

# HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.



Loneliness is on the rise. Last year, the United Kingdom named a national Minister for Loneliness. One-fifth of citizens of the UK report feeling lonely most of the time, and the health impact of loneliness, lack of friends or family who check in on you, well they say loneliness is as damaging to health as smoking or obesity. Over 200,000 people reported not having a conversation with a friend or relative for more than one month. Somehow in the most connected world we have ever had, people are lonelier than ever. A hotel in Brussels has started renting goldfish. If you are traveling and feeling lonely, for about four bucks you can have a little friend. Some feedback cards came in: "Not a great conversationalist, but a good listener." "A little wishy-washy; hard to pin down." "Not easy to cuddle." "Too bubbly." It would be funny if it wasn't also a little sad. Solitude can be a blessing, but lonely is no good. Let's talk about relationship poverty today. We get dehumanized by loneliness because we were made for relationship and community. When we get isolated and alone, when we cut ourselves off from those around us and find ourselves alone behind layers of protective shields, Jesus knows how to break into our alone and bring us back to connection.

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy" (Luke 19:1–2). Jesus was passing through. This engagement was purely accidental, right? Now we meet Zacchaeus. What do we know about him? It starts with this: he was a chief tax collector and he was wealthy. He was rich. Tax collectors were not well-liked in that day. They weren't super popular like they are in our time. No, it was worse than that. The Jewish people were living under painful, oppressive occupation by Roman forces. Tax collectors colluded with Roman occupation authorities to suck money out of the provinces. They bought a franchise of tax base, delivered an agreed amount to Rome, but kept for themselves whatever else they could wrench from the people. The system it created was a corrupt, greed-driven, mob-boss kind of system.

Jesus had met tax collectors before. Back in chapter five, Matthew (aka Levi) was at his tax booth hauling in gains when Jesus called him, told him to follow, and he did. In chapter 15

there's a whole group of tax collectors listening to Jesus. Matthew was with Jesus when they walked into Jericho. Zacchaeus was a "chief tax collector." He's the only one in the New Testament. What did that mean? Did he buy and sell franchises? Did he oversee the operation of people like Matthew? Could Matthew have even warned Jesus about him before they got to Jericho? "There's a guy in this town, Jesus. He taught me everything I know about tax collection. He's a beast at it. He's a monster. If you see him, walk away. There has never been a man further from grace, further from righteousness." He was chief tax collector, and he was rich. In a corrupt system, the person at the top is the best at being the worst. "There's no way, Jesus. No way." Ever thought someone was outside of the reach of God's grace?

What else do we know about Zacchaeus? He was short. "He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way" (Luke 19:3–4). Okay, yeah, he was short. But catch something else here. Nobody moved for Zacchaeus. Nobody made room for Zacchaeus. Let him find his own way. Let him handle his own problems. I've got no time for a guy like that. Chief tax collector, rich, short, but one more thing: Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. There was something missing in his rich, successful life. His heart longed to see the Lord. Why? Was it the buzz of celebrity? Curiosity? Jealousy? Was it something in the purity of Jesus he wanted to see for himself? Was it an inner need of the heart, a deep-seated discontent that longed to once, just once, see the Lord? Loneliness? Whatever it was, it was enough to cause him to take a risk, climb a tree, brush off the humiliating jabs from the crowd—he had to see Jesus.

"When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly" (Luke 19:5–6). Even when we have locked ourselves up, even when we have isolated ourselves from community, even when we have constructed, for various reasons, our little bunkers of alone, our protective cells of loneliness—Jesus knows how to break in, and break down our barriers, and enter our lonely lives. "Zacchaeus,

come down." "Immediately," says Jesus. Right now. Listen, even when we have grown accustomed to our pain, when we have learned to live with the empty feelings and heartache and pain, to us it doesn't seem urgent, to us it doesn't seem like an emergency—it's been this way for a long, long time. To Jesus, the pain is unacceptable even for a minute longer. Immediately, come down. Come out of your loneliness. Step forward. Not later, not tomorrow. Immediately! Right now. No more alone.

Jesus says, "I must." Not a question, not a request, an urgent necessity, "I must enter your life, and stay at your house today." Let's talk about Zacchaeus' house. What do you imagine? Everyone knows about Zacchaeus' house. He's rich. He's wealthy. His is the big one down the end of the lane. And what do the people associate with that house? Well, this is the house of a chief tax collector. No self-respecting person of any ethical sensibilities at all, certainly no self-respecting spiritual person, no patriotic Israelite, would ever want to enter that house. The only memories people have of that house are memories of shame—that time I had to beg Zacchaeus to let me off, that time I had to grovel in front of the mob boss to give me another week to pay before his hit squad came for my family. The house of Zacchaeus of Jericho. Large, ornate, secure, and empty. Jesus demands to enter.

