

# Adult Teaching Resources

October 30, 2016



## An Apostle's Apprentice – Lessons from Timothy (Sept. 11-Oct 23)

2 Timothy 1:1-14 – “Keep the Faith”

2 Timothy 2:8-15 – “Don't Be Ashamed”

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 – “Read the Instructions”

2 Timothy 4:6-18 (RCL 4:6-8, 16-18) – “Finish the Race”

**Luke 19:1-10 – “Little Big Man”**

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# Little Big Man

Luke 19:1-10

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Note to the teacher:** Today's lesson is an opportunity for class members to "live into" the text through a spiritual exercise known as "holy reading". There are several methods to do this exercise, but the basic idea is to move from familiarity of the text to gaining deeper insight through silence and empathetic reflection. This is an ancient Christian practice (also known as "lectio divina") which is experiencing a revival in the 21st century. Usually, the readings are done in silence as class members keep their eyes closed. I have also included a handout to facilitate reflection and discussion.

**Before the Lesson:** Make copies of the handout, "Holy Reading of Luke 19:1-10" to be used as the Transformational Exercise.

## Fellowship Question

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(Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

Who is a person, not in your normal circles, that you would love to have lunch with? (celebrity, hero, etc.)

When is the last time you climbed a tree? Are there any "tree climbing" stories to share?

## Information

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Usually, I ask you to read the scriptures, but today, I will read it as you listen and use your imagination to live into the story that I will be reading.

Today's Bible lesson concerns Zacchaeus, a man whose short height drove him to rise above others.

Let us get a little bit of background before we try an exercise of listening and imaging ourselves in the story.

[Use the printed lesson and/or the following to give a brief set up for the reading.]

## Information *continued*

Jesus is passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem where Passover is about to be celebrated – and he knows he will be crucified. Knowing Jesus will be passing through their town and knowing how Jesus loves a party, the town has probably prepared a big feast. However, Jesus is determined to make his way to Jerusalem with no plans to eat or spend the night in Jericho. No doubt, this was a disappointment to the party planners and to those who wanted to be in the presence of this religious celebrity.

Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a short man, but a big man as far as wealth goes. He made his money as a chief tax collector. He had paid the taxes for the town to Rome. He then hired minions to serve as tax collectors. These would charge the “real” tax that Rome demanded (which the chief tax collector knew, but the typical person was ignorant of), as well as a commission fee – some of which they kept for themselves and some of which went to the chief tax collector, in this case Zacchaeus.

The people hated being under Rome’s thumb, and they hated anyone who collaborated with Rome. And, the peasants did not think much of the wealthy. The assumption was that wealth was a sign of greed and fiscal abuse. So, Zacchaeus was hated for at least two reasons: He had power as a collaborator with Rome and he had lots of money taken from honest, hard-working Jews – his own people.

[Much of the above was adapted from: Kenneth E. Bailey. Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2008. pp. 175-185.]

## Transformational Exercise

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[Distribute the handout, “Holy Reading of Luke 19:1-10.”]

[Instructions:]

I will read the story three times. After each reading, you have questions to answer on this reflection page. I will not ask for verbal responses after any of the readings, but we will have a chance to share what you’d like after the third reading, when we have completed the reflection questions.

For the first reading, just listen to the story itself. On your handout, there is a question about what you have noticed that you had not noticed before. I will give you a little time to jot a note on your handout about that.

For the second reading, use your imagination to live into the story. It helps to imagine yourself as one of the characters in the story: for example, as a disciple, as a person in the crowd, or as Zacchaeus. See the event through their eyes. Again, I will give you a little time to jot a note on your handout about that.

After the third reading, you will find several reflection questions on your handout. I will give you some time in silence to answer those questions. When you have written what you want, remain in silence as others complete their thoughts. After the silence, I will say a short prayer. Then, I will invite you to share whatever you would like with the other class members.

## Transformational Exercise *continued*

Are there any questions about what we are going to do?

Let's enter a time of quiet reflection. Take a few deep breaths, relax, and be in a prayerful state as you hear the scripture.

