

2026-03-08 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide: The Thief in the Tree

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you felt like an "underdog" but pushed through anyway. What motivated you?

Sermon Summary

This sermon contrasts two thieves—one on a cross and one in a tree (Zacchaeus). While many focus on the thief on the cross who received salvation with seemingly no effort, Pastor Steve challenges us to look at Zacchaeus, whose encounter with Jesus resulted in radical life transformation and generous restitution. The message calls us beyond "minimum requirement" Christianity to wholehearted devotion that produces visible change.

Key Scripture Passages

Luke 8:19-21 - Jesus defines His family as those who hear God's word and put it into practice

Luke 13:22-28 - The narrow door and making every effort to enter

Luke 18:9-14 - The Pharisee and the tax collector

Luke 19:1-10 - Zacchaeus encounters Jesus

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

What struck you most about the comparison between the thief on the cross and Zacchaeus in the tree? How does this challenge common assumptions about salvation?

Read Luke 8:21 together. What does it mean to not only "hear God's word" but also "put it into practice"? What's the difference?

The sermon mentioned two types of Christians: those asking "What's the least I can do?" versus "How much can I do for Christ?" Which mentality do

you find yourself gravitating toward? Why?

Personal Reflection

The pastor described a moment of "brokenness" where we recognize we killed Christ with our sins. Have you experienced this? If comfortable, share what that moment was like for you.

Zacchaeus climbed a tree—an undignified act for a wealthy man—just to see Jesus. What "undignified" steps might God be calling you to take to pursue Him more deeply?

Read Luke 18:13 about the tax collector beating his breast. When was the last time you felt genuine conviction over your sin? How do we cultivate this kind of repentant heart without falling into condemnation?

The Challenge of Change

Zacchaeus immediately offered to give half his possessions to the poor and repay those he'd cheated four times over. What does this tell us about genuine conversion? How does this challenge the "easy believism" in modern Christianity?

The sermon emphasized that we can't be presumptuous about our salvation. How do we balance confidence in God's grace with taking our faith seriously? Where's the line between healthy self-examination and unhealthy doubt?

"My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." What's one area where you've been hearing God's word but not putting it into practice? What's holding you back?

Application & Action

The pastor mentioned that God rewards those who "earnestly seek Him." What does earnestly seeking God look like in your daily life? What would

need to change for you to seek Him more earnestly?

Zacchaeus made specific, measurable commitments. If you were to make a "Zacchaeus commitment" today, what would it be? (This could involve generosity, restitution, lifestyle change, etc.)

The sermon talked about the "art of comparison" and how it deceives us. Who do you tend to compare yourself to in order to feel spiritually adequate? How can you break free from this trap?

Key Takeaways

Salvation involves transformation, not just transaction. True conversion produces visible life change.

We must hear AND practice God's word to be part of His family (Luke 8:21).

The narrow door requires effort (Luke 13:24). We shouldn't seek the minimum but the maximum in our relationship with Christ.

Brokenness and repentance are essential to genuine salvation—not just asking for forgiveness.

Zacchaeus demonstrates radical generosity and restitution as fruits of true conversion.

We cannot be presumptuous about salvation while living unchanged lives.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge (Choose One or More):

SEEK: Commit to reading your Bible daily this week, not just to check a box, but asking God, "How do I apply this to my life today?"

REPENT: Identify one area of ongoing sin or compromise. Spend time in

genuine repentance (not just saying "sorry" but turning away from it).
Share this with one trusted person for accountability.

RESTORE: Like Zacchaeus, is there someone you've wronged that you need to make restitution to? Take a concrete step this week toward making it right.

GIVE: Consider a sacrificial act of generosity this week. It doesn't have to be half your possessions, but let it cost you something and be motivated by gratitude for Christ's sacrifice.

EXAMINE: Set aside 30 minutes this week to honestly examine your salvation. Journal through these questions:

Have I experienced genuine brokenness over my sin?

Is my life visibly different because of Christ?

Am I seeking the minimum or the maximum with Jesus?

Do I love Him because He saved me from hell, or because of who He is?

Prayer Focus

Pray together for:

Hearts that earnestly seek God, not just the benefits of salvation

Courage to make "Zacchaeus commitments" that demonstrate genuine faith

Protection from presumption and taking God's grace for granted

Transformation that makes Jesus visible in our lives

Specific needs and commitments shared during discussion

Closing Thought

"Jesus said, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'" (Luke 19:9-10)

Zacchaeus didn't earn his salvation through his generosity—his generosity proved his salvation was real. What fruit in your life proves that your encounter with Jesus has been genuine?

For Next Week

Come prepared to share: What happened when you put this week's application into practice? How did God meet you?