

How Jesus Loved Zacchaeus and His Sinner Buddies

The Point: Jesus accepts us.

Scripture Connect: Luke 19:1–9

Supplies for all session 7 activities and options: Bible, index cards, pens, marshmallows (save them to use in session 8!), bag, mousetraps, glasses of water, cotton swabs, dish detergent, small packets of pepper (we asked a café and they gave us a handful), can of soup, dented can of soup, hand mirror, timer, sidewalk chalk

The Basics for Leaders

How could Jesus hang out with a notorious criminal and his cronies? Didn't Jesus worry about his reputation?

Actually, no!

Jesus was way more interested in changing lives than in what people thought of him. He engaged with Zacchaeus, and as a result, Zacchaeus was never again the same.

Today you and your kids will explore how to accept people without necessarily endorsing their behavior.

Sort of like what our friend Jesus did with us!

The catch: You've brought something from the "cafeteria special" with you. Grimace with disgust as you handle the bagged marshmallows, muttering "I hope this doesn't leak" as you move it.

Read aloud three cards picked at random. Add flourishes such as "fried," "refried," "chopped," "grilled," or "sugared" at random when describing one or more of the items.

After running through several cards, give the bag to the kid who's proclaimed as most accepting. Let that winner reveal the bag's contents.

Say: **Some stuff we wouldn't eat; we'd rather go hungry. But what about accepting people? Do we have to accept everyone, or can we pass on some people by saying "No thanks" to people we don't like?**

We'll dig into the whole "accept people" thing in a few minutes, right after a game of Mousetraps and Marshmallows!

Gung-Ho Game

MOUSETRAPS AND MARSHMALLOWS

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: mousetraps, marshmallows

Have kids take off their shoes. Set a half dozen spring-loaded mousetraps in a cluster about 10 feet away. As you set traps, explain that if kids value their toes, they won't want armed and dangerous mousetraps lying around.

Give kids marshmallows and explain that kids can toss the marshmallows at the traps to trigger them, but not to get closer than the boundary you set.

If kids aren't scoring many hits, move the boundary up to about 5 feet from the marshmallows. You scoop up misses and put those marshmallows back in play.

After a few minutes call a halt to the barrage and trigger the mousetraps yourself with some marshmallows.

Have kids sit, pull on their shoes, and talk about this:

Say: **Those mousetraps weren't welcome or wanted here in a room where we weren't wearing shoes. Tell about a time you didn't feel welcome someplace, and why you didn't feel welcome.**

As for me ...

Being with Jesus changed Zacchaeus. Notice: Jesus didn't tell Zacchaeus to change first *before* Jesus spent time with him. Jesus didn't love the bad things Zacchaeus had done, but he *did* love Zacchaeus.

We're like Zacchaeus. We don't change to try to become good enough to come to Jesus. We just come to Jesus so the bad things we've done can be forgiven and so Jesus can change us.

In your trio, talk about this:

- What's a lesson you can learn from what happened with Zacchaeus?

After trios talk, ask if anyone will share with the whole group what was shared in trios.

Thank kids for sharing and then sum up: **Jesus accepts us like he accepted Zacchaeus and his buddies. He doesn't approve of everything we've done or will do in the future, but his love is big enough to forgive us when we ask for forgiveness. And his love is big enough to walk with us when we choose to follow him!**

CLOSING PRAYER

PASS-AROUND PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: can of soup, dented can of soup, hand mirror, Bible

Have kids sit in a circle. Hold up the can of soup.

Say: **Sometimes we look at other people and see what's good, but sometimes** (hold up the dented can of soup) **we look at ourselves and see only what's bad.**

When Jesus looks at us, he sees us as we really are—both outside and inside. Pass around the mirror and have kids look at themselves as you continue. **We might be a bit dented, a bit broken, but we're a lot loved. Just like Jesus accepted Zacchaeus, he accepts us. And like Zacchaeus, through Jesus we find the power to be the people he wants us to be. Listen to what God's Word says about you in the eyes of God.**

TIP

If you're reading several Bible passages, mark them in your Bible before kids arrive so you can easily flip from one passage to the next.

Few pairs will be able to do it. At the end of 60 seconds, ask:

- **How did that feel? Why?**

Say: **We aren't used to people looking at us so long unless they're judging us in some way, maybe because they're mad at us or don't like us. Today we discovered that Jesus looks at us with acceptance, not judgment. He's calling us into a friendship with him that will change us; but before helping us grow, he accepts us.**

We don't have to ever turn away from our friend Jesus!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

FREE SIDEWALK ACTIVITY COURSE

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: sidewalk chalk

Before kids arrive, determine a stretch of sidewalk to turn into an activity course.

Arm each child with sidewalk chalk. Explain how you'll work together to turn a sidewalk into a free activity course by writing something on the concrete every 3 feet.

Before going outside, have kids choose what to write. Some options include: "Three jumping jacks," "Twirl in a circle," "Take a bow," "Walk like a zombie," "Howl like a wolf," "Sing a song," and "Smile!"

As the kids write, you write at the beginning of the course, "Free Activity Course—All Are Welcome to Play!"

After creating the course go back inside and, as a group, discuss:

- **We invited everyone to play, no charge. How's that like or unlike how Jesus invites people to follow him?**