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Is Your Heart Looking for Jesus? The Story of Zaccheus

Luke 19:5-6: (NASB) ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, *Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.* ⁶And he hurried and came down and received him gladly.



People want to be happy. They think about it, they talk about it and they do things to find happiness. The United States Declaration of Independence speaks of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Yes, we all want to be happy, but have you ever thought about "joy"? Have you ever heard of people wanting and pursuing joy in their lives? Happiness and joy have several similarities in that they are both elusive and often fleeting. But there is something profoundly special about joy. You see, joy is deeper than happiness. It can become a state of mind that unequivocally transforms you. Here is the catch - if you go looking for joy you are actually pushing it further away from you. So, how do we find joy, or more clearly stated, how do we let joy find us and change us in our everyday experiences?

Happiness is an emotional feeling of delight or enjoyment and therefore is not likely present when things go sour. The Bible does not spend a lot of time on this kind of happiness; it actually uses the word *happy* to mean "blessed," which takes the emotion out of the equation. "*Blessed (happy) are you when men persecute you...*"

Joy as we know it today is more of a state of mind than a feeling and therefore can be present even when circumstances are bad.

 **Joy is terrifying, Dr. Brené Brown on Joy: It's Terrifying, Super Soul Sunday, The Oprah Winfrey Network**

Here is the biblical story of Zaccheus, a man who found joy through a life-changing (but unexpected) vulnerability: **Luke 19:1-2:** The city Jericho: (Source: Biblical commentary by J. Vernon McGee) In Jesus' day it was like a resort area, the Las Vegas of that time. Many people spent their vacations there. Here the publicans lived. The publicans were like the modern Mafia. They were tax gatherers and were despised.

The man Zaccheus: **Zaccheus:** Young's Concordance #2195 Ζακχαῖος Zakchaios dzak-chah'-ee-yos of Hebrew origin, "pure" Often in biblical stories the meaning of a person's name exemplifies what their story is about. We will find out Zacchaeus had a pure heart even though his actions were not always good.

The occupation of chief tax collector: (Source: Biblical commentary by C.T. Russell) The chief; probably employing under-collectors to assist him in his contract... A prominent one amongst them and rich. He had accepted a minor office under the Roman government; he was a tax collector for the Romans, a publican. On this account he was despised and declared to be disloyal to Judaism. Tax collectors had power and control over the people's money making it easy to cheat them. This occupation was despised.

The status: (Source: Biblical commentary by Albert Barnes) He was rich. Though this class of men was despised and often infamous, yet it seems that they were sometimes wealthy. They sustained, however, the general character of sinners, because they were particularly odious in the eyes of the Jews. The average person was not "rich" in those days.

 **Fatalistic response, The Price of Invulnerability, Brené Brown, TEDxKC**

The call to follow Jesus brings massive vulnerability, and Zacchaeus was not the only tax collector to experience it: **Mark 2:14-15:**

Luke 19:3: Here was a man on a mission! Perhaps he had heard of or even seen the previous Jericho experience with the blind men (**Matthew 20:29-34**). Perhaps he was even in the crowd but could not get close enough? Several commentators say he was merely curious, but we do not agree based on previous events and the story itself, in addition to his sincere reaction to Jesus and Jesus' proclamation to him later.

STEPS TO TRUE JOY: Vulnerability can lead to joy when it is triggered by our seeking to understand something of great magnitude that has presented itself in our life.

 **Symptoms of foreboding joy, The Price of Invulnerability, Brené Brown, TEDxKC**



A lesson in contrast: Herod the powerful curiosity seeker: Luke 23:8-9: For some, Jesus had entertainment value and not much more. **Another lesson in contrast: Here is another rich man who had been living in a noble way:** Matthew 19:16-22: He was not ready to "let go." For some, Jesus had great appeal, but they would not let that appeal translate into vulnerability. Think of the joy this nobleman lost!



Faith extremism equation, *The Price of Invulnerability*, Brené Brown, TEDxKC

We can develop comfort with vulnerability if we develop an ability to adopt God's promises as tools to focus us through the discomfort of vulnerability, so we can be open to the joy on the other side of it!

"Vulnerability Bridge" Promise: Matthew 6:33-34

Whatever the difficulty in your life, focus on the kingdom first. That will allow God to add other things to you as He sees you have need. You become vulnerable, which is often uncomfortable, as you place your trust in something higher. You trust God to take care of all your needs. The Rich Young Ruler was not willing to do this. This kind of life is devoid of joy.

Luke 19:5: This is typical Jesus! He recognized the sinner from the "inside out," saw his heart and called him by name to come and join him.

This is a vulnerability nightmare! He was probably disheveled and just wanted to catch a glimpse of Jesus because of his greatness, and here Jesus called him out specifically.

Zacchaeus hurried - the word can mean "to make haste" or "to desire earnestly."

He was happy to welcome him - Happy used here is the same Greek word **Strong's #5463** meaning "rejoice."

This same word is also used as a greeting. One example: Philippians 2:17-18: (NASB) *¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy <5463> with you all. ¹⁸You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy <5463> with me.*

This means, "I am sharing the conviction of how I live my life with you, even if my life is not full of happy things right now." That is what Zacchaeus felt at this point. He did not have an attitude like, "No, my house is a mess; I was not expecting company; this is not convenient. What will people think?" He immediately was vulnerable and jumped at the opportunity.



