



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

It's Personal / Week 4

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

It's personal because Jesus loves you no matter what.

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students understand that Jesus loves them no matter what, and they can offer a no-matter-what love to the world around them.

SCRIPTURE

No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39 NLT).

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- We've all done something we knew we shouldn't have done.
- *(Communicator Note: Tell a personal story about a time when you did something or made a decision that was "against the rules"—be sure to keep it light-hearted.)*

TENSION

- When you and I do something we know we shouldn't, we all have the same, immediate reaction: we HIDE.
- The very first humans made the very first mistake, and their very first reaction was to hide.
- We all have a tendency, not just to hide from our teachers, our social media followers, or our parents, but to hide from God too.
- Most of us have a pretty solid idea that however God reacts when we mess up...it isn't good for us.
- It's easy to talk about God's love in theory, but when we've messed up, things get personal and it just feels different.
- There's more to the story.

TRUTH

- Jesus is already super famous and He pauses because this guy, Zacchaeus is sitting up in a tree.
- Zacchaeus has a reputation for being a pretty bad human.

- And Jesus looks at that guy, a “bad guy” (*gesture to the white board*), and basically says, “Come down out of that tree. I’m going to your house. We’re going to throw a party”.
- The crowd was filled with people who felt like they had done all the right things.
- Jesus chooses Zacchaeus even before Zacchaeus decides to make right for all the wrong he had done.
- Jesus called his name – knowing full well exactly what he did for a living – and it was up to Zacchaeus to decide whether or not he would accept the love Jesus was giving in that moment.
- *When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy (Luke 19:5-6 NLT).*
- Time after time in the Bible we see that Jesus is constantly seeking those who mess up, and extending love and grace.
- Jesus looked at the worst thing Zacchaeus had done and realized there was a great opportunity to destroy feelings of shame, or even guilt, that Zacchaeus might have been living with.
- *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39 NLT).*
- **God’s love is not a sliding scale or dependent on how GOOD we think we are, or how BAD we think we are.**
- **It’s personal because Jesus knows your potential.**
- God doesn’t look at us differently just because we mess up.
- **I can trust God with not just the parts of me that do right, but also the parts of me that do wrong.**

APPLICATION

- Sometimes we allow ourselves to live in the guilt or shame of the things we’ve done.
- You have a choice, just like Zacchaeus had a choice that day in the tree. You can either stay in that tree and refuse to accept the love God gives unconditionally, or you can choose to believe God loves you no matter what.
- Here are two things you can do to begin to grasp how big and wide and deep and extraordinary God’s love is for you:
 1. **Name it.**
 2. **Confess it.**
- Who are you most like in the story?

LANDING

- There is right and there is wrong in the world, but that does not have to define us.
- You need a group of people who know you personally, who know your story, and will love you when you mess up.
- Small group is where we remind each other what is true even when it doesn’t feel true—that **God loves you (and likes you) and is with you NO MATTER WHAT.**

INTERACTIVE

This Interactive starts in the Tension section and continues throughout the Truth section (see those sections for more details).

For this Interactive you’ll need...

- 2 whiteboards
- Dry erase marker
- 2 easels



TEACHING SCRIPT

It's Personal / Week 4

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

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HOME

BOTTOM LINE

It's personal because Jesus loves you no matter what.

INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

Okay, let's be honest. We've all done something we knew we shouldn't have done.

(Communicator Note: Tell a personal story about a time when you did something or made a decision that was "against the rules"—be sure to keep it light-hearted.)

One time in high school, my friends and I did something a little stupid. Now I usually kept to myself; I actually liked following the rules. But one night—when we were supposed to just go grab a burger—my friends decided they wanted to go to school. In the middle of the night.

And...better yet, they didn't want to just GO to our high school, they wanted to go ON TOP OF our high school.

So that's what we did. We found garbage cans and benches, and made a super-sketchy mountain of random things, and then climbed on top of the roof.

We did it. But that's not the point when I knew I was in the middle of doing something I shouldn't have done. Not yet.

Once we got down, put everything back, and were all the way back to the parking lot—ready to head out without anyone knowing, I found a tennis ball. And after a night of already just doing something crazy on a whim, I just picked it up. No big deal. I threw it. No big deal. And it hit an empty car. No big deal.

Except... It wasn't an empty car. You know how I knew that? Because... all of a sudden, the driver-side door swung open and a random guy—who knows why he was there (I didn't know)—came out and started running at me.

What'd I do? Um, I ran of course! I ran the fastest I've ever run, and the fastest I've ever run since.

So the scene was me running, a guy chasing me, and my friends following behind trying to make sure that this night didn't get any worse.

