



**Scripture:** Luke 19:1–10, John 3:16–17

Hey everyone! I'm so glad you're here. Whether you're here every week or this is your first time, I want you to know this: you belong here.

We're kicking off a series called **REALationships** — see what I did there? It's all about getting real about the way we treat others. Over the next few weeks, we're going to talk about friendships, differences, love, conflict; all through the lens of what the Bible says and how Jesus lived.

But tonight, we're starting with something that hits home for all of us: how we treat people who are different, awkward, or just hard to love. You know the kind of people I'm talking about.

Think about this for a second: What do you look for in a friend? A friend is likely someone who shares your interests, laughs at your jokes, maybe even dresses like you or vibes with your energy. That's totally normal; we're all drawn to people who are “like” *us*. And that's not a bad thing. So don't feel guilty about that. Seriously. You don't have to be best friends with everyone.

But here's the bigger question we're wrestling with tonight: how should we treat people who are different from us or maybe even difficult to be around? This could be a person who talks a little too much. Or someone who doesn't pick up on social cues, or the classmate who acts like they don't care what anyone thinks, but deep down probably really does.

You don't have to become best friends with everyone. But if you follow Jesus, you do have to wrestle with how you are supposed to treat others. Let's pray and ask God to help us see people the way He does.

[\[Pray here.\]](#)

Go ahead and open your Bible to **Luke 19:1–10 (NIV)**. We're going to look at a story that gives us a front-row seat to how Jesus treated someone who was super hard to love, a guy named Zacchaeus.

And yes, it is *that* Zacchaeus. He's the "wee little man" from the Sunday School song who climbed a tree like a squirrel on a mission. If you've got the tune stuck in your head now, you're welcome.

*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. 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.*

*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.*

*All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."*

*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. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Okay, Let's break this down. Zacchaeus wasn't just disliked, he was hated. He was a tax collector, which meant he worked for the enemy. He was Jewish, but he collected taxes for the Romans, and he took extra money off the top to make himself rich. Imagine someone robbing their own people to help a foreign government; that's how people saw him.

He was rejected by the Romans because he wasn't one of them. He was rejected by his own people because he betrayed them. Nobody wanted anything to do with him.

Imagine this in today's world: someone at your school gets rewarded every time *you* do extra credit, but then they also sneak into the grading system and lower *your* grade to boost their own. You put in the effort, and they benefit while you lose. That's basically what tax collectors were doing in Jesus' time, profiting off people unfairly and getting rich at their expense.



- Who are some people in your life right now that you'd consider close friends? What makes those friendships meaningful to you?
- Why are having friendships important for our lives?
- The message talked about how our friends can shape our language, choices, and even our faith. Where have you noticed this happening in your own life?
- Elihu was the friend who reminded Job of God's greatness. Who in your life helps remind you of who God is when things get hard?
- What qualities do you think make someone a godly friend? Which of those qualities do you want to grow in personally?
- How can you be a friend this week who points others toward Jesus?
- Why do you think God cares so much about who we choose to let influence our lives?

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