Ruled by scarcity, *The Price of Invulnerability*, Brené Brown, TEDxKC

STEPS TO TRUE JOY: Once we become vulnerable it is likely that the vulnerability will grow and even begin to feel ominous. Choose between caving in TO fear or grown in TO joy.

Perhaps we are to focus on this man, shown to be pure in heart, to teach us lessons:

1. Blessings come to those whose heart is right in spite of their circumstances.
2. The occupation and heart of Zacchaeus is contrasted with the average person of higher stature but with a lesser heart condition. It matters if your heart intention strives for godliness.

"Vulnerability Bridge" Promise: *Because we are "in Christ," we become extraordinary by God's grace.*

1 Corinthians 1:26-31: To keep a spiritual perspective is to conquer vulnerability and to open the door to joy.

Luke 19:7: (NRSV) *All who saw it began to grumble and said, he has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.*

Here we have typical, average sinful man who judges others from the "outside in."

People started to publically grumble when they saw Jesus befriended Zacchaeus.

This was not the first example of judgmental thinking in that day: Luke 7:34,39: Jesus was never affected by peer pressure. But it would have been easy for those seeking him out to have bowed to peer pressure. Jesus showed each individual that if they chose to follow him, their lives could become extraordinary - not because they were so great but because God's grace is great.



 **Search for extraordinary, *The Price of Invulnerability*, Brené Brown, TEDxKC**

We can experience the most joy in the ordinary moments of our lives. That is profound! Rather than focus on our dead-end job or family problems or money problems or whatever the issue, learn that ordinary moments can bring us joy. We can glorify God with this difficult day or trying moment. Change your attitude and step out of the "comfort" of our own misery. Appreciating the little things can go a long way.

STEPS TO TRUE JOY: Vulnerability always compounds when exposed to the barbs and actions of those who see you through the eyes of your shortcomings or their arrogance. The only way to truly cope is to face and look past their doubt-laden actions. Fix your gaze upon that which brings you joy.

We end up seeing our lives through others' perceptions of us or through our actual weaknesses, rather than seeing our lives as God sees us. We become vulnerable because we see weakness. Weakness produces fear. Fear produces inaction. Inaction chases joy away. We have to look past all of this and fix our gaze on that which would produce joy.

Regarding compounding vulnerability, here we can see a lose/lose scenario: James 2:1-5: We are all equal when we enter into the presence of Christ. Stop thinking like a Pharisee! The joy of Christ cannot dwell in us if we are judging others. The reality here is that seeing beyond the judgments of man opens the door of joy for ALL involved.

 **Selective numbness, *The Price of Invulnerability*, Brené Brown, TEDxKC**

Do not take the chance that you will numb the joy in your life by trying to numb your vulnerability!

"Vulnerability Bridge" Promise: *The peace of God PROTECTS and FOCUSES!*

Philippians 4:4-7: God WANTS us to have joy - why do we spend so much time pining about being vulnerable?

Luke 19:8: He speaks directly to Jesus, ignoring the crowd talking bad about him. This is typical of a sinner who is repentant from the heart. He was willing to help those in need and make right that which he did wrong.

In the face of public ridicule, Zacchaeus did the right thing. He acknowledged his flaws (this can make our feeling vulnerable even more acute) and committed to the reparations necessary to mend his past so that his present could be opened to the joy of following Jesus.

STEPS TO TRUE JOY: We have to both face our fear of vulnerability AND commit to the joy that lies beyond that fear.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-18: Rejoicing, prayer and thankfulness all work together and are ingredients that bring us great joy in God's service.

"Vulnerability Bridge" Promise: *Gratitude for forgiveness is a powerful place to begin receiving joy.*

Nehemiah 8:9-10: The story of Nehemiah is one of trial and difficulty in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. In the end it is a story of very great joy. When the walls were finally rebuilt, they could finally begin to worship God again properly. The people cried because they realized how far away from godliness they had come.

They were told to stop crying because the joy of the Lord was their strength. They had to get through the vulnerability of their failure in order to experience that joy.

Fear, one of Satan's favorite tools, comes from self-doubt and the inability to see the end from the beginning. We like to have a guarantee - I will do this if for sure I know I can do it right. Put faith and trust in the place of fear. Zacchaeus put his fear aside just to catch a mere glimpse of Jesus and ended up living a transformed and joyful life.

These next verses typify the path that Zacchaeus was now on and the path that we ourselves should take: Psalms 119:57-64

Luke 19:9-10: Typical Jesus...again! He read the heart of Zacchaeus and knows of his sincerity and therefore plainly proclaims that he is now a follower and the truest kind of son of



Abraham. He could not find joy in riches but now would find joy in sacrifice. Galatians 3:6-9

STEPS TO TRUE JOY: Once our vulnerabilities are faced and dealt with and once we have committed to living with righteousness and gratitude, a life driven by joy is now an open possibility. Grab ahold of the joy that has been placed before you and let it rule!

Once we hold the joy of the Lord in our hearts it now powers us through the darkest trials!
Hebrews 12:2-3

"Vulnerability Bridge" Promise: Recognize joy's foundation.

Psalms 16:8-9: A joyful life that is based in godliness is a life of strength, courage and vision. It is unshakable.

Philippians 4:13: (NASB) *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Proverbs 17:22: (NASB) *A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.*

Follow the path Zacchaeus followed. Be willing to be vulnerable. Present yourself before the Lord. Embrace His guidance for you even if it causes anxiety because joy is on the other side.

***So, is your heart looking for Jesus?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***