

## Gospel Journaling

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[www.ParentTeacherSupport.org](http://www.ParentTeacherSupport.org)

The Word of God intersects our lives and meets us where we are. It is so true. It is such grace! The teens who prayed through “Gospel ABCs” ([www.ParentTeacherSupport.org](http://www.ParentTeacherSupport.org) . . . [Newsletters/Religious Ed/Gospel ABCs](#)) experienced Jesus and the power of his Gospel. Their prayers testify to having had a formative encounter with Jesus.

The teens were guided to use a six-step process to pray with the Gospel. They were given a rubric/structure and next to each point they wrote their response. The individual sentences later combined to create a prayer paragraph.

1. Pray to become conscious of and attentive to the presence of God.
2. Read the Gospel slowly and audibly, loud enough to hear my own voice but not so strong that others hear me.
3. Write a brief, one-sentence summary statement about the story.
4. Analyze what Jesus is saying to me.
  - (4.1) What do his words mean today in the circumstances of my life?
  - (4.2) Why do I think Jesus is calling my attention to a particular idea, word, phrase, or thought?
  - (4.3) What is Jesus asking me to do?
5. Dialogue. Use “I-you” language. Talk with Jesus about the issue(s) that the Holy Spirit is stirring up in me. Ask Jesus to comment.
6. Make a resolution. Tell Jesus how I want to respond; what difficulties I predict that I will encounter; and how I will need Jesus to help me.

Following are the prayers of ten young teens who used this rubric/structure to process the Gospel story of Zaccheus (Luke 19: 1-10). Take note: All ten teens heard the same Gospel and yet ten unique responses emerged. The teens encountered Jesus. Each prayer gives a window into the soul of a young teen on a particular day... each one having had an experience of the Gospel intersecting with life!

*1. Zacchaeus was short, but Jesus noticed him.*

I may not be outstanding but I know you notice me, Jesus. I know that you don't care that I am not the best of all, just the best I can be! Your words mean that I shouldn't belittle myself; that I should have more confidence. I don't think you are asking anything of me, except maybe just to believe in myself. I don't know how I can muster up any more confidence. I never was very

confident about most things. I can only say that I will try my best, because it really is not my nature to be self-confident.

2. *Sometimes people have to go get what they want by themselves without depending on someone else.*

Jesus, I think you are telling me to stop trying to blend in with the crowd. I want to be my own person. I have to depend on myself some more. You are giving me the opportunity to do things by myself and different from others. You are asking me to depend on myself more or to find the unique part of me that is different from everyone else and precious. I want to respond by being more responsible and unique and to stop trying to blend in with the crowd and almost miss opportunities.

3. *Jesus loves everybody – great and small!*

It doesn't matter what my size is. You still love me. You probably want me to stop comparing myself to others in size and other things. You called my attention to the fact that you called Zacchaeus and welcomed him. You are asking me not to focus so much on little details, but the big picture itself.

Holy Spirit, please help me not to worry so much about little details and hurt feelings but to try my best to welcome others. I want to respond to you, Jesus, by giving a sign of affection to everyone I meet. Help me overcome the difficulty of getting my feelings hurt when I do this.

4. *Although we may feel lost, left out, or unnoticed in our lives, Jesus always notices us and loves us just as much as he loves anyone else.*

I think you are telling me that you love me no matter how many mistakes I make. And I think you are asking me to make friends with those who feel unwanted and seem lonely. I think you want me to make them feel special. I am willing to try to do what you ask but I might have difficulties such as being teased and not being able to have enough patience. Please help me to be patient and understanding. Thank you for relaying your message to me today.

5. *Jesus did not let the criticisms of the crowd change his decision to stay with Zacchaeus.*

Jesus, I think you are telling me that no matter how different I am, that I can be myself with you and you will still love me. If someone comes up to me I should be myself and not let another person put me down for being unique. Thank you for making me unique. I will try my hardest to be an individual.

6. *Zacchaeus got more than he hoped for!*

I'm not sure what you are telling me but I think it is that you will still like me no matter what I do or what happens. I think you called this to my attention today because you don't want me to act without thinking. I don't know what you are asking. If I understood what you wanted, I would be very willing to do it for you. Thank you for giving me something to pay attention to. I need your help.

Whenever I do these prayer experiences I never know what you want me to do. I'm sorry, but would you make it more clear?

7. *People are sometimes led off the right road and need to be corrected or reminded by something or somebody.*

I think you are telling me that money is not all important. I think you want me to spend more time with my brother and not be so mean to him. You are correcting me and telling me what I should be doing. You are asking me to be nicer to my family and spend more time with my brother. I'd rather not talk about it anymore today and just do it when I get home. Jesus, I do want to respond, but my homework and swimming will hold me back. But if you can pass the time to the weekend, I can spend more time then.

8. *Zacchaeus realized his sins, admitted them, and was willing to turn around his life.*

Jesus, you are telling me to go back and to be kind or to build new relationships with those I have hurt or haven't really become closely acquainted with. I think you want me to correct my relationship with my friends. I should erase all the bad things and begin new, good ones. You are asking me to start over on a clean slate. I will try very hard to do this. I know it is important. Thank you.