I finally got some distance away from the guy and I hid in a bush. And let me tell you, I stayed hidden until one of my friend's mom basically stopped by in her car and saved my life.

THAT was when I knew I had done something I shouldn't have done.

So whether it was like something I did or something else—we've all done something we shouldn't have done.

TENSION

3 MINUTES

And here's something you already know: when you and I do something we know we shouldn't, we all have the same, immediate reaction: **we HIDE**. Here's what I mean: maybe you've...

- Lied about who was at a party and promised it was only yourself and a friend hanging out.
- Hacked the system to make sure your parents didn't get the notification that you failed a test.
- Kept secrets in your Snapchat that you pray stay in your DM's and never accidentally post.
- Pretended your bad decision was all somebody else's idea and not your own.

It's all a form of hiding. AND, this isn't just a YOU thing. This isn't a teenager thing. The instinct to hide our failures is an everybody thing. Every adult you know has their own way of hiding when they make mistakes. We all do it, and we have since the beginning of time. In fact, maybe you know that the very first humans made the very first mistake and their very first reaction was to hide. Yeah. It's a thing we all do. And like those very first humans, we all have a tendency, not just to hide from our teachers, our social media followers, or our parents, but to hide from God too.

And we might have a pretty good reason.

Maybe you grew up hearing stories about God being angry, about God destroying or punishing people, and you learned early on to keep your distance. Or maybe, like me, it was more subtle than that. Maybe you grew up hearing "God is love", but His love felt more like a sliding scale. He loved you more when you were good, but when you weren't, He was disappointed, angry or distant.



(Communicator Note: for this Interactive, you'll be using 2 whiteboards to illustrate how because of the distance we feel from God, we tend to organize ourselves—and others—into one of two categories: "good people" or "bad people". Prepare each whiteboard before your message on either side of your teaching space by placing them on an easel and writing "Good" on one whiteboard and "Bad" on the other.)

Say this: "Or maybe it wasn't a sliding scale and it was one of two things. Maybe instead we may have grown up with the idea that there were two categories: "Good people and Bad people". Bad

people do bad things. Good people do good things. God likes good people. God doesn't like bad people. It sounds silly and childish when I say it that way, but to some degree that's the idea we all work from."

However you think about it, by the time we're in high school, most of us have a pretty solid idea that however God reacts when we mess up...it isn't good for us.

So, we hide.

- **We show up less.**
- **We speak up less.**
- **We pray less.**
- **We keep our distance from God and from His people.**

It's easy to talk about God's love in theory, but when we've messed up, things get personal and it just feels different.

And if that's you tonight, I want you to know that that response is normal. If you walked in here feeling like you needed to stay toward the back of the room, keep your distance, stay low-key because of something you did or something you said, I get it, and you are welcome to just sit and observe—no one is going to be mad at you.

But I also want you to know there's more to the story, and what we talk about tonight may just change the way you see God, and yourself, forever.

TRUTH

7 MINUTES

For the past few weeks, we've been looking at the life of a guy named Zacchaeus and this one interaction he had with Jesus.

(Communicator Note: Try continuing to use the whiteboards throughout this section.)

Quick recap of what's going on here: Jesus is on His way to the cross. He's already super famous and He pauses because this guy, Zacchaeus is sitting up in a tree. Now Zacchaeus has a reputation for being a pretty bad human—basically a sellout, a cheat, a liar, a thief...all of those would have been words used to describe him. And Jesus looks at that guy, a "bad guy" (*gesture to the whiteboard*), and basically says, "Come down out of that tree. I'm going to your house. We're going to throw a party".

If that sounds confusing, it's because it was. And the people who saw it were not happy about it. You might've even considered them the "good people" (*gesture to the whiteboard*).

Let's be honest, we probably would be upset too.

The crowd was filled with people who felt like they had done all the right things—they had prayed, fasted, made sacrifices to God, chosen right instead of wrong. These are the people Zacchaeus had been stealing money from. Many of them had even gone poor because of this man. And now Jesus is passing through their town, overlooks them (*gesture to the whiteboard: the "good"*)

people) and chooses him (*gesture to the whiteboard: the “bad” person*). Jesus chooses Zacchaeus even before Zacchaeus decides to make right for all the wrong he had done.

Nobody liked Zacchaeus. He had a pretty bad reputation as a Tax Collector of getting over on people and stealing their money. People called him the “notorious sinner” —pretty much a big screw-up. In those days, a Tax Collector was someone who sold out their friends to the government to make a profit. No one wanted to befriend the tax collectors, much less spend time with them. And here Jesus is, doing just that.

The best part of this story happened when Zacchaeus came out of the tree. Jesus called his name – knowing full well exactly what he did for a living – and it was up to Zacchaeus to decide whether or not he would accept the love Jesus was giving in that moment. He had messed up pretty badly, and he knew that.

