

What Do You Seek?

Deep-Dive: The Guest (Zacchaeus)

A standalone session: any group, any order

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that Jesus invites Himself to the house of the most hated man in Jericho, that joy comes before reform and produces it, and that grace, while completely free, is never cheap: Zacchaeus pledged half his goods plus fourfold restitution, self-imposed.

Catholic Touchstone: Jesus not only forgave sinners; He made plain the effect of forgiveness by reintegrating them into the community and receiving them at His table (CCC 1443).

The Knock in This Encounter (leader only)

This deep-dive stands alone, but it carries the study's signature pattern in its most literal form: Jesus stops, calls the man by name, and invites Himself to the door of his house; Zacchaeus's freedom answers by coming down "with haste" and receiving Him "joyfully." **Spoiler discipline:** if your group has not yet finished the six core sessions, keep this framing to yourself; the pattern is theirs to discover there. If they have finished, expect someone to name it unprompted, and enjoy it.

What You Need to Know

Zacchaeus is not merely a tax collector; Luke calls him a *chief* tax collector, and rich (Lk 19:2): a franchise boss of collaboration with Rome, wealthy off his neighbors' backs, and hated with the special hatred small towns reserve for their own traitors. He is also short, and the crowd does not make room for him. So one of the richest men in Jericho climbs a tree like a child, because he "sought to see who Jesus was" (Lk 19:3). Curiosity undignified enough to climb is already something; honor it in your seekers.

Then the reversal the session turns on: Jesus stops under the tree, looks up, and calls him by name: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Nobody introduced them. And Jesus does not request hospitality; He announces it: "I must." The town's villain is publicly honored before he has reformed a single thing, and the crowd murmurs on cue: "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (Lk 19:7).

Watch the order of operations, because it is the Gospel's order everywhere: welcome first, transformation second, as fruit and not as fee. Zacchaeus receives Him joyfully (19:6), and then, standing at his own table, sentences himself: half his goods to the poor, and "if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold" (19:8). Fourfold is not a round number; it is the Law's own restitution rate for a stolen sheep, which the group will find live. The town's cheat voluntarily books himself under the statute's full rate for a stolen sheep, with every victim in town free to hold him to it. Joy did what shame never had.

Jesus' verdict names the day and the mission: "Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:9-10). The seeker in the tree turns out to have been the sought.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 22:1. The Law's restitution table: a stolen sheep restored fourfold. Zacchaeus's number is not generosity plucked from the air; it is a legal self-sentencing at the statute's own rate; Exodus 22:1 requires five oxen for a stolen ox and four sheep for a stolen sheep. The group finds it live.

Ezekiel 34:11, 16. "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep... I will seek the lost." God's own promise to do the shepherding in person; Luke 19:10 is Jesus claiming the verse as His job description. Leader background.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Alexandria *Commentary on Luke (summary)*

Cyril notes that Zacchaeus's climb was small faith in a small man, and that Christ, who sees the hidden movement of every heart, met the flicker of curiosity with a self-invitation; the seeking of Zacchaeus was itself already Christ's drawing. A faithful summary of his homily on this passage.

St. Augustine *Sermons on the New Testament (summary)*

Preaching on this scene, Augustine delights in the indignity: a rich official scrambling up a sycamore, a fig tree of no reputation, and finds in it a picture of the Gospel itself: the man willing to look foolish to see Christ is the man Christ stops for. A faithful summary of his preaching on Zacchaeus.

St. Bede the Venerable *Commentary on Luke (summary)*

Bede reads the sycamore as the crowd's verdict overturned: the one the town would not make room for is given the best seat, and the house nobody respectable would enter becomes the address where salvation is announced by name. A faithful summary.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1443:** forgiveness made visible: Jesus reintegrates forgiven sinners into the community and receives them at His table.
- **CCC 2412:** commutative justice requires restitution of stolen goods, with Zacchaeus's pledge cited as the example.
- **CCC 545:** Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom; the invitation itself is the mercy.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week's Coaching

Somebody in your room knows what it is to be pre-judged by religious people: the divorce, the job, the reputation, the family story. This is their session. The crowd's murmur in verse 7 is the sound they expect from church, and the session's whole force is that Jesus honors the town's villain publicly, by name, before any reform. Do not blunt that. Also watch the money talk: it is easy for a group to get comfortable auditing Zacchaeus's wealth from a safe distance. If the conversation turns smug, the leader's move is the honest one: every person at this table has a version of the thing Zacchaeus was clinging to, and Jesus invites Himself past all of them.

Standalone Notes

- No dependencies: this session can be run before, during, or after the six-session core, or on its own.

- If run after the core, the group may connect Jesus at the door of a house, the language of “today,” and the initiative pattern on their own; confirm from the text and add nothing.
- Pairs naturally with the deep-dive on the rich young man: two rich men, two answers; run them in either order and the contrast preaches itself.

