

Chapter Six: Zacchaeus

Primary Concept:

We make choices based on our goals.

To understand our own behavior and the behaviors of others, we must understand the underlying goals behind our choices and actions.

In second grade, I liked a girl named Tammy. One of the things I liked about Tammy was that she constantly told me who I was. If I was struggling with the “Who am I?” question, Tammy was more than happy to answer it for me. For example, Tammy and I had a disagreement over how to spell ‘phone.’ “You’re crazy!” I told her. “There is no way that phone begins with a ‘p’.” We took our debate to the teacher, who, as the ultimate authority on all things phonetic, set me straight. “You’re a terribly bad speller,” she told me when we returned to our table. “Who am I?” The message was clear from Tammy, “I am a bad speller. That’s who I am.” We got back our math tests. She got a 75, and I got 100. “You are a math brain,” she said. “Who am I?” “I am a math brain. That’s who I am.”

Tammy taught me that my identity came from my successes and my failures, my abilities and my deficiencies. She taught me that I am what I do. I didn’t misspell ‘phone,’ I am a bad speller. I didn’t make an ‘A’ on my math test, I am a math brain. This lesson was reinforced at home. If I didn’t clean up my room, I was messy. If I didn’t do my homework but watched TV, I was lazy. If I argued with my sister, I was mean.

The lessons continued into adulthood. Smoke and I am a smoker. Overdraw my checking account and I am irresponsible. Drink too much once and I am also irresponsible. Drink too much on several occasions and I am a drunk. Sleep with somebody because I feel lonely, and I am a slut. A very simple psychology: *actions = identity*, do good and you are a good person, do bad and you are a bad person.

This is the psychology the crowd has in the following scripture passage. Read the text. Imagine you are in the crowd. How do you judge Zacchaeus based on his actions? Read the text again and imagine you are Jesus. How do you see Zacchaeus differently than the crowd?

Text

Luke 19: (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because (Jesus) was going to pass that way.

⁵ 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." ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

⁸ 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."

⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Concept in the Text

Zacchaeus' community diagnosed him through the eyes of an *actions = identity* psychology. The assumption is clear in the viewpoint: good people do good things, bad people do bad things, do good things and you are a good person, do bad things and you are a bad person. For the crowd, Zacchaeus did bad things because he was a bad person. Zacchaeus collected taxes for the Romans, he was a traitor. He took more than required, so he was a cheat. He worked with Gentiles instead of keeping the race pure, so he was unclean. He was, all in all, through the culminations of his actions, a sinner. They judged Jesus through the same lens, because Jesus ate with sinners, he was a sinner. You are what you do.

Jesus did not share their psychology. Jesus did not equate others with their actions. Jesus (on another occasion) said, "Judge not lest ye be judged." Why? Because he knew the game. As soon as you try and define who somebody is because of their actions, somebody is going to start doing the same to you.

Jesus looked at location, separation, and movement. Jesus saw Zacchaeus for where he was, up a tree, and how he got there. He didn't diagnose his character but his location.

Concept in Depth

Freud and Adler disagreed on the root source of human behavior. Freud believed that people were driven by conflicting internal processes, two drives (sex and aggression) which could seldom be satisfied, and divided personalities (id, ego, and superego) which were constantly at odds. Adler took a different approach which is illustrated in the following riddles.

*Why did the banana go to the doctor?
Because he was not peeling well.*

*Why did the cookie go to the doctor?
Because he was feeling crummy.*

*Why did the boy tiptoe toward the medicine cabinet?
Because he didn't want to wake the sleeping pills.*

*Why didn't the lady run from the lion?
Because people told her it was a man eating lion.*

Why was 6 afraid of 7?

Because 7 8 (ate) 9.

What do all these riddles have in common? Each presents a puzzling behavior: bananas and cookies going to the doctor, a boy tiptoes in the bathroom, a lady who doesn't run from a lion, and one number afraid of another, and then each riddle explains the behavior by revealing the motivation. *Why didn't the lady run from the lion? She didn't run because she thought the lion only ate men since it was a man eating lion.* Her assumption doesn't have to be correct to illuminate the behavior.

These riddles give a puzzling behavior and explain it. The best example is the oldest known riddle, *Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side.* In the riddle, understand the goal, understand the mysterious actions. For human behavior, once we understand a person's goal, we understand the puzzle of a person's behavior.

Whereas Freud believed behavior was pushed by drives, Adler believed behavior was pulled by goals. Adler said it this way, *When we know the goal of a person, we know approximately what will follow.* Adler believed, *Each of us values only that which is appropriate to his goal. A real understanding of the behavior of any human being is impossible without a clear comprehension of the secret goal which he is pursuing; nor can we evaluate every aspect of his behavior until we know that his whole activity has been influenced by his goal.*

Why did Zacchaeus climb the tree? *He climbed up in the sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see...* The children's song is clear; he climbed the tree because he wanted to see Jesus. If we didn't understand that Jesus was in town, if we didn't know that there was a crowd which blocked Zacchaeus's view of Jesus, we might question the behavior, "Why is that grown man climbing a tree?" But because we understand his goal, we understand his behavior.

Looking a little deeper, why was Zacchaeus a tax collector? We can't say for sure, but we can apply the same principal. We can assume that like climbing the tree, Zacchaeus had a motivation for being a tax collector which made sense to him. There must have been some benefits obvious to Zacchaeus about being a tax collector which made the choice attractive. Perhaps he thought collecting taxes for Rome would give him power, authority, wealth, or connections, no one knows for sure. For whatever reