

Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1–10

A story-specific guide for reading, retelling, and exploring together.

READ THE STORY

From the Bible

The Story Block follows:

Luke 19:1–10

If you would rather read directly from Scripture, begin there.

BIBLE BLOCKS NARRATIVE

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was short and the crowd blocked his view. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry down. I must stay at your house today.”

Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly, but the people grumbled, “He is the guest of a sinner.”

Then Zacchaeus gave to the poor and repaid anyone he had cheated.

Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

MEET THE STORY BLOCK

The six pictures follow the movement of Luke's story.

Side 1

Zacchaeus with a money bag

Side 2

Jesus entering Jericho

Side 3

Zacchaeus in the tree and Jesus below

Side 4

The people grumbling

Side 5

Zacchaeus giving money back

Side 6

Salvation comes to Zacchaeus's house

The pictures are not meant to show every detail in the passage.
They are memory joggers.

As your child becomes familiar with them, the six pictures can help them carry the sequence of the biblical story in their memory.

THIS WEEK WITH YOUR BLOCK

Each time you return to the story:

1. Read or remember the story.

This helps to anchor the retelling to a specific source of truth. The leader can often turn the sides of the story block to help participants make the connection.

2. Retell it with the Story Block.

3. Intentionally choose one additional Activity Block experience.

One activity is enough.

You do not need to finish everything in this guide.

Come back to the same story throughout the week and let familiarity grow.

RETELL

Tell the Story Using the Six Pictures

Retelling is the heart of Bible Blocks.

Return to it every time you explore this story.

For younger children, one sentence or thought for each picture is enough.

For children who know the story well, hand them the block and see how much they can tell without help.

SIDE 1

Zacchaeus with a Money Bag

Try:

“Who is this man?”

“What is he holding?”

“What kind of job did Zacchaeus have?”

A simple retelling might begin:

“Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.”

For Parents: Why Zacchaeus’s Job Matters

Luke tells us two things about Zacchaeus right away: he was a **chief tax collector**, and he was **rich**.

That is not just background information. It shapes the entire story.

Tax collectors were disliked because they worked within the Roman tax system. They collected money from their own people under the authority of Rome. The system also created opportunities for overcharging, fraud, and personal profit.

Zacchaeus was not simply a tax collector. He was a **chief** tax collector. That probably means he stood higher in the collection system, perhaps supervising others or profiting from a larger tax operation.

Jericho was an important city for trade and taxation. So Zacchaeus's wealth would have made sense in that location, but it also would have carried a bad reputation. Many people would have assumed his riches came through taking advantage of others.

This may be why the crowd later calls him a sinner.

This first picture helps children see that Zacchaeus's money is part of the story. By the end, that same money will become part of his repentance.

SIDE 2

Jesus Entering Jericho

Try:

"Where is Jesus?"

"What city is he passing through?"

"Who does Jesus notice?"

A simple retelling might continue:

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through."

For Parents: Jesus Is on the Way to Jerusalem

Luke places this story near the end of Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem.

That matters.

Jesus is moving toward the cross. The story of Zacchaeus is not a random interruption. It shows what Jesus' whole mission is about.

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, but he still stops for Zacchaeus.

This is one of Luke's great emphases. Jesus sees people the crowd overlooks. He notices those who are pushed aside. He welcomes those others have written off.

Jericho also connects Zacchaeus's story to the healing of the blind man just before it. In that story, a blind man near Jericho cries out to Jesus while the crowd tells him to be quiet. Jesus stops and restores his sight. Then, in Zacchaeus's story, another man wants to see Jesus, and again the crowd gets in the way.

The blind man cannot see because he is blind.

Zacchaeus cannot see because he is short and blocked by the crowd.

Both need Jesus to stop.

The important surprise is this: Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus, but Jesus is already seeking Zacchaeus.

SIDE 3

Zacchaeus in the Tree and Jesus Below

Try:

"Why did Zacchaeus climb the tree?"

"What did Jesus do when he reached the tree?"

"What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus?"

A simple retelling might be:

"Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, so he climbed a sycamore tree. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and called him by name."

Then add Jesus' words:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. I must stay at your house today."

For Parents: Zacchaeus Wants to See, but Jesus Sees Him

Luke says Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was.

