

Today's Suggested Schedule—February 2026, Week 3

Bible Story: Zacchaeus • *Luke 19:1-10*

Bottom Line: The love of Jesus can change things for the better.

Conversation Starter: How can love change things?

Monthly Memory Verse: *"I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you."* • John 13:34 NIV

Supplies NOT Included in the Activity Bags

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

- Whiteboard and dry-erase marker (or large paper and marker)

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

- Bible
- Paper
- Marker
- Tape

Prayer Activity: Make It Personal with Prayer

- Kids' "Prayer Journal" Activity Page from previous weeks with their names on them
- Extra "Prayer Journal" Activity Pages for kids who didn't attend previous weeks
- Coloring supplies

Bible Story Summary

In Week 3, Jesus singles out Zacchaeus, a tax collector who has scrambled up a tree for a better view. Instead of scolding Zacchaeus for stealing from his neighbors, Jesus invites himself over to the tax collector's house for a party. Profoundly changed by Jesus' love and acceptance, Zacchaeus offers to pay back anyone he has cheated—four times as much! [BOTTOM LINE] The love of Jesus can change things for the better.

Prayer

Pray for kids who will visit your group for the first time. Thank God that His love doesn't leave us where it finds us and that it has the power to bring real change. Recall an age-appropriate story about a time God's love convicted you and gave you the courage to make a change or restore a relationship. Ask God to help your preteens truly grasp that Jesus' love isn't based on their performance. Pray for the kid who feels like an outcast (like Zacchaeus) and the one who is making others feel that way. Ask that Jesus' love would change their hearts, their attitudes, and their actions, giving them the courage to make things right.

1. Application Activity

What You Need:

- Whiteboard and dry-erase marker (or large paper and marker)

What You Do:

- Tell the group that you're going to create a "Top Ten" list together.
- The title of the list is: "Top Ten Ways to Share the Love of Jesus." Write that across the top of the board.
- Challenge the group to brainstorm a list of ten practical, everyday ways they can show Jesus' love to the people around them.
- Write their ideas on the board. Encourage them to be specific.
 - Instead of "be nice," maybe "invite someone new to sit with my group at lunch."
 - Instead of "help people," maybe "ask my parents if I can help with a chore before they ask me."
- Keep brainstorming until you have a solid list of ten great ideas.

What You Say:

"This is an incredible list that we can put into action. Zacchaeus didn't just feel bad about his choices; he made a plan to change. He took action. The people in the crowd who saw Jesus go to a 'sinner's' house didn't understand. But Jesus said He, the Son of Man, came to look for the lost and save them. Every item on this list is a way to show that **[Bottom Line] the love of Jesus can change things for the better.**"

2. Bible Story Extension

What You Need:

- Prepared bottle of water with “Zacchaeus” label

What You Do:

- Ask: “What was the biggest change you saw in Zacchaeus after he met Jesus?” (*He went from selfish and greedy to generous and fair.*)
- Show the group the water bottle. Tell them this is the “Zacchaeus Bottle Flip Challenge.”
- Let kids take turns trying to flip the water bottle and have it land standing up.
- Explain that just like flipping the water bottle can completely change its position, Jesus’ love completely flipped Zacchaeus’s life around.
- Discuss the following questions:
 - Why do you think Jesus chose to spend time with Zacchaeus when everyone else disliked him?
 - How do you think Zacchaeus felt when Jesus called him by name and wanted to come to his house?
 - What does this story show you about how Jesus sees people—especially those who have made wrong choices?

What You Say:

“It’s amazing to think about how much Zacchaeus changed in one day. Jesus didn’t condemn him or order him to pay everyone back. Jesus simply made it clear how much He loved him. Jesus looked up into the sycamore-fig tree and said, ‘*Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay at your house today*’ (Luke 19:5 NIV). That love transformed him from the inside out. Zacchaeus went from being someone nobody trusted to someone who was making things right and being generous, promising to pay back four times the amount he took. It’s proof that **[Bottom Line] the love of Jesus can change things for the better.**”

3. Discussion Questions

Ask:

- Zacchaeus climbed a tree just to see Jesus. What do you think made him so eager to see Jesus—and what might that say about what was missing in his life?
- Jesus called Zacchaeus by name and wanted to spend time with him, even though others called Zacchaeus a “sinner.” What does this teach you about how Jesus sees people who have messed up or feel left out?
- Zacchaeus didn’t just feel loved—he changed. Why do you think experiencing Jesus’ love made Zacchaeus want to make things right instead of being told to?
- The crowd judged Zacchaeus and whispered about him, but Jesus chose kindness. When have you seen someone judged by others, and how could you respond more like Jesus in that kind of moment?
- The story says that the love of Jesus changes people. How has knowing that Jesus loves you—no matter what—changed the way you see yourself or treat others?

4. Verses to Take with You

What You Need:

- Bible
- Paper
- Marker
- Tape

What You Do:

- Write the numbers 1 through 4 on the paper.
- Tape one paper in each corner of the room or in your small group space.
- Open the Bible and read John 13:34 to the group.
- Instruct the kids to start in the middle of the room/space.
- Tell them to move to a corner while you count to ten.
- Call out “Corner 1!” and instruct the kids in Corner 1 to say the Memory Verse together.
- Direct the kids to return to the middle of the room/space.
- Tell them to move to a corner while you count to ten.
- Call out “Corner 3!” and instruct the kids in Corner 3 to say the Memory Verse together.
- Continue to play as time allows.

What You Say:

“Great job! You were all over the room for that one. Jesus’ command to love is something that should follow us everywhere we go. Jesus showed Zacchaeus unconditional love and gave him an opportunity to make things right. When we obey that command to love others, we see that **[Bottom Line] the love of Jesus can change things for the better.**”

EveryChild Pro-Tips:

- *Pair students up so they can travel to the corners together, providing support and encouragement.*
- *Make sure you place the numbers in accessible locations for all kids.*

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

What You Need:

- Kids' "Prayer Journal" Activity Page from previous weeks with their names on them
- Extra "Prayer Journal" Activity Pages for kids who didn't attend previous weeks
- Coloring supplies

What You Do:

- Set out the coloring supplies.
- Give each kid their "Prayer Journal" Activity Page from the previous week.
 - If a new kid attends this week who didn't attend previously, give them a blank "Prayer Journal" Activity Page and instruct them to write their name on the front.
- Encourage the kids to turn to page 5 in their "Prayer Journal."
- Invite the kids to think about one area in their own life, or in the world, that they wish could be changed for the better, and write or draw about that situation in their journal.
- After they've had a moment to write or draw, encourage the kids to take a moment to pray, inviting Jesus to bring His love into that situation. (e.g., "Jesus, please help my friend who is sad," or "Jesus, please help me to be more patient with my brother.")
- Let the kids know they'll add to their journal each week.
- Collect the prayer journals and keep them in a safe place for the following weeks.

What You Say:

"Zacchaeus's story shows us that no situation is too broken for Jesus' love to fix. He can change hearts, and He can change situations. We can ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's love and show us ways to love others. Let's trust Him with the things we wrote down or drew today.

"God, thank You for the incredible story of Zacchaeus. It's a powerful reminder that Your love can change absolutely anything for the better. Please help in the situations we wrote about in our journals. We believe that You can bring Your love and peace into each one. Help us to be part of that change by showing Your love to others this week. We love You, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."