



WEEK 2 – THE PREP

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... what's your favorite place to be out in the community among the people? Is there a restaurant or coffee shop you find fits you? Maybe it's the public library or a bar "where everybody knows your name"?

OPENING PRAYER

God of Opportunity, open our eyes to see the Outsiders you are calling us to invite in.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of where you like to spend your time out in the community, there are opportunities there to reach out to the Outsiders, which is what we'll take a look at today. Again, let's remember why we're doing this. We've built something pretty cool, something really unique, and more people should experience it. As I

said last week, it's not about butts in the seats. It's about helping others find a relationship with God and experience the incredible love and grace that we have. And so, part of our call as followers of Christ is to reach out to the lost around us, inviting them into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and if the opportunity presents itself, inviting them to THIS faith community. This means our focus for 2026 will be *invitation*. If we've got something this good, why wouldn't we want to invite people to it? But that begs some questions... namely, *why, who, where* and *how* do we invite? Well, good news... that's what this series will be about. Last week, we started with the *why* and the *who*, and we looked at a great little story from the Bible, the story of Zacchaeus, to help us begin our discussion of inviting others into a relationship with Christ. Today, we'll look at the next question... *where*? But first...

Setup Question: Last week, we were challenged to begin the process of inviting someone into a relationship with Christ, or, if appropriate, invite them to our Faith Community. Is there anyone on your mind and heart, who God might be asking you to invite?

SCRIPTURE

For this entire series, we're living with this one story, the story of Zacchaeus, identifying specific parts each week that will help us with this topic of invitation. Let's start by reading it again...

Read Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 through 10.

Again, if you grew up in the church and know the song, we'll wait if you need to sing it out of childhood behavioral conditioning. Last week, we looked at the thesis statement in verse 10, that Jesus "came to seek and save the lost." (NIV) But Jesus isn't on Earth anymore to do the seeking himself, so it's up to us. Second, we looked at the first few verses to understand a universal fact, that people are drawn to Jesus out of their brokenness; and when they find him, they discover healing. For us, "the lost" are all around us, Outsiders everywhere in our lives. And so, it's up to us to make the introduction of Jesus to the Zacchaeuses in our lives, so they, too, might find healing for their brokenness.

Question 1: You've lived with the story of Zacchaeus for a couple weeks now. Have you noticed anything you hadn't before? Has this series changed the way you view this story? Does anything else stand out to you about the scripture?

REFLECTION

We've talked about *why* invitation is important, namely that our world is full of Outsiders, "the lost" as Jesus described them. And if we have an answer to the brokenness they're feeling, it's our obligation to offer it to them. We've talked about *who* our target audience is. Namely, because we are a church full of Outsiders, folks who know what it means to feel ostracized, left out, or rejected. And for every one of us, there's a 100 more out there... Outsiders who have been told they're not good enough, who have been told they don't fit in with society, who have been made to feel less than or

unworthy. Those are the people to whom we are called, because *they* need a place to belong, a place where they go from outsider to insider, a place where they are loved and accepted as a child of God, nothing less.

Today, we're going to shift our focus to the practical side of this topic... actually doing the dang thing. So, first, we need to talk about *where*; *where* do we find these people to invite? For that, let's look at the very first verse of this story, verse 1...

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town.

If Jesus's personal mission statement is to seek and save "the lost," he can't do that very well if he never leaves his couch. (Besides, Mary would be on him to get out and get a job. "Jesus, you're 30-years-old. Time to start your ministry. Besides, Joseph wants to turn your room into a man-cave.") Also, he can't find "the lost" if the only place he ever hands out is the synagogue. So, what does he do? He goes to Jericho and makes his way through town. Jericho is an eclectic city with a wide swath of Outsiders, not the least of which (or maybe so) is Zacchaeus. This encounter doesn't happen if Jesus is not out in the community where "the lost" are. Jesus intentionally puts himself in the places where he can interact with The Outsiders.

The same should be true for us. If we're going to do the seeking for Jesus, we have to be where the lost are, too. We can't invite them in, if we never encounter them. So, come to worship... great. Spend time

resting in the sanctuary that is your home... great. But The Outsiders exist in the spaces in-between those things... where you work and play, where you shop and eat, where you have clubs and organizations, where, like Jesus, you are out interacting with the world. So, step 1... go where The Outsiders are.

Question 2: Where are the Outsiders in your life? Consider the places you frequent out in the community... the groups you are a member of, the places you spend the most time. In which of those settings do you interact with folks who might be seeking Jesus? (If you can't think of any, the God might be asking you to get out more.)

For step 2 of *where* do we find these folks to invite, let's look at verse 5. Jesus is walking through town, and Zacchaeus has climbed the tree. What happens next?

⁵ “When Jesus came by, he looked up...”

Jesus could have kept walking. Jesus could have ignored Zacchaeus. Jesus could have kept looking at his phone and pretended not to notice the weirdo up in the sycamore. But no, Jesus looked up. When Jesus says, “I came to seek...” he means it. He's actively looking for people who need him. He's got his eyes open, attuned to those in the crowd, intentionally looking for someone who needs the healing he provides. Now, it never tells us what catches Jesus's attention about Zacchaeus. Could be that a grown man climbed a tree. Could be that

Jesus just has a radar for hurting people. Either way, he does not pass Zacchaeus by. He does not ignore him. He does not reject this Outsider. Jesus actively seeks out Zacchaeus, and he looks up.

So, step 2 for us? *Look up*. How often do we plow through life with our heads down? We bury our faces in our own business. We ignore the people around us. We often literally lock our eyes onto our phones, and intentionally avoid the world. (Occasionally, I think the entire reason for the invention of the cell phone was to eliminate the awkwardness of riding in the elevator with strangers.) Jesus intentionally and actively looks for the Outsider. So, look up. See the world around you. Stop plowing from one thing to the next. Pause to look around you in those in between spaces. The Outsiders are everywhere. All Jesus had to do was look up in a tree, and found Zacchaeus. So, look up... listen for the stories of someone who is hurting. Open your eyes to the person who is obviously lost and searching. Your Outsider will likely not be in a tree. But, the Outsider in your life will be just as easy to identify... if you start looking for them, if you get your head out of your own business and look up.

Question 3: Consider your answers to the previous question and the people you encounter there. Who in those locations might God be calling you to see, as Jesus saw Zacchaeus, and potentially invite in? It's okay to begin by considering this generally. But don't be afraid to get specific... Jesus didn't invite all the Jericho-ites... he invited Zacchaeus by name.

CLOSING

So, we've talked about *why* it's important for us to invite others. We've talked about *who* we are called to invite. And now, we've covered the *where* ... where do we find those who are lost and looking for the kind of love and grace and healing that we have found in Christ? Step 1, get out into the community... The Outsiders exist in the in-between spaces... go where the Outsiders are. And step 2, look up... get your head out of your own business, and start actively looking for the Outsiders who may or may not be in a tree... but who will be just as obvious as Zacchaeus was to Jesus.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**