We are not told exactly why.

Maybe he was curious.

Maybe he had heard that Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners.

Maybe he wondered if there could be mercy for someone like him.
Maybe he simply wanted a glimpse.

Luke leaves the motive open.

But Zacchaeus has two obstacles.

First, he is short.

Second, the crowd is in the way.

The crowd is probably more than a neutral obstacle. A respected person might have been allowed through. Zacchaeus likely would not have been. The crowd that gathers around Jesus becomes a wall between Zacchaeus and Jesus.

So Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree.

That would have looked undignified for a wealthy adult man. He risks looking ridiculous. But he does it anyway because he wants to see Jesus.

The sycamore tree was climbable, with low branches and broad leaves. Zacchaeus may have hoped to see Jesus without being seen by everyone else.

But Jesus sees him.

Jesus stops, looks up, and calls him by name.

Not “tax collector.”

Not “sinner.”

Not “traitor.”

Zacchaeus.

Then Jesus says he **must** stay at Zacchaeus’s house **today**.

Both words matter.

In Luke, “must” often points to God’s saving purpose. Jesus is not merely saying, “I need a place to stay.” He is saying that this visit belongs to his mission.

And “today” points to the immediate arrival of salvation. Jesus is not speaking about a distant possibility. Grace is coming to Zacchaeus’s house now.

Zacchaeus climbed the tree to see Jesus.

Jesus came to the tree to seek Zacchaeus.

SIDE 4

The People Grumbling

Try:

“How did the people respond?”

“What did they say about Zacchaeus?”

“Why were they upset?”

A simple retelling might continue:

“Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly. But the people grumbled and said, ‘Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”

For Parents: The Crowd Is Right and Wrong

The crowd’s complaint is important.

They say Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

In one sense, they are right. Zacchaeus is not presented as an innocent man whom everyone has completely misunderstood. His later promise to repay those he has cheated strongly suggests that he really has wronged people.

But the crowd is wrong about what Jesus should do with sinners.

They think Zacchaeus’s sin means Jesus should stay away.
Jesus knows Zacchaeus’s lostness is exactly why he must come near.

The crowd sees contamination.
Jesus sees rescue.

The crowd sees a man to avoid.
Jesus sees a man to seek.

This same pattern appears earlier in Luke, when religious leaders complain that Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus repeatedly refuses to let respectable people decide who is beyond the reach of grace.

This is a good place for parents to slow down.

The crowd is not wrong to think sin matters.
They are wrong to think sin puts Zacchaeus beyond restoration.

Jesus' welcome does not excuse Zacchaeus's greed.
Jesus' welcome produces repentance.

That is the difference.

SIDE 5

Zacchaeus Giving Money Back

Try:

“What did Zacchaeus say he would do?”

“Who would he give money to?”

“What would he do if he had cheated someone?”

A simple retelling might be:

“Zacchaeus said, ‘Lord, I will give half of my possessions to the poor. If I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much.’”

For Parents: Repentance Becomes Concrete

Zacchaeus's response is one of the clearest pictures of repentance in Luke.

He does not merely say:

“I feel bad.”

“I will try harder.”

“I am sorry people are upset.”

Instead, he names the part of his life that needs to change: money.

That matters because Zacchaeus's sin was economic and relational. If he had cheated people, real people had lost money. If he had used his power to exploit others, real people had been harmed.

So repentance means repair.

Zacchaeus does two things.

First, he gives half of his possessions to the poor.

Second, he promises to repay fourfold anyone he has defrauded.

This is not the smallest possible response. It is generous and costly.

It is also important to keep the order straight.

Zacchaeus is not buying salvation.

He is responding to grace.

Jesus sees him first.

Jesus calls him first.

Jesus comes to his house first.

Then Zacchaeus responds.

The giving does not cause salvation.

The giving shows that salvation has reached him.

This also contrasts Zacchaeus with the rich ruler in Luke 18. The rich ruler cannot release his wealth and walks away sad. Zacchaeus receives Jesus joyfully and opens his hands.

Both men are rich.

Only one is transformed.

SIDE 6

Salvation Comes to Zacchaeus's House

Try:

“What did Jesus say came to Zacchaeus's house?”

“What did Jesus call Zacchaeus?”

