

Fatal Distractions |
Enough
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Let me take you back a few years to the year 2001. For some of you here this will be a chance to reminisce, for others this may well be an education. The summer of 2001 to be exact. It was the year of blockbuster movies such as Shrek, Lord of the Rings, believe it or not the first ever Fast and Furious movie was released [2001 has a lot to answer for], the radio was playing songs such as Shackles [Praise You], Destiny's Child Jumpin' Jumpin', All the small things and Teenage DirtBag. Britney and Justin were still together and wearing hideous outfits like this [image].

I was 19 at the time a fan of "indie" music which meant it was the year of low slung slightly boot cut jeans, paired with a pair of double strap birkenstocks [no socks] or Clarks Wallabees and a tight retro t-shirt. Every week we would make the pilgrimage to the local indie wannabe hangouts with our freshly combed indie mullets and suitable attire, hoping to be accepted and acknowledged by our peers. **However as we strolled into the pub, I could always remember that something was missing.** Were my jeans boot cut enough, was my mullet suitably styled. I would go through the check list; hair, tight fighting retro tee, bootcut jeans, suede wallabees, pint of stella, but despite all the boxes being ticked I was left feeling like I wasn't enough. Something about what I was wearing wasn't quite enough to garner the attention or affirmation of the other wannabie's. Despite my well groomed mullet and carefully selected retro tee - it just didn't seem enough. Something was missing. It was then that it dawned on me, what I needed, what I really required, the thing that would be enough was of course a denim jacket.

There began my long and arduous journey to find the perfect denim jacket. Hunting high and low, before the day of internet shopping, had to make calls, look through catalogues, visit shops.

After some time I finally found the one. The perfect jacket. This was going to be it. That Friday as I swaggered into that pub in full denim tux, guess what? I still felt exactly the same, felt like something was missing, felt in-complete, felt like it wasn't enough, I wasn't enough, I needed something else, something more...but what.

In my feeble search for self-worth, for approval, I was making a fatal error. I was trying to base my self worth not on who I was but rather on external factors. I was being distracted by what I wore, what I listened to, what I associated with. Believing that these things would validate who I was. Believing that these things could define who I was or give me the confidence to live my life.

The issue with this distraction is that it has us fighting a battle that we can't possibly hope to win. It will always leave you wanting or needing more.

Whether it's through academic performance, appearance, approval from others, money, popularity, status, relationships, we are always left with a sense of needing more or not being enough.

It's a distraction that will cause us to consume more and more.

To run up debts, to overspend.

To feel like we are constantly in lack.

It will cause us to move from relationship to relationship, marriage to marriage in search of something more.

It will have us constantly chasing the next big thing, the next new car, the next job promotion, bigger house

Putting ourselves under pressure to perform, to change the way we act or behave, to be someone we aren't,

It's a distraction that leads us to believe that our self-worth is defined by what we have or what we do. It's a state that leads to us running in circles, constantly chasing and never quite feeling enough.

So what can we do in order to find a true understanding of our self worth and to escape this fatal distraction?

Today I want us to take a look at an account found in Luke 19, and it's the account of a man who found himself caught in this place of being defined by the thing he is chasing, and that man's name is Zacchaeus. It's a story that may be familiar to some or many of us, but as we go through this, there are a few things that I believe we should remember. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Actually he was a chief tax collector. He was also really short. This is important. Let's read [on screen].

Luke 19:1-10 [NLT]

Jesus entered Jericho and was making His way through the town. **2** There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. **3** He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

5 When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

6 Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. **7** But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

8 Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

9 Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man[a] came to seek and save those who are lost."

As we have said Zacchaeus is a tax collector, in fact he is a chief tax collector which makes him a very wealthy and powerful man. Israelites of Jesus' day looked at tax collectors as thieves and robbers.

Tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman government, which ruled Israel at the time. Their job was to collect taxes from their OWN people and hand the money over to the hated foreign power. Their own income came from whatever they could get out of people after they met Rome's quota. They were stealing and cheating their own people - which meant they weren't exactly popular at the local synagogue.

At some point, years before, he had been recruited by the Romans. Perhaps looking for something to define and approve him. He was probably a bit of a prodigy. He would have started out as an assistant to a tax collector. After proving his worth, his value, his usefulness he would have been promoted to tax collector. Ultimately, when we find him in this account, he has become the chief tax collector. He probably oversees an entire tax district and a gang of mini tax collector's who give him a cut of their take.