Between verses seven and eight, there must be a meal because it says Zacchaeus "stood up" as though from the table. But I mean, maybe not. Maybe this all happened at the tree. Maybe Zacchaeus fell down coming out of the tree and stood up! But probably there was a meal at Zacchaeus' house. Luke skips over it, I think, because he wants us to see how immediate the change was in Zacchaeus' heart. Once Jesus penetrated the isolation, once Jesus and the disciples got into Zacchaeus' life and his empty home was full of joy and laughter and food and wine, something else could break in. Jesus popped the bubble, broke the glass around his heart. Something else could come in now. What is it? Jesus calls it "salvation." "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham'" (Luke 19:8–9). The law for a person

who defrauded someone else, in Leviticus 6, was to return the amount with 20 percent more. Zacchaeus goes with 400 percent. And half of his estate, half of all he has, he gives away. I'm telling you, a man like that in a city like that—the city changed that day. Life changed in the whole city that day.

Is that the "salvation" Jesus is talking about? It's related to it. It's a result. "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus is changed. Immediately. He is transformed. A new man. The rivers of his heart change direction in a violent flip and suddenly all that was flowing in is flowing out and all that he resisted he is open to and his life is totally changed. He too, says Jesus, is a son of Abraham. What does that mean? That means his isolation is over. He is part of the family. He is part of the community. He is not alone anymore. Is that the "salvation" Jesus is talking about? It's part of it, but there is more.

There are moments of insight in our lives, rich, poignant moments when we suddenly know something that changes us forever. Sometimes we are aware of them even as they happen. You're suddenly aware. I'm hearing something, I'm seeing something, I'm understanding something in these few minutes that just might change my life forever. This is such a moment. It has to do with what Jesus explains at the end: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He was lost. Jesus sought him. Jesus found him. Jesus saved him. Zacchaeus longed to see Jesus, but now he knows Jesus and his life belongs to Him. That's salvation. That's eternal life. "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Our friend Eric Jacobsen from First Pres, Tacoma (Washington), was here in 2017 for our last Christian Life Conference and said we live behind three panes of glass: our windshields in our cars, our TVs and our smartphones. Three panes of glass we think connect us to one another, and actually promise to connect us to one another, but in actual fact create isolation and loneliness. Each promises to bring us closer but actually drives us apart. The things we build to tie us together actually keep us apart. It would be comically ironic, funny, if it wasn't also tragic. The loneliness is literally killing us. Jesus knows how to break the glass. In case of emergency, break glass! One of the best ways we know to

break the glass around here is to join a Life Group. A few years ago, we had a summer series called "Me to We." In case of emergency, break glass. Get into community. Solitude can be a gift, but alone is no good. Before you go renting goldfish, maybe try a Life Group.

The Bible says it all the way through. Think of Genesis. God created Adam, but Adam was alone. And what did God say? "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). After all the stuff God listed as "good, good, and very good" there is one thing God said was not good at all! Alone. Alone is no good. How are we to understand this moment? Should we imagine that God was surprised? Do you think God was really thinking about making just one? "I'll just make one... Huh! That's not good!" No. I don't think so. God always intended to make us, to make man and woman, husband and wife, you and me, to make community. He did it this way in order to give us the clarity of verse 18. Alone is no good. "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalms 133:1). Solitude can be a gift, but alone is no good. We were made to be in relationship.

We see it also in Jesus' own life. He didn't go it alone. He gathered a small group. Twelve guys and the women who followed and supported the ministry. He even had a smaller group of three—Peter, James and John—in whom he seemed to confide in deeper ways. Alone is no good. But at the end of the day, Jesus did go alone. On the cross, Jesus is the picture of alone. His best friends betrayed and denied Him. His own people rejected and crushed Him. The world He made spit Him out. Pinned to the cross, with our sins laid on Him, Jesus even found Himself alone to the relationship most precious to Him—communion with His Father. "From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')" (Matthew 27:45–46). Do you see? At every single turn, Jesus has taken up our inhumanity so that we can be human again. Jesus became utterly alone, utterly alone, so that you and I would never have to be.

**STUDY GUIDE**  
**HUMANIZE ME • "Community"**  
**Luke 19:1–10**

**UP:** **Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word**

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 19:1–10.

- 1) Zacchaeus was disliked in his community. Tax collectors regularly cheated people out of their money and Zacchaeus oversaw this whole operation in Jericho. Who holds a similar place in our society? What sorts of people are disliked, avoided or isolated?
- 2) Why do you think Jesus was willing to talk with Zacchaeus?
- 3) Reread 1–4. Have you ever had difficulty seeing Jesus? What gets in the way of this?
- 4) Reread 5–6. Where did Jesus find you? How was He able to get your attention?
- 5) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?
- 6) Reread verse 10. Jesus identifies His mission here. What do you think about the idea of seeking and saving the lost? How does this relate to your own experience with Jesus?

**OUT:** **Connect With the World Around Us  
(Join God in His Mission)**

Think of a person in your life who would fit into Jesus' category of "lost". Take time to pray for this person as you close your time.

**IN:** **Connect with Each Other**

See if you can schedule time to meet with this person in the next week or two. You don't need to force a spiritual conversation, just take time to be available to them and encourage them in some way.