“Why did the Son of Man come?”

A simple ending might be:

“Jesus said, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.’”

For Parents: The Whole Story Leads Here

This final picture is the meaning of the whole story.

Jesus says:

“Today salvation has come to this house.”

That connects back to what Jesus said earlier:

“I must stay at your house today.”

When Jesus comes to Zacchaeus’s house, salvation comes with him.

Jesus also says Zacchaeus is a **son of Abraham**.

The crowd had treated Zacchaeus as an outsider. He may have been Jewish by birth, but his work with the Roman tax system and his reputation for dishonesty made people view him as if he no longer belonged among God’s people.

Jesus publicly overturns that verdict.

Zacchaeus too belongs.

Not because his past was clean.

Not because his sin did not matter.

But because Jesus has sought him, and Zacchaeus has responded with repentance.

Then Jesus gives the mission statement that explains the whole passage:

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus thought he was looking for Jesus.

Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus.

The lost man is found.

The sinner is restored.

The greedy man becomes generous.

The rejected man is welcomed.

The house of a tax collector becomes a place where salvation is announced.

That is where the story has been going all along.

GO DEEPER WITH RETELL

Once your child knows the six pictures, hand them the block and invite them to tell the whole story.

You can prompt only when needed:

“What happened first?”

“Who was Zacchaeus?”

“Why did he climb the tree?”

“What did Jesus say?”

“What did the crowd do?”

“What changed for Zacchaeus?”

“What did Jesus say at the end?”

For older children, open **Luke 19:1–10** afterward.

Ask:

“What does Luke include that is not pictured on the block?”

“What words did Jesus actually say?”

“What details did you remember?”

“What part of the story changed Zacchaeus?”

The goal is not perfect memorization.

The Bible is the source.

The Story Block helps your child remember and retell what the Bible says.

REFLECT

Slow Down and Respond

Reflect gives children space to notice something in the story through drawing or writing.

Simple Start

Choose one:

Draw Zacchaeus in the tree.

Talk about why he climbed up.

Draw Jesus looking up.

Talk about what Jesus said.

Draw Zacchaeus’s house.

Add simple lines around the house to show that salvation came there.

Draw coins being given back.

Talk about how Zacchaeus wanted to make wrong things right.

Ask:

“Tell me about your picture.”

The goal is not artistic skill.

The drawing gives your child another way to think about the story.

Go Deeper

Choose one prompt:

“If I were Zacchaeus in the tree, I might...”

“The crowd grumbled because...”

“One thing this story teaches me about Jesus is...”

“Zacchaeus changed when...”

“Making wrong things right means...”

“One thing I want to remember from this story is...”

Children can draw, write several sentences, or make a journal entry.

CHARACTER

Experience the Story Through Someone’s Eyes

Characters include:

- Jesus
- Zacchaeus
- someone in the crowd
- a poor person
- someone Zacchaeus had cheated
- someone in Zacchaeus’s household

The goal is not to invent details.

The goal is to slow down and notice what the story looks like from one person’s perspective.

Simple Start

Pick one person.

Ask:

“What was this person doing?”

“What happened to them?”

“What did Jesus say or do?”

“What changed in the story?”

You can also ask:

“How do you think this person might have felt?”

Use **might** deliberately.

Luke tells us Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly. Luke also tells us the people grumbled. But he does not tell us every person’s feelings.

Children are allowed to imagine, but help them recognize the difference between imagination and something Scripture actually says.

You can also draw several circles on a page and ask child to draw their eyes and mouth to show how they may have felt during the story.

Go Deeper

Retell from one person’s perspective.

Try:

“I am Zacchaeus. I wanted to see Jesus, but...”

“I am Jesus. I came to Jericho and saw...”

“I am someone in the crowd. I saw Jesus go to...”

“I am someone Zacchaeus cheated. When he gave the money back...”

“I am in Zacchaeus’s house. Today Jesus...”

Then ask:

“What does this person help us notice about Jesus?”

“What changed for this person?”

“What does this person teach us about God?”

“What does this person teach us about ourselves?”

CONNECT

Connect This Story to Another Story

Connect helps children notice that Bible stories are connected through repeated words, places, people, actions, and themes.