Luke 19 sets up the story like this:

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy (Luke 19:5-6 NLT).

When Jesus passed by and called Zacchaeus out in love, Zacchaeus accepted it!

Time after time in the Bible we see that Jesus is constantly seeking those who mess up and extending love and grace. Even knowing all that Zacchaeus had done, Jesus refused to hold it against him. Jesus looked at the worst thing Zacchaeus had done and realized there was a great opportunity to destroy feelings of shame, or even guilt, that Zacchaeus might have been living with.

Another guy in the first century, the Apostle Paul, most likely knew this story well. He met Jesus face-to-face and spent a ton of time with people who knew Jesus well. I think that’s why Paul writes this in a letter to some of the earliest Jesus followers in Rome:

No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39 NLT).

Did you hear that? Nothing.

Here’s what that means for you:

God’s love is not a sliding scale or dependent on how GOOD we think we are or how BAD we think we are.

- Even if it did cause a permanent situation.
- Even if we kept doing it.
- Even if we said that the last time was going to be the absolute last time, but it really wasn’t the last time—and we did it again.
- Even if...fill in the blank.

He knows we will fail. He knows we won’t always get it right – and even with this knowledge of us—He still loves us.

Because of Jesus, God does not hold our past mistakes or future failures against us.

In other words,

It’s personal because Jesus loves you no matter what.

It's the truth. God doesn't look at us differently just because we mess up. God loves us no matter what.

You may look at me and say, "Well, that's great. But you have NO clue what I have done. And I'm scared to admit what I've done and even worse...what I may think about doing."
Yep – same. But think about what that scripture says and what it means. If we know we cannot outrun or out measure God's love, what would that change about how personal we thought He was?

Jesus, in this moment, is a glimpse of God's love for not just Zacchaeus, but for us too. We sometimes look at how badly we might have messed up and disqualify ourselves from God's love. But what we can learn from what happened to Zacchaeus and his response is that even with what we've done, God still wants to be with us. Through Zacchaeus, I have personally realized that **I can trust God with not just the parts of me that do right, but also the parts of me that do wrong.**

APPLICATION

3 MINUTES

Sometimes we allow ourselves to live in the guilt or shame of one, two...or a few messed up things we've done. We judge ourselves and think, "God will never forgive me of this!"

Maybe you hurt somebody.

Maybe you wrongfully took advantage of something.

Maybe you have a secret that you know you shouldn't keep holding on to, but you're just afraid of what will happen if you let it out.

You have a choice, just like Zacchaeus had a choice that day in the tree. You can either stay in that tree and refuse to accept the love God gives unconditionally, or you can choose to believe God loves you, no matter what.

Here are two things you can do to begin to grasp how big and wide and deep and extraordinary God's love is for you:

1. **Name It.** Name whatever it is you feel is separating you from God. A secret? A hurt? Taking advantage of a situation? Whatever it is, name it. Write it on a piece of paper, tell a trusted adult, scream it at the top of your lungs driving down the highway. Whatever it is, be honest with yourself about what scares you the most about your biggest mistake.
2. **Confess It.** God is big enough to handle the worst and best parts of our lives. Talk to God about how this past failure makes you feel, and ask Him to show you in your everyday life how He sees you. I know it has changed my perspective asking Him to do that!

And then accept that Jesus loves you, and that is a fact you can never ever change. Even though you may go through seasons where you feel more distant from God—I know I do—despite what you might have felt or what you might have done, there is nothing that can separate you from God's love.

But the other thing I want us to think about is: who did you react more like in this story? Are you a person who is quick to point out the flaws of others, or are you like Jesus and are quick to show mercy? Every single one of us has a "tax collector" inside of us. But each of us are also made in God's image and can choose to operate like Jesus did when interacting with Zacchaeus. Just as we are not defined by our greatest failures, neither is anyone else.

Living in faith means we are willing to be courageous and trust God with our full self – the good, bad, and indifferent.

Every fragment.
Every broken piece.
Every lie.
Every judgment.
Every insecurity.
Every thing.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

There is right and there is wrong in the world, but that does not have to define us. What defines us is the love of Jesus. Just because we don't understand how God can love us or anybody else, even with our brokenness, doesn't mean that love doesn't exist. It may be hard to believe, but it isn't any less real.

That, by the way, is one of the reasons we have small groups. You need a group of people who know you personally, who know your story, and will love you when you mess up. You need a leader who will be a safe person to talk to when you feel like keeping your distance from God. Small groups are where we remind each other what is true even when it doesn't feel true—that **God loves you (and likes you) and is with you NO MATTER WHAT.**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
