



From the Manger to the Cross, the Men in Christ's Life: Zacchaeus

by Kris Swiatocho

Editors note: This is a part of a series.

My stepfather is only one example of a man who has impacted my life as a result of his relationship with Christ. Throughout this series, I want to share with you about some of the other men who have impacted my life solely because of their relationship with Jesus. I believe as I share that you, too, will connect with them and discover for yourself how God has always had a plan for you, is working it out in your life and will never leave you.

Do you sometimes think you don't matter? Do you feel insignificant in this big world? That all your hard work, building your life hasn't amounted to much? Or at least you think much?

I used to feel this way. I can remember when I was a young adult; I was searching for my purpose. What was God doing in my life? I am just one little person. How can my life be that valuable to God? I am one in a zillion of people. Yeah, yeah, he knows the hairs on my head so he knows me. Yada yada yada! I knew he knew me. I had read Scripture and understood that he even loved me, unconditionally. But what I didn't know was how I could be used by God. I wanted to not just exist. I wanted to make a difference. But how?

During this struggle to figure out who I was and what God wanted to do with me was also a time when I still had a foot in the world. Have you ever been there? Living almost two separate lives. I was still partying, hanging with some folks who weren't the best influences in my life, watching TV and movies that didn't edify anyone, smoking cigarettes, etc. Well, you get the idea. But what was so cool was that I may have had one foot in the world, but I also had one foot in Christ. And that foot was desperately searching for value, for importance in this world. That foot would be the first step toward a life saturated with purpose in Christ.

At this time in my life I was flat broke, due to being in a relationship with a guy who borrowed (uh, took and didn't pay back) thousands of dollars from me. I was working two jobs to pay back the debt. My parents came to visit me and saw I wasn't doing that well. They decided to take me home, back to Raleigh, N.C. They brought me back into their home ... to get my life back together. They knew I was a good kid but somehow had gotten off track. They gave me another chance to turn my life around (just like Christ does over and over).

It was at this time that I got down on my knees and recommitted my life to Christ. I had been saved for several years but being a young person like most, I had fallen away ... tempted by the colorful imagery of this world. Within three days, I had a job in my field. It was also during this time that a new friend told me about a ministry called "SOLO" ... Singles Offering Life to Others, led by Pastor Tom Harris. It was a huge citywide ministry for young singles ages 22 to 34. My first time was overwhelming as there were hundreds of people there. For the first several months I literally hugged the wall (and if you know me personally, that was a major feat as I am usually very extroverted). What was this world of people? They are all Christians, doing everything right. How could I be a part of this? Do they know my past, my mistakes? Do they know I am still struggling with things? If they knew me would they shun me or ignore me?

What was amazing about SOLO is that everyone there was on the same journey that I was. Some were still living in the world while others had managed to get out of it. Some were from overly fundamental religious backgrounds, while others were from legalistic, and others had never even been to church. Some were the devil in sheep's clothing, using the church to only find dates and some were authentic followers of Christ. And you know what, I was one of them. With all my scars, scrapes and hurts ... with all my mistakes ... with all my questions, I was one of them.

It was during this time that I found out my value in Christ. SOLO put on the huge singles conference each year called SingleLight. The year prior they had a "nobody" named Steven Curtis Chapman lead their worship. Ha! They asked me if I



would like to help with the event. They knew my background was in graphics. They asked if I could do the banner for the outside of the civic center, the location of the conference. I was like, "Sure, sounds like fun."

I asked when was the conference, and they said it would be in 11 months. I said, "OK, call me in 10 months." They said, "Well, you are part of the team now and well, we meet weekly to prepare for the conference." Weekly! Weekly? For a banner? Then they said, "Well, we could get someone else." Then I was like, "No, no, I can do it" (I loved the idea of everyone seeing my work up on a building ... this is where one of my feet was still in the world). "OK, I can meet weekly." Then they said, "Oh and we do a devotion and pray, too." I was like, a devotion and prayer!! Ugh! Well, what was cool about this is that these guys met me where I was in this world. They found common ground with me.

As the weeks went on, I realized that this meeting was much more than deciding where to put a registration desk or what T-shirts to buy. It was a time of growing in Christ. It was a time of understanding my purpose. I learned that my purpose was simple. A relationship with Christ that glorifies Him that transfers into relationships with others. Wow! I had a reason to live! I could make a difference. I was important to Christ, as I was, where I was. Everything that I was doing was to glorify Jesus. And yes, he did know how many hairs I had on my head and loves each one of them, too.

Zacchaeus, was another person who had a bunch of junk in his life. The town did not like him for the kind of work he did. But like myself, I believe he had one foot in the world and one foot in Christ. And he needed one step (up a tree) to cross the line where he, too, would know his purpose.

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 being a short man he could not, because of 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. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

— Luke 19:1-10

What I have learned from Zacchaeus:

1. Even the worst of sinners knows truth.

Even in the worst times of my life, when I have been the farthest from Christ, I knew the difference between right and wrong. For one reason, my parents taught me the difference but also, God says we are born knowing the difference—even though we choose sin. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus coming. Based on what was about to happen, he knew what it would take to clean his slate. To feel forgiven for his sins. He knew who had the power to forgive him. He knew the truth. Zacchaeus, needed a new start, do you?