If this is your family’s first Story Block, you may want to skip Connect for now. You can also use a Bible story your child already knows, even if you do not have a block for it yet.

As your collection grows, Connect gives children another reason to handle the blocks, compare the pictures, and begin seeing connections across Scripture.

Simple Start: Compare Two Pictures

Before you begin, choose another Story Block that has a clear connection to this one.

Place the two blocks next to each other and turn them so the connected pictures are already facing your child.

You have already found the connection. Your child’s job is simply to notice and talk about what the two pictures have in common.

Here is an example of a strong connection for Zacchaeus.

Jesus Calls Matthew

Matthew 9:9–13

Place the Zacchaeus picture with the money bag beside the picture of Matthew at the tax booth.

Matthew and Zacchaeus are both tax collectors.

Jesus sees Matthew and says:

“Follow me.”

Jesus sees Zacchaeus and says:

“I must stay at your house today.”

In both stories, Jesus moves toward someone many people would have avoided.

Ask:

“What job did Matthew and Zacchaeus have?”

“What did Jesus do in both stories?”

“Why were people upset?”

“What does Jesus show us about the people others reject?”

Both stories show Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners.

Both stories also show that Jesus' welcome leads to a changed life.

Go Deeper: Discover Your Own Connection

Place several or all of your Story Blocks where everyone can see and handle them.

This time, do not choose the connection ahead of time.

Invite your child or family members to pick up the blocks, turn them around, compare the pictures, and take their time looking for something that connects Zacchaeus with another story.

The connection might be:

- **the same person**
- **the same place**
- **similar words**
- **a similar action**
- **the way someone responds to Jesus**
- **something Jesus does**
- **a repeated theme**

Ask:

“What connection did you find?”

“Which two pictures helped you notice it?”

“What is similar?”

“What is different?”

“Does seeing these stories together help you notice anything new?”

Possible connections include:

Bartimaeus

Both Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus are near Jericho. Both want access to Jesus. In both stories, the crowd becomes an obstacle.

Matthew

Both Matthew and Zacchaeus are tax collectors. Jesus moves toward both.

There may be connections you did not expect.

That is part of the activity.

The goal is not for your child to discover the connection the parent already has in mind. The goal is to practice looking closely at stories and recognizing meaningful relationships across Scripture.

If you only have one Story Block so far, feel free to skip Connect or ask:

“Does this story remind you of another Bible story you already know?”

Parents can help by suggesting a familiar story when needed.

As your Bible Blocks collection grows, Connect can become increasingly child-led—giving children the opportunity to spread out the blocks, explore them, and discover for themselves how the stories of Scripture fit together.

ACT OUT

Bring the Story to Life

This story is easy to act out because it has movement, surprise, dialogue, and a clear change.

You do not need costumes or elaborate props.

Simple Start: Freeze Frames

This can be done individually or in groups. Look at the different sides of the block and determine a scene you are going to capture in a pose.

Say:

“Freeze!”

Everyone guesses the **scene**.

Go Deeper: Act Out the Whole Story

Choose roles:

- Narrator
- Jesus
- Zacchaeus
- crowd member or crowd members
- poor person
- person Zacchaeus cheated
- someone in Zacchaeus's house, if you have enough people

Simple props: Give kids 10 minutes to scour the house for props they might want to incorporate.

- chair, couch cushion, or blanket = tree
- small bag = money bag
- coins, paper circles, or blocks = money
- doorway, table, or blanket = Zacchaeus's house

Let the narrator turn the Story Block one side at a time as they narrate the story. Sometimes kids even like to rehearse before performing.

PRAYER

Talk to God About the Story

Simple Start: Echo Prayer

One person says one line.

Everyone repeats the same line before moving to the next.

Leader: Jesus,

Family: Jesus,

Leader: Thank you for seeing Zacchaeus.

Family: Thank you for seeing Zacchaeus.

Leader: Thank you for seeking the lost.

Family: Thank you for seeking the lost.

Leader: Help us welcome your grace.

Family: Help us welcome your grace.

Leader: Help us make wrong things right.

Family: Help us make wrong things right.

Leader: Amen.

Family: Amen.

Young children may enjoy taking turns being the leader.

Go Deeper: Three-Part Prayer

Invite each person to finish:

Jesus, thank you for...

Jesus, help me...