[Open in a prayer something like this:] *O God, as we hear your word, open our ears to hear what you would say to us today. Open our spiritual eyes so that we may gain more insight. Amen.*

[The readings:]

For our first reading, simply listen to the story. Try to hear it as if for the first time. Pay attention to what you had not noticed in the story before today's reading. Then, answer the questions on your reflection page.

[Read Luke 19:1-10.]

For the second reading, use your imagination to live into the story. Maybe you will want to imagine yourself as one of the characters in the story. Then, answer the questions on your reflection page.

[Read Luke 19:1-10 a second time.]

For the third and final reading, pay attention to the word, or phrase, or imagine that seems most significant to you. Then, answer the questions on your reflection page.

[Read Luke 19:1-10 a third time.]

[Allow more time than the previous readings for reflection and writing. After it seems that most are finished, close the exercise with a prayer something like this: *We thank you, O God, for your Spirit who speaks to us through ancient stories in far-away lands. Yet, your truth is constant for all generations. Give us the faith to do what you lead us to do because of this passage. Amen.*]

[Debriefing questions:]

Who did you imagine yourself to be in the story?

Looking at the third set of questions, would you be willing to share your answers to one of those?

[Close in a prayer something like this: *We thank you, God, for the grace and compassion you show to sinners like Zacchaeus and like us. We thank you that you welcome all with a loving, hospitable heart. Give us your heart, Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Jesus’ final journey** — Luke gave great significance to Jesus’ final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, the last leg of his active ministry. Luke marked its beginning at 9:51 by saying “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus knew what was coming, but resolutely walked toward the coming danger rather than away from it.

Luke incorporated so many of Jesus’ teachings into the decisive journey that the trip seems elongated, encompassing 10 of Luke’s 24 chapters. Most of the parables unique to Luke find their setting in Jesus’ long walk to Jerusalem, giving them added emphasis.

**Tax collectors and sinners** — Native Hebrews who worked for the Romans and profited from their Jewish brothers by collecting taxes were thought of as the dregs of society. The gospels emphasize this disdain by noting how the scribes and Pharisees chided Jesus for “eating with sinners and tax collectors” (Matt. 9:11, 11:19, Luke 5:30, among others). Yet, in responding to the Pharisees’ self-righteousness, Jesus said “the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom ahead of you,” for some of them had followed John when the scribes and Pharisees wouldn’t (Mat. 21:31-32).

According to Matthew, when Jesus spoke of someone who had caused offense and refused to reconcile, he said “let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Mat. 18:17), that is, someone Jews would normally shun. In this saying Jesus employed the common convention of tax collectors as outcasts, but in his actions Jesus paid special attention to those who were spurned by polite society.

**Sycamore trees** — The tree Zacchaeus climbed was a sycamore-fig tree (*sukomorean*), which could grow as high as 50 feet but typically had branches beginning near the ground. Its fruit bears a resemblance to a small fig, but is not typically eaten. Tour guides routinely take visitors to Jericho by the “Zacchaeus tree,” a large street-side sycamore. It could not possibly be the one Zacchaeus climbed, of course, but offers a visual image of what the tree might have been like.



## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Why pay quadruple?** — Why did Zacchaeus promise to pay back anyone he had defrauded four times over? Perhaps he still remembered his lessons from the synagogue. He knew that there was a rule found in Exodus 22:1 that said anyone convicted of stealing had to repay four times the amount stolen. There was a more lenient rule in Leviticus 6:5 (cf. Numbers 5:6) that said anyone who *confessed* to a theft only had to pay back the amount taken plus one-fifth as interest.

Zacchaeus' offer shows that he was confessing his own error, but willing to pay the same penalty as if he had been caught, tried, and convicted. Perhaps that is how he felt when he looked into Jesus' eyes and saw the love of God reflected there. He was convicted by love, convicted of his sin, and convicted of his need to make it right.

**Son of Abraham** — The term “son of Abraham” usually indicates nothing more than Jewish heritage, but Zacchaeus had been genetically and culturally Jewish all of his life. Why would Jesus said “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham?”

