

## SCRIPTURE & WELLBEING

### 6 New dawn

In our final session, we'll enter a story of emotional and spiritual healing with a focus on the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus.

#### Pray

*'Only say the word and my soul shall be healed.'*

#### Scripture

*'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.'*

*Luke 19:5*



**Christ and Zacchaeus by Niels Larsen Stevns, 1913.**

Oil on canvas. Randers Museum of Art, Denmark.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niels\\_Larsen\\_Stevns-Zak%C3%A6us.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niels_Larsen_Stevns-Zak%C3%A6us.jpg)

Niels Larsen Stevns' Biblical works always focus on transformation and the promise of spiritual life; offering that which the material world cannot offer. In deciding to give half his possessions to the poor, Zacchaeus is not obeying a rule that Jesus promulgated, rather Zacchaeus's gift is a spontaneous act of repentance, love, and gratitude.

## Reflection

We're nearing the end of our journey through the biblical world of spiritual wellbeing.

We've asked how God might use a dream to pose some of life's fundamental questions.

We've considered the value of starting the day in a state of prayerful mindfulness.

We've reflected on ways of dealing with the heat of day of modern life and all it throws at us, and whether, paradoxically, the hustle and bustle might keep us from living.

We've considered the need for restoration in times of physical and spiritual burnout.

We've made connections between suffering and the 'dark night of the soul'.

So here we are, about to meet the one who came for people as insecure as young Solomon, as disillusioned as the writer of Ecclesiastes, as exhausted as Elijah and as unable as Job to face another day of pain; one who came 'to seek out and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10).

Jericho lay on the route from Galilee to Jerusalem, so we can expect Jesus to have passed through the town repeatedly. It was an attractive place, coveted by the likes of Herod and Cleopatra, and the mansion of one of its citizens would have blended in nicely with the gentrified feel: a chap named Zacchaeus.

He was a senior tax collector by trade. Not a particularly popular profession at the best of times. In Zacchaeus' day, things were made worse by the fact that the taxes he collected on goods transported around the country went into the coffers of the enemy: Rome. Not to mention the fact that people like Zacchaeus had a reputation of charging a mark-up to line their own pockets. No wonder, eyebrows were raised when Jesus singled him out from the crowd:

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.' *Luke 19:1–10*

Zacchaeus: rich, corrupt, despised – and the focus of Jesus' attention. No doubt he didn't expect to be called down from the safety of the tree. No doubt he didn't enjoy the sudden, unwanted attention of the crowd. They ignored him at best and hated him at worst. They saw nothing but the money-grabbing sycophant, ready to betray his own people. But Jesus saw something else.

If you've ever been in love, you may have noticed how everyone around you treated the beloved pretty much the same, giving them an average degree of attention. Only you noticed the loose strand of hair gleaming behind their ear and found the peculiar way they held their fork endearing, you seemed to be the only one who registered how their voice dropped by a half-tone or two whenever they felt unsure about something, and while others carried on chatting as your beloved got in the car and fastened the seatbelt, a sudden sense of the fragility of life punched you in the gut.

Love is not always blind; it also opens our eyes. Jesus could see something in Zacchaeus that others couldn't.

How surprised would he have been when the Rabbi invited himself to dinner? And how might he have felt when the penniless preacher from up north entered his luxurious courtyard and settled down for a time of fine dining? What happened between Jesus entering Zacchaeus' posh executive home and the words: 'Today salvation has come to this house'?

C.G. Jung – one of the fathers of psychology – saw the house as an image of life, so much so that he fashioned his own house as a kind of mirror of his own unconscious. And it's interesting to note that Jesus doesn't lecture Zacchaeus on financial misconduct at the foot of the tree but insists on going to his house. Did Zacchaeus realise in Jesus' presence that his house was a reflection of his dubious and contradictory existence? Was this the key to the salvation Jesus referred to later on? So taken by his encounter with the Lord was Zacchaeus that it transformed his life.

Now let me invite you to spend a few minutes in silence as you picture Jesus visiting, not Zacchaeus, but you.

Depending on which of the topics and biblical figures we discussed previously you identify with the most, start off by picturing yourself with that hurt, that doubt, that fear, as you sit in your living room, your bedroom or perhaps even in a far corner of your shed or loft, where no-one can find you.

Close your eyes and silently view yourself in that place, clinging to whatever it is that is weighing you down. Feel the weight, without trying to push it away.

Then, keeping your eyes shut, picture Jesus entering with the words: 'I must stay at your house today'. Will you let him into your well-guarded space?

Sense his presence for a minute or two. Then, ask him to take your burden off you, whatever it might be. And hear him say to you: 'Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Finally, open your eyes and slowly read the story of Zacchaeus as if it was written to you.

Expect no magic, no miracle cure. But take the time to contemplate your hurts and fears and allow Jesus into your most private, most painful space; today, tomorrow, each day. And trust that salvation will come.

### **Pray**

*'Lord Jesus – forgive me; heal me; restore me. Amen.'*

### **Reflection and action**

Over the next few days, take time to read one Gospel account a day in which Christ is healing or teaching, and imagine yourself as one of the story characters. See whether this helps you to deepen your appreciation of Christ's words and deeds, and their significance to your life.

Think about your hurts and fears, past and present, and consider the destructive impact they might be having on your daily life. Ask yourself whether it might be worth revisiting them with the help of a professional counsellor.

## Reflection on the painting



**Norham Castle, Sunrise by J.M.W. Turner, 1845.**

Oil on canvas. Tate Britain Gallery, London.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph Mallord William Turner - Norham Castle, Sunrise - WGA23182.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_Mallord_William_Turner_-_Norham_Castle,_Sunrise_-_WGA23182.jpg)

Turner is arguably the finest landscape painter of all time. And this painting is a perfect example of his gift with light. Here, the landscape and architecture merge to an almost unrecognisable form diluted by the omnipresent light of the sunrise. It is a moment in time, which Turner loved creating, as he was more interested in showing the atmosphere created in a single moment, than the actual physical objects of the place he loved so dearly. Only the title tells us that there is a castle since it is all but disappeared. The cows serve as the only clue that this is not some other surreal fantasy, but an actual English landscape.

Norham sits on the river Tweed in Northumberland, on the English side of this famous border with Scotland. Turner first saw Norham Castle in 1797, during his grand tour of northern Britain, and was taken with it immediately. He returned to the ruins several times throughout his lifetime, painting it during each visit, and this work comes later in his career.

Turner represented this castle like no other before him. He found a beauty where no one else looked, painting an ordinary British mist with cosmic effect. He always recognised the sublime ignored by so many artists. And then revealed it slowly through his brushstrokes; each layer speaking to us gradually, seamlessly in tune with the dawn of a new day. Turner was inspired by the purple rocks, blue river pools, shimmering trees and the endless hills that this location had to offer.

Turner wanted the atmosphere to dominate, to evoke nature without man-made intervention. To arouse and stir our hearts with the truthfulness and changing moods of nature at its best.

**A Sinful Woman is forgiven**

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace.

**Bible texts for further reflection**

**I have seen the Lord.  
Receive the Holy Spirit.  
And their eyes were opened.**

**John 20:1–18  
John 20:19–29  
Luke 24:13–35**

**Further reading**

The Other Side of You by Salley Vickers, Harper Perennial, 2007.

The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your Transformation by Richard Rohr, SPCK Publishing, 2016.

Monsignor Quixote by Graham Greene, Vintage Classics, 2000.