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 being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.

— Luke 19:2-3

2. When we know the truth, we need to run to it.

God talks about that when we are tempted (and temptation isn't the sin, it's falling into that is sinful) that we are to run, flee. In the same way, I believe when we see and know the truth that we should run to it. And run as fast as you can. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. What would he look like? Would he have a halo on his head? Would he be tall or short



like me? Would he be dressed in fine clothes like me? Would he be funny or smart? He just wanted to see him, just one glimpse. Zacchaeus, due to his size, was having a hard time seeing Jesus through the crowd. So he ran and climbed up a tree. He would never realize that making these steps would change his life forever, for eternity. Sometimes we are only one step away from a life with Christ, one step away from living with Him for eternity.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

— Luke 19:4

3. Don't ever believe that Jesus isn't watching you and wanting to be involved in your life.

Can you envision being Zacchaeus at this moment? Standing in the tree, looking out and seeing Jesus coming your way. Oh, wow, there he is. The crowd moving, tight with people, children and animals. The dust from their sandals filling the air. Oh, he is almost here. I can see him coming. He is almost in front of me. I know he won't see me. I am one in a million people here. I don't really matter. But maybe, just maybe he might look up. I am the only one in a tree. He has to see me!

I have felt like Zacchaeus many times in my life. Jesus, look, just look. I am over here ... drowning in my sin, in my filth, in my doubt. Jesus, I need you so much. I can't do this alone; yet I keep trying to. I'm up here Lord ... can you see me? I want to change, I want my life to be different. Just look this way, and I know that is all it will take.

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately!" What? Is he talking to me? How does he know my name? There are so many people here. Oh, I bet he has heard about me and what I do for a living. Yeah, everyone knows my name, and they don't always use it in a nice way. "Zacchaeus, come down immediately! I must stay in your house today!" What? What? You not only know me, but you want to stay at my house? Don't you know who I am? Yes, Jesus says. He knows WHO YOU ARE!

In Bible times when people wanted to stay in your home, it meant much more than what it means today. That type of hospitality was a deep level of intimacy. It's like the difference between those outside your circle and those inside. It's your comfort level. Inviting someone over to your home was allowing them into that sacred circle of trust, of closeness, of safety. Jesus coming to Zacchaeus' house was not only a step in showing others his faith, but also showing Jesus' faith in Zacchaeus.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

— Luke 19:5

4. Zacchaeus taught me about obedience, with joy.

Has Jesus told you to do something and you kind of hemmed and hawed about doing it? What I love about Zacchaeus is that he didn't argue with Jesus. I guess first he was blown away that in the midst of the crowd, that Jesus not only saw him, but called him by name. Second, he wanted Jesus to eat at his house. I believe Jesus wants to eat in our homes, too, but there are things we are still not doing that he wants us to do. We are still being disobedient about things. Things he has told us over and over to stop doing, as well as things he wants us to start doing. Now I am not saying that God isn't everywhere, even eating dinner with us. I am simply saying that Jesus wants a more intimate relationship with us and that we are the barrier to it with our sin.

Zacchaeus not only was obedient and came down out of the tree, but he welcomed Jesus gladly. Do you ever welcome God's direction? God's discipline? God's guidance? With joy? I don't, and I know I should as I know he is doing all these things in my life to help me and grow me to be more like him. Lord I pray for not only myself for those writing this that we welcome God's direction, his discipline, with joy.

So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

— Luke 19:6



5. Don't forget the he knows everything about you and still loves you.

Wow, he knew everything about Zacchaeus and still chose to go to his house. I think sometimes we are more concerned with what people think than God. Yes, we have a witness and we do need to be concerned about our witness. However, Christ came for the sick, not the healthy.

Years ago one of my friends used to say he was going into bars to witness to people—but he felt having a beer and a cigarette helped to reach lost people. Well, I think it's great to go into bars and such to reach lost people, but I don't think you have to compromise to do it. I think we, as a Christian society, are more concerned about what people think, but if you are really sold out for Christ it won't matter where you go to witness as your light will shine.

Did Jesus know Zacchaeus? Yes! Did it matter to him about who he was and his past? No! Christ loved Zacchaeus just as much as he loves you. He wants all of us to come to him, even though not all of us will.

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

— Luke 19:7

6. Do what you need to do.

Zacchaeus didn't have to do anything to receive Christ, but he wanted to. That's what a relationship with Christ will do to you. It will change you. It will produce things in your life that will surpass any understanding. It will lead you to live totally differently. It will cause you to want to die for Christ. But even better, it will cause you to live for Christ.

Zacchaeus felt his possessions were a distraction, a hindrance to his relationship with Christ. Sometimes the things we own are a hindrance. Sometimes material possessions, relationships, our jobs, how we spend our time compete for Christ. What is in your life that is competing for Christ?

