the time (even if you have students who have not yet chosen to accept Jesus as their Lord, He is still aware of what they are going through). Ask if your students find this to be comforting, or not. After your class is finished discussing its ideas about this exercise, proceed to the closing prayer.

Close

Pray: Lord, we know that You do want to be with us in our homes, when we are with our friends, when we are studying, relaxing, and even just goofing off. Thank You for the fact that You accept us, and that You empower us to improve how we live. Please help us to feel Your presence and to live in a way that pleases You. Thank You for all You have done for us. Amen.

A Second Take on Zacchaeus

We know that Zacchaeus was a tax collector, with the opportunity to steal his way to wealth, and that he told Jesus that he would not steal. But had Zacchaeus been stealing previously? The Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, allows authors to specify whether a statement is about the past (“I ran”), the future (“I will run”), or the present (“I am running”), but also to make statements about ongoing situations (perhaps equivalent to “I have been running”). Zacchaeus’ statement about giving half his money to the poor and repaying any theft four times over seems to be framed as a statement about an ongoing situation – which would mean he wasn’t acknowledging having stolen, he was stating how he chose to deal with any situations where he became aware that too much tax had been taken. This makes more sense if we remember that Zacchaeus was a “chief” tax collector. He may have been saying that it was his policy not to permit those who worked under him to steal.

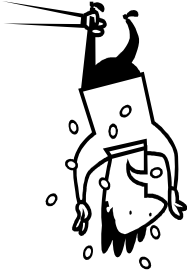
The author Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that Zacchaeus made his public statement about giving to the poor and rejecting theft as a public defense not only for himself, but to defend Jesus’ reputation because of others’ reactions to Jesus’ willingness to stay with him. It is an intriguing idea, someone rising to Jesus’ defense (though perhaps still holding a limited understanding of Jesus’ identity and intentions) and receiving praise from Jesus for doing so.

If Zacchaeus’ story is not one of a disreputable character changing his lifestyle after only brief contact with Jesus we do not thereby lose out on having such stories. Jesus came into their lives, and their lives changed, and sometimes after only a brief contact – Jesus can make a powerful impression. Johnson’s suggestion also does not deny us Zacchaeus’ example as someone who strove to act properly in a position of power and was willing to use his wealth for others.

We know that one of the standard traits of Christian disciples ought to be willingness to speak for Jesus, and that then Jesus will speak for them (in front of God). We have Jesus’ own words that salvation had come to Zacchaeus’ house – was this because he changed his conduct, or because he opened his mouth and committed himself to Jesus’ cause?

Looking at the Bible story, and considering the possible interpretation of it described here, how do you think Zacchaeus would have been feeling about being publicly accepted by Jesus? In a similar situation, how would *you* feel?

Does this interpretation of the story make sense to you?



How Many Tax Collectors . . . ?

“You see, Minbari humor is based not on physical danger, or rejection, or embarrassment like human humor, but rather on the failure to obtain emotional or spiritual enlightenment.”

That quote from the character Zooty, on the science fiction program *Babylon Five*, states the issue broadly, for comic effect. “Human humor” also deals with the unexpected, plays on words, odd combinations of ideas that strike us as funny because they are absurd. Humor can get us thinking as well as laughing. But a lot of jokes really are based on cruelty, vulgarity, and rudeness. Among teens it is not unusual to make fun of others for their differences – particularly people we don’t actually know. So while Zooty’s comment is not perfectly serious, it raises an interesting point regarding what we laugh about, and why.

Along with humor that makes fun of people much humor is crude, in the language that is used or in the subject matter (which frequently is sex). Ephesians 5:4 warns us against “obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking.” In the context of today’s lesson, and the idea of standing up for and with Jesus in an environment that isn’t always accepting of us, it is interesting to notice what Paul suggested those things be replaced with: thanksgiving. Jesus was not opposed to laughter, He went to parties (including at the homes of prominent “sinners,” as the Pharisees noticed), He praised children, and He said funny things. Jesus commented that people were unhappy about John the Baptist’s solemn behavior and also was unhappy about Jesus’ own behavior, like children who play a dirge (a funeral tune) on a pipe and complain that no one is mourning, and then play a dance and complain that no one is dancing. His comparison wouldn’t have made much sense if Jesus weren’t a happy person, but it also seems to be a joke in itself. Many of Jesus’ parables seem to have humor along with their teachings; the idea of a camel going through the eye of a needle ought to be a funny image. Jesus’ disciple Paul said that we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Too often humor has been viewed as opposed to the Christian life (frequently by non-Christians, while they reject the church). But Jesus engaged in a far wiser form of humor than many of today’s comics.

What kind of jokes do you like (knock knock; chicken crossed the road; etc.)?

Have you ever found yourself embarrassed to have laughed at something (or someone)?
What did you do?

Have you ever been the subject of a joke that hurt your feelings? What did you do?

Just a Normal Day

Zacchaeus did not expect to be spending his evening with Jesus, but it happened. How about you? Fill in the following sections and try to visualize what a visit with Jesus could be like.



1. Determine what kind of day it will be. Pick a number between one and seven and tell it to your teacher. Your teacher will also pick a number between one and seven, and adding the two together will determine what day of the week your hypothetical visit from Jesus is taking place. Write that day down here. (It has to be random; no man knows the day or the hour.)
2. What time of day will Jesus show up? Note down a time, then ask your teacher to provide a number between 1 and 24 at random. Add that to your figure to get Jesus' arrival time.
3. Describe your schedule of what you would expect to do that day, for at least 12 hours. Include classes and activities, meal times, friends you would see, television programs you would watch.
4. From your list/schedule, what things would you expect to change because of Jesus being along? This could include things that you consider too insignificant or difficult to do with Him along, or embarrassing, etc. Assume that Jesus wants to stay with you for at least 12 hours.
5. Imagine how you would feel having Jesus physically with you during your day. Try to describe the experience here.

Seeking !

Who May Be Found



Jesus looked for Zacchaeus and found him in a tree. He told the crowd that He had found a son of Abraham, something worth locating even though the crowd wasn't interested in locating it. This is a Bible hunt, you will be looking for things that were missing, and for people who were lost and then were found. See how many you can discover in your mind, then find the rest in your Bible.

1. Who regained his hair?
2. What item miraculously floated so it could be returned to its owner?
3. Where was part of the Bible lost and then relocated?
4. Who regained a certain sword long after he had used it to cut off a dead man's head?
5. Who lost a gold-plated wooden box?
6. Who lost his mind for seven years?
7. What did a man lose when he ran from the scene of Jesus' arrest?
8. What father falsely believed one of his sons was dead and gone (not in a parable)?
9. What object did a woman sweep her house to find?
10. What was lost to a man at the price of a bowl of soup?
11. Who did fifty men try to find for three days but could not?
12. What are we told Jesus came to seek and save?

My Journal

This week's Bible story involves a man who lived in a much different time, in a much different culture, with different pressures and demands on him than apply today. How would Zacchaeus have felt on that day he met Jesus if he was told that one day Luke would write his story in the Bible and it would be read by people for generations to come?