This makes Zacchaeus a major player in Jericho but it has also caused him to be rejected and looked down upon by his own people, maybe even his own family and friends. He is infamous, legendary, notorious, but it has come at a price. At some point in Zacchaeus' journey he has allowed the pursuit of money, wealth, power to distract him. Zacchaeus has become a reject, an outcast - the Jews don't want to know him, and the Roman's only want to use him.

Don't get me wrong, Zacchaeus is a popular guy, but popular for all the wrong reasons, sure he has people around him but how many just accept him for who he is rather than what he has to offer? The distraction of wealth and riches, has left him searching for more.

It's a search that has led him to be found sat up in a tree. One day, rumor was, Jesus might be the promised Messiah, and He was passing that way. Zacchaeus had grown up in the Jewish culture, and he would have been familiar with the prophecies. No doubt he had heard that one day there would come a Messiah. Now Jesus is coming through town, and Zacchaeus says, "I'm gonna check this guy out. He's getting a lot of followers; a lot of guys are talking about him. I'm curious."

Zacchaeus was all about status. You don't become a tax collector and then a chief tax collector and not like money and status. He was famous in a negative sense, but famous nonetheless.

Jesus starts strolling through the town. People are lining the streets, trying to catch a glimpse of him, and Zacchaeus realizes he can't see over the crowd. So he hitches up his blinged-out robe and runs ahead, gold chains clanking, and climbs a sycamore tree.

Then, to Zacchaeus's surprise, Jesus arrives and stops under the tree, and he looks up at him. He calls him by name. "Zacchaeus." "Whaaaa? How do you know me? I don't know you. Who told you about me?"

They say the sweetest sound to a human being's ears is the sound of your own name. God calls this rejected, hardened, selfish man by his name: "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I'm heading over to your house—right now." "You are? Uh, okay. Yeah." Zacchaeus is relishing the moment. All the upstanding religious Jews want a minute with Jesus, a nod, a handshake. Yet now, the chief tax collector—the biggest bad guy around—gets a personal invitation. I think he's looking at everyone saying, "Check me out!!" This is his moment in the limelight.

But that afternoon, something unexpected and unexplainable began to happen in Zacchaeus's heart. How long did he have an audience with the living God? Two hours? Four hours? We don't know. What did they talk about? We can only guess. We can assume that they ate a meal together and Jesus probably listened a lot.

Zacchaeus must have thought, nobody listens to me, except for a few guys who work for me. But this guy cares. He listens. He gets it. I can imagine Zacchaeus looking into the most compassionate eyes he's ever seen and thinking, Does Jesus know who I am? Does he really know the things I identify with? Does he know who is around my dinner table? Does he know what we do for a living? Does he know what paid for his fish? Does he know how I paid for this house?

He must . . . but he doesn't reject me. After a few hours with Jesus, Zacchaeus can't contain himself any longer. Abruptly, he stands up, seemingly overwhelmed with who this Jesus is. In front of family, peers, and employees, he blurts out, "I'm changing everything!" What? "I'm changing everything, Jesus. I'm gonna start giving my money away. In fact, anyone I've ever cheated, I'm gonna give them back four times what I stole."

The callous, money-hungry mob boss is about to go broke, and he doesn't even care. A moment with Jesus changed everything. I wonder what Jesus said in one short afternoon that changed a lifelong taker into a lavish giver. But that's not the point of this passage. It wasn't what Zacchaeus talked about—it was the person he talked about it with.

It was about being with Jesus. What changed Zacchaeus? Biblical principle? Personal devotion? Religious duty and deeds? No—just a few moments with God in the flesh. We don't even have a record of anyone telling Zacchaeus he needed to repent or give the money back. But something came over this man when he encountered Jesus.

The truth is, I am Zacchaeus. I may not be short in stature, but I'm short spiritually, in my own abilities and my own capacity. I have been distracted by performance, by appearance, by intellect but I'm left feeling like I'm not enough, that I don't have what it takes. Even if I want to get to Jesus, even if I want to see Jesus, I can't see past myself. I can't see past my sin, past my distractions, past my ego, past my self worth or value.

How do we try to reach Jesus? How do we try to get noticed? We run faster and we climb proverbial trees of religious actions, tree's of academia, tree's of materialism. We work harder, we study harder, we work out more, we chase more. We think, I'll get to Jesus. I'll impress Jesus with who I am, with what I have achieved, with how good I've been.

I believe most people have a sense of inadequacy and failure deep within themselves. No matter how hard we try or what we accomplish, we know we never truly feel like we are enough. We are short in a spiritual sense. We come short of God's glorious standard. So we think, I'll run faster, I'll run ahead, I'll find a tree and climb it, and I'll get God's attention. As if your running and your climbing is what gets God's attention!