Abraham was known preeminently as a man of faith. The writer of Hebrews summarized the old patriarch's reputation this way: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore’” (Heb. 11:8-12).

When Zacchaeus heard Jesus' call and welcomed him into his home, he also embraced a new understanding of God. Accepting the grace Jesus offered, Zacchaeus became a new man, willing to surrender his wealth in order to right old wrongs and help the poor. With these acts Zacchaeus proved himself to be more than a genetic Jew: he was also a spiritual descendant of Abraham, a man of faith to whom salvation had come.

**Two men, two stories** — Note that the story of Zacchaeus, in Luke's gospel, follows the healing of a blind man as Jesus approached the city. In that story (18:35-43), the blind man, who lived on the margins of society, called out to Jesus in hopes of being healed. The crowd sought to keep him from reaching or bothering Jesus, but Jesus stopped, called him over, and healed him.

The story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10) also involves a man who was marginalized by society and who wanted to see Jesus. Again, the crowd stood in his way, but Zacchaeus made himself visible and Jesus stopped and called him into relationship as a son of Abraham to whom salvation had come.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Is the story of Zacchaeus really a conversion story?

In the Bible study, we have followed the traditional interpretation that the story of Zacchaeus is one of penitence and conversion: Zacchaeus met Jesus and after an unreported conversation, was convicted of his wrongdoing and had a change of heart, leading him to pledge that he would give away much of his wealth. This interpretation gives the present tense verbs Zacchaeus used a future sense, which is not unusual.

There is another way to read the story, however. Qualifying words such as “Here and now” (NIV), which indicate a new practice, are not present in the Greek but added to support the interpretation that Zacchaeus has changed.

If the present tense verbs for “give” and “pay back” are given an iterative sense, the statement takes on an entirely different meaning. Craig A. Evans notes that a literal translation could be “Behold, Lord, half of my wealth I give to the poor, and if I have ever cheated anyone I pay back fourfold.”

Evans further notes that there is no indication in the text that Zacchaeus made his speech after a conversation with Jesus, perhaps over dinner, but that it follows immediately upon the crowd’s accusation that Jesus should not accept hospitality from such a sinner. Since there is no spoken confession of sin, Zacchaeus’s statement could be seen as a simple defense before the crowd, an argument that Jesus should not judge him by his occupation as the crowd has done, for he habitually gives half his wealth to the poor, and if he discovers an inappropriate charge, he pays it back four times over. For Evans, “This interpretation seems to make the best sense of what is actually found in the Greek text . . . Here again we see Jesus in the role of champion of the outcast and of those who are maligned because of unwarranted assumptions and religious hypocrisy.” (*Luke*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011], 279-281).

Other scholars, including John Nolland, defend the traditional interpretation that the story concerns salvation rather than vindication. Nolland argues that “the whole tone of the story finally counts against this view, from the image of Zacchaeus that emerges in vv 3–4, via the mission echoes of v 6, through the role of the other statements similar to v 7 in the Gospel account, to the salvation-of-the-lost emphasis of vv 9–10” (*Luke* 18:35–24:53, vol. 35C of Word Biblical Commentary. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 906).

Given that Jesus declares in the following verse: “today salvation has come to this house,” we seem to have more going on than an attempt to vindicate Zacchaeus as a rare tax collector who was both fair and generous. Jesus’ closing comment, “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (v. 10) seems to affirm the view that Zacchaeus, a lost sheep of the house of Israel, had been found.

## Handout: Holy Reading of Luke 19:1-10

*After the first reading:*

What did you hear that you've not heard in this story before?

*After the second reading:*

How were you able to live into this story? (senses, emotions, thoughts, etc.)

Did you choose a character to live through? If so, who?

*After the third reading:*

What word, phrase, or image "called" to you for further reflection?

Why is this word significant to you today?

What is it that God wants to say to you today in this text?

What insights did you gain through this exercise?

What action(s) do you want to take based on your insights?