What is also great about this story is that Zacchaeus didn't give his possessions to Jesus (although this would seem natural) like he owed Jesus—but he gave it to Jesus' children, those who needed it (which IS giving to Jesus). In a matter of minutes, Zacchaeus was already understanding what it is to glorify God.

Then on top of giving away his possessions, he repented of his sins and wanted to make it right—even the sins he didn't know he made. Zacchaeus wanted to be clean, to be whole, to be forgiven. Zacchaeus wanted a relationship with Christ. Are you wanting a relationship with Christ? Do you want to be whole?

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."

— Luke 19:8

7. Zacchaeus had faith, bigger than life.

Because of his faith, Zacchaeus not only believed in Jesus but knew what Jesus could do for him. Something that nothing else in his life had done so far. Something that no idol, person or possession could do. His faith not only brought him into a relationship with Christ, but healed him. Healed him of his guilt, his fears, and his selfishness.

Can you imagine how God started using Zacchaeus? Can you imagine now that he knew his purpose was a relationship with Christ that glorified him and in turn a relationship with others, what his life would be like? Do you think Zacchaeus gave up his job? Moved to the beach or the mountains? Bought a time-share and retired? Well, even though I don't know for sure ('cause it isn't written), I like to think that Zacchaeus learned to live for Christ in the occupation that he had. Can you imagine what people would learn when they heard that this horrible little man gave half of his possessions to the poor and was willing to pay back four times anything he owed to anyone in the city of Jericho who he had wronged? What is so cool, too, is that Zacchaeus got to tell them why he is doing it. What had changed in his life? He got to have a God-incident.*



You see guys, not everyone is supposed to sell everything and move to some remote country to do the work of the Lord. Some of us need to be here, doing our work at a grocery store, at a doctor's office or in road construction. God wants you to live for Him where you are! To reach others for Him. For the son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost! It starts with you—short, tall, rich or poor, with a little sin or a bunch. He came for you just the same. If you don't know for sure of whether you are going to heaven, or maybe you know you are saved but you don't feel like you have a purpose, please go here.

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

—Luke 19:9-10

This is a list of people in the Bible who perhaps may have also thought their part didn't mean much. This list has gone around on e-mail for a long time. I am not sure who wrote the original e-mail, but I know who wrote the original list. Blessings, and I hope it encourages you. ...

Noah was a drunk,
Abraham was too old,
Isaac was a daydreamer,
Jacob was a liar,
Leah was ugly,
Joseph was abused,
Moses had a stuttering problem,
Gideon was afraid,
Samson had long hair and was a womanizer,
Rahab was a prostitute,
Jeremiah and Timothy were too young,
David had an affair and was a murderer,
Elijah was suicidal,
Isaiah preached naked,
Jonah ran from God,
Naomi was a widow,
Job went bankrupt,
Peter denied Christ (three times!),
The Disciples fell asleep while praying,
Martha worried about everything,
Zacchaeus was too small,
Paul was too religious,
and
Lazarus was DEAD!!!

*God-Incident: Weekly, and sometimes daily, I ask those I minister to if they have had a God-Incident. Meaning, that each day they need to remember to ask God to show up in their life. Then, start looking for it to happen. It might show up as an opportunity to pray for someone or share your faith, a beautiful sunset or the smell of flowers, or in a hug for you. No matter how it shows up, it will come to you if you look for it. Start today by praying for God to show up each day, for an opportunity to share your faith with someone, to experience Him. Trust me, as time goes on, He will show up and boy, how amazing it is. What is so cool about it all is that the more you experience God, the less of the world gets in. And I am all for staying full of Christ!

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to reach and grow leaders so they will in turn reach and grow others. She is currently working on her third Bible study, *From the Manger to the Cross: The Men in Jesus' Life*. Her second Bible study, *From the Manger to the Cross: The Women in Jesus' Life*, was published last fall and is available on her websites. Her first book, *Singles and Relationships: A 31-Day Experiment*, was co-authored with Dick Purnell of Single Life Resources.

TheSinglesNetwork.org Ministries helps churches, pastors and single adult leaders evaluate, develop and support their single adult ministries through high-energy speaking engagements, results-oriented consulting and training and leadership development conferences and seminars. Click [here](#) to request a FREE "How to Start a Single Adult Ministry" guide.

FromHisHands.com Ministries is Kris's speaking ministry. If you've ever heard her speak, you know that Kris is the kind of speaker who keeps the crowd captivated, shares great information and motivates people to make a difference in the lives of those around them! She speaks to all church audiences on everything from "first impression" ministry to women's topics to singles and young adults. She can speak on a Sunday morning, at a woman's retreat or for a single adults conference. Bring Kris to your church today!

Singles and Relationships by Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell

Many singles are Christians who wonder if God will ever bring a mate their way or if they should just stop focusing on a future with a marriage partner and live the single life to the fullest. Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell offer solid biblical answers for singles in this newest title in Dick's popular 31-Day Experiment Bible study.