Jesus, please help...

Or ask:

“What would you like to say to Jesus after hearing him call Zacchaeus by name?”

“Is there anything you want Jesus to help you make right?”

“Who can we pray for today?”

Children can pray aloud, silently, or in writing.

FIND

Find the Story in the Bible

The Story Block is a memory tool.

Scripture remains the source of the story.

Simple Start: Find Luke 19

Help your child locate:

Luke 19:1–10

Show them:

- the book: Luke
- the chapter: 19
- the verses: 1–10

Let them hold the Bible and find where the story begins.

Then ask:

“Can you find Zacchaeus’s name?”

Look for:

“Zacchaeus.”

You can also ask:

“Can you find the word ‘today’?”

That word is important in the story.

Go Deeper: Match Scripture to the Block

Use each picture to find its place in Luke.

Side 1

Luke 19:2

Zacchaeus is introduced as a chief tax collector and a rich man.

Side 2

Luke 19:1

Jesus enters Jericho and is passing through.

Side 3

Luke 19:3–6

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus, climbs a sycamore tree, and Jesus calls him down.

Side 4

Luke 19:7

The people grumble that Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

Side 5

Luke 19:8

Zacchaeus promises to give to the poor and repay anyone he has cheated.

Side 6

Luke 19:9–10

Jesus announces that salvation has come to this house and says the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

Then ask:

“What does the Bible tell us that is not pictured on the block?”

“Which side has the most verses connected to it?”

“Which side shows the biggest change?”

“What words does Jesus say?”

MUSIC

Remember the Story Through Sound

There is no single right way to use Music.

You can sing.

Play.

Listen.

Move.

Or create something together.

Simple Start: Tree Rhythm

Clap, tap your knees, use shakers, or make a simple rhythm.

Try a call and response:

Leader: Zacchaeus climbed—

Family: Up in a tree!

Leader: Jesus said—

Family: Come down to me!

Leader: The people grumbled—

Family: But Jesus came!

Leader: Salvation came—

Family: To this house today!

Repeat it faster, slower, louder, or quieter.

Sing Together

Choose a familiar family or worship song about:

- Jesus seeking the lost
- grace
- forgiveness
- joy
- generosity
- following Jesus

- God's love

Use instruments if you have them.

Young children can use shakers or simply clap.

Spotify or YouTube are completely fine too.

Create Your Own Song

Let each person contribute a line.

You might begin:

**Zacchaeus climbed up in a tree.
Jesus said, "Come down to me."
Joy came into Zacchaeus's house.
Jesus seeks and saves the lost.**

Families who enjoy experimenting can use an AI music tool to turn family-written lyrics into a song.

The goal is not musical skill.

It is another way to carry the story in memory.

WONDER

Make Space for Questions

Wonder gives children permission to be curious about Scripture.

Not every question needs an immediate answer.

Simple Start: Share One Wonder

Choose one picture from the Story Block and begin:

“I wonder...”

Try:

“I wonder what Jericho looked like.”

“I wonder why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus.”

“I wonder what it felt like to climb the tree.”

“I wonder how Zacchaeus felt when Jesus called his name.”

“I wonder what happened when Jesus came to Zacchaeus’s house.”

Then ask:

“What do you wonder?”

Go Deeper: Let the Questions Come

Give your child time to ask whatever questions the story brings to mind.

Try:

“What are you curious about?”

“Is there anything in this story that doesn’t make sense to you?”

“What would you want to ask Jesus?”

“What would you want to ask Zacchaeus?”

“What would you want to ask the crowd?”

Resist the urge to answer every question right away.

Some questions have answers you can find in Scripture. Some may take more study. Others may simply remain unanswered.

Make it normal in your family to say:

“I don’t know.”

“That’s a good question.”

“Let’s see if the Bible tells us.”

“We may not know the answer to that one.”

Wonder is a chance to show children that questions are welcome and that they do not need to hide uncertainty.

Scripture is worth exploring, and your family can keep learning together.

REMEMBER

You do not need to work through this entire guide.

Begin with the story.

Retell it every time.

Then intentionally choose one additional activity.

Follow your child's curiosity.

Keep it simple.

Come back to the story again.

BIBLE BLOCKS

bibleblocks.org/resources