Session Goals

1. Establish who Zacchaeus is and what his tree-climb costs him in dignity.
2. Land the reversal: Jesus initiates, by name, before any reform.
3. Walk the order of operations: welcome, joy, then justice as fruit.
4. Land the live discovery in Exodus 22:1: fourfold as self-sentencing at the Law's own rate for a stolen sheep.
5. Close on Luke 19:10: the seeker in the tree was the sought.

Time Note

75 minutes of content in a 90-minute evening. If long: cut the Dig Deeper first, then merge Build questions 1 and 2. Never cut the Exodus discovery; the receipts are the argument.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. If new faces are present, state the two rules: nobody gets called on; nobody's answer gets graded.

“God, you know everything this town knows about each of us, and more. Come to our house anyway. Amen.”

Win

Jim Carrey, at the top of the industry, put it this way: he wished everyone could get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of, so they could see that it is not the answer. Zacchaeus had run exactly that experiment in Jericho, and it had cost him every friend he had.

1. What do people assume about someone before meeting them, based purely on how they made their money?
2. Have you ever wanted to see something badly enough to look ridiculous doing it? What was it?

Build

Read Luke 19:1-7 aloud.

1. Assemble the file on Zacchaeus from verses 1-4: his job, his wealth, his standing with the crowd, and what he is willing to do to see Jesus. What does the tree-climb tell you about him?
2. Verse 5 is full of surprises. Count them: what does Jesus do, what does He know, and what does He announce rather than request?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Chief tax collector: the franchise boss of collaboration, rich off his neighbors, and hated accordingly; the crowd will not even let him through. Yet one of the richest men in town scrambles up a sycamore like a schoolboy because he “sought to see who Jesus was.” Undignified curiosity is still seeking, and it is enough. Then verse 5: Jesus stops, knows his name with no introduction, and does not ask for hospitality but declares it: “I must stay at your house today.” The town's villain is honored by name, in public, before he has reformed anything, and verse 7 supplies the soundtrack: the murmur of every respectable person who has ever watched grace go to the wrong address.

Read Luke 19:8-10 aloud.

3. Look at the order of events across verses 6-8: what happens first, and what follows? What did the welcome produce that a lifetime of the town's contempt never had?
4. Half his goods to the poor, and fourfold restitution to anyone defrauded. Fourfold is a strangely specific number. Let's find where it comes from.

Live discovery: *have the group find Exodus 22:1 and read it aloud.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Joy comes first: he received Him joyfully, and then, unprompted, the reform pours out of the joy. Contempt had decades to fix Zacchaeus and produced a chief tax collector; one welcome produced a philanthropist with a restitution schedule. And the number is a legal citation: Exodus 22:1 sets fourfold restoration as the Law's penalty for a stolen sheep (an ox costs five). Zacchaeus sentences himself at the statute's full rate, publicly, in front of the very people able to hold him to it. This is conversion with receipts: grace was completely free, and his public pledge committed him to more than any court would

have extracted.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Full strength: “Instant conversions are cheap theater. A lifetime of extortion, canceled over one dinner because the celebrity noticed him? He got swept up in a moment, and moments fade.” Grant the kernel: moments do fade, and religious emotion is not reform. Then point at what the text actually reports, because Luke seems to have anticipated the objection: the conversion here is not a feeling but a filing. Half his estate, out the door; fourfold restitution, self-assessed at the Law’s own rate, owed to the exact people best positioned to hold him to it. Every victim in Jericho becomes an auditor of this dinner-table pledge. If it was theater, it was theater with his entire fortune posted as bond. The honest question the story leaves is not whether the moment was real; a pledge this public and this costly answers that. It is why joy accomplished in an evening what shame had failed to do in a career.

Dig Deeper (optional)

Luke has a habit worth showing the group: the word “today.” Today a Savior is born (2:11); today this scripture is fulfilled (4:21); today salvation has come to this house (19:9); and to a dying man, today you will be with me in Paradise (23:43). In Luke, God’s mercy has a delivery date, and it is never “eventually.” Ask the group what it would mean to take the word seriously.

Send

3. “Welcome first, transformation second.” Where have you seen that order work on a real person? Where have you seen the reverse order fail?
4. The crowd murmured because grace went to the wrong address. Whose address would scandalize people today, and what does your answer reveal?

Live It This Week

1. Zacchaeus’s curiosity was undignified and it was enough. Take one undignified step of curiosity this week: the question you have felt silly asking, asked.
2. If there is a person you have written off the way Jericho wrote off Zacchaeus, do one small thing this week that treats them as callable by name.
3. Read Luke 19:1-10 once more, alone, and put yourself in the tree.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: “Lord, you invited yourself past everything the town knew. Do it again, here. Amen.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” **Luke 19:10**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- Luke 19:1-10, the tree, the self-invitation, the joyful welcome, the fourfold pledge, the verdict

Live Discovery Text

- Exodus 22:1, fourfold restitution: the Law's own rate for a stolen sheep, self-imposed

Supporting Texts

- Ezekiel 34:11, 16, I myself will seek the lost (leader background)
- Luke 2:11; 4:21; 23:43, Luke's "today" pattern (Dig Deeper)

Catechism

- CCC 1443, 2412, 545

Memory Verse

- Luke 19:10