That's not what saved Zacchaeus. It was God's mercy. It was God's grace. It was God's initiative. We think God stops and takes notice of us because he sees us up in our cute sycamore trees. We think it is because we are so good. "See, I got God to notice. You see me? It's because I pray so loud because I pray so much, because I attend church."

But that's not why Jesus stopped that day. He stopped of his own choosing. He stopped because he's gracious and he's good. He stopped because he knew Zacchaeus by name, just as he knows me and knows you. Jesus told Zacchaeus to hurry, and he tells us the same thing.

“Hurry down from religion. Hurry down from traditions, achievements, privilege, knowledge, appearance. Quit trying to pick yourself up. Only my grace can save you. Come down, and come now. Don't spend another moment or another day trusting yourself, trusting puny external factors which change from one moment to the next. I want to be with you today.”

But now he makes an announcement of his own. “Today, salvation has come to this house. Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, a true Jew.” Zacchaeus is stunned. He is a traitor, the bad guy, the complete opposite of a good Jew. For as long as he can remember, he's been on the outside looking in. Now he's on the inside? Now he's a good guy? If there's hope for Zacchaeus, there must be hope for me too!

So what can we learn from Zacchaeus and what can we do to help us?

1. Who are you talking to?

A moment with Jesus changed the direction of Zacchaeus' life. He went from being a consumer to the most generous giver. We don't know what was said during that visit but that doesn't matter. It wasn't about what was or wasn't discussed but rather who Zacchaeus was talking to. The same is true for our lives. Who is it that you are talking to? Who is it that you are allowing to influence your life, your decisions, your actions? Are these individuals having a positive influence on your self-worth?

In the life of Proclaimers we have a saying, show me your friends and I'll show you your future. It's so important that we allow the right people to influence our lives. Perhaps this week we need to take stock of who or what we are allowing to influence us and decide whether or not it is having a positive impact, or if it is becoming a fatal distraction. Take some time to access what are you talking to yourself? [Helena message - check it out - taking thoughts captive and measuring them against what God says].

Allow His opinion of you be the thing that defines who you are. Whether you call yourself a Christian or not, have a read of who God says you are. It will begin to transform your life. The people told Zacchaeus he was excluded, Jesus called him included. The people called him rejected, but Jesus called him accepted. Outsider, to insider.

What does God say about you? About the things which you have allowed to define your self worth?

Take time this week to discover what Jesus says about who you are. Take time this week to start replacing your ideas with God's truth and it will change your life.

BRAVE>KIND>LOVED>

2. Jesus is calling your name.

I find it amazing that Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name. Do you ever wonder how did he know? [Besides being God] I think Jesus knew his name because he had asked people ahead of time - who was this guy?

I think Jesus wanted to meet Zacchaeus no matter what. Whether there was a crowd or not. Whether he had been in that tree or not, Jesus was looking for Zac and he would have waded through that crowd until he eventually found him. The same is true for you and I.

Jesus is looking for you. Jesus wants to be involved within your life. He's not fussed by what you have or what you don't have. He's not interested in your bank balance or whether you have a degree or not, He just wants to know you. No jumping through hoops.

For some of us, like Zacchaeus, we just need to spend time with Jesus. Jesus is calling your name and he wants to hang out with you. He wants to be part of your everyday, part of your every moment. Part of your failures and success'. Don't hide from him in shame or reject him in self-righteousness. Don't allow the opinions of other people to shape your concept of him. Get to know him for yourself, and let the goodness of God change you from the inside out.

Tomorrow when you wake, when the pressure to perform begins to take hold, when we begin to find acceptance through trying will you answer him? When life gets loud, will you answer him? Jesus is calling your name, and he wants to be apart of your life, will you answer his call? This week as we prepare to head back into our worlds I wonder will you answer that call? Before you walk out of your front door or as you wake will you answer him and say Jesus, here I am?

Imagine how different your life could look if we could put into practice the truths found in the account of Zacchaeus. Imagine the freedom that we can experience when we begin to understand that our self worth, our value is not based upon the things which we do or have but rather on the goodness of God. True value isn't found in working hard, or trying our hardest to impress but rather it's found in answering his invitation, in accepting the truth of who Jesus is and who he says we are. There is nothing that we need to do or be in order to be accepted by God. This is true self worth and it comes through friendship with Jesus.

Call

Today you may not call yourself a Christian, we've talked a lot about a relationship with Jesus. Today Jesus extends that invitation to you.

Zacchaeus is stunned. He is a traitor, the bad guy, the complete opposite of a good Jew.