9. *Maybe Zacchaeus was offended by the crowd's anger, but he stood his ground and became a son of Abraham.*

I feel you are telling me not to be so selfish. If people ask things of me that aren't life threatening, I should give it to them. You are correcting me. I probably should have gone with "N" because the circumstances were urgent for her. You are asking me to be more lenient with my friends and the things they want. But I do this many times everyday and it doesn't cause me much good. But I guess I don't mind it.

10. *Jesus invited himself for dinner to the home of the most disliked man in town.*

Jesus, you are telling me to admit what I do wrong instead of making excuses. You want me to be completely ready for Confirmation and for me to be a better person in general. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for this news.

On another occasion, during a weekend adult retreat, retreatants worked through this same Gospel story and used similar guidelines for structuring their prayerful response to the Gospel. Shared here is the prayer of one female high school teacher:

Jesus, I think you respected Zacchaeus because (1) he was creative in having his needs met and (2) he assumed responsibility for his choices and (3) he allowed himself to experience delight with your invitation to join him rather than be overwhelmed with guilt or feelings of unworthiness.

I would benefit from being more like Zacchaeus. He did not allow himself to be stopped or remain in frustration because he was too short to see you in the crowd. He became creative and tried something unique.

Jesus, I think you want me to practice this creativity in my relationship with you and myself. When too many jobs or responsibilities pile up and scatter me, I get frustrated and come to a stand-still. I think you are asking me to change perspective at those times; to withdraw or back-up or climb a tree, so to speak, to get a clear vision and direction. So often it seems that I cannot see the forest because of the trees.

My experience teaches me that prayer time with you, especially my Sabbath Day, gives me the larger picture and focuses or rearranges the pieces of my life in such a way that I am peace-filled. I have become less faithful to that time and it is showing in my daily living. I am more impatient and irritable, things quickly rub me the wrong way, and I sink into isolation and judgmentalism.

I want to be faithful to focusing time with you. I will plan now to go to the School chapel each day for ten minutes after my second period before returning to my faculty desk. I will need your help, though, because the minute someone asks me for a favor, or if they can talk with me, or I get a thought about how kind it would be to say something supporting to the cafeteria workers, etc., my problem-solver need to be “all things to all people” kicks in and overshadows my soul’s need for solitude with you.

### **A Family Journaling Exercise** *(A follow up to Gospel ABCs)*

Gospel ABCs is a versatile tool. It engages a variety of ages and it is suited to a variety of settings: individual prayer, a class session, family activity, or an intergenerational gathering. Perhaps the most non-threatening way to share it with parents would be to organize a family event where children sit with their parent(s). Depending upon numbers, two or three families might be seated at the same table.

1. Using powerpoint or other visuals provide an overview explanation of Gospel ABCs. Post large poster-paper or newsprint paper around the room for each of the elements: attitude(s), behavior(s), consequence(s). Divide each chart in half. Designate the left column for positive qualities and the right column for negative qualities.
2. Use the Gospel of Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10). Direct the families to brainstorm characteristics and to then list them on the poster-paper. Have someone read the lists aloud for all to hear. Add ideas.
3. Schedule a break.
4. After the break introduce the group to a rubric for formulating a personal prayer response. Give the family a printed copy of the rubric.

<sup>1</sup>Write a brief, one-sentence summary statement about the story. <sup>2</sup>Analyze what Jesus is saying to me. (2.1) What do his words mean today in the circumstances of my life? (2.2) Why do I think Jesus is calling my attention to a particular idea, word, phrase, or thought? (2.3) What is Jesus asking me to do? <sup>3</sup>Dialogue. Use “I-you” language. Talk with Jesus about the issue(s)

that the Holy Spirit is stirring up in me. <sup>4</sup>Make a resolution. Tell Jesus how I want to respond; what difficulties I predict that I will encounter; and how I will need Jesus to help me.

5. Explain that eventually their family will write a sentence for each point. It would be helpful to have a group-size visual of the prayer rubric. Then, as each of the ten students prayers are proclaimed, point to the steps in the rubric that correspond to the prayer sentences. For example:

*<sup>1</sup>Although we may feel lost, left out, or unnoticed in our lives, Jesus always notices us and loves us just as much as he loves anyone else. <sup>2</sup>I think you are telling me that you love me no matter how many mistakes I make. And I think you are asking me to make friends with those who feel unwanted and seem lonely. I think you want me to make them feel special. <sup>3</sup>I am willing to try to do what you ask but <sup>4</sup>I might have difficulties such as being teased and not being able to have enough patience. Please help me to be patient and understanding. Thank you for relaying your message to me today.*

6. After the ten examples have been heard verbalize the conclusion that there is no one “right” answer; that the Spirit of God works in each of us individually, according to our needs. Invite all present to get in touch with what message Jesus is whispering to them.

7. Dim the lights. Play soft music. Provide three minutes of quiet time for personal prayer. Restore the lights so that the family can create a common prayer response to the Zacchaeus Gospel Prayer. Invite families to send a representative to share aloud the family prayer. Or, if preferred, post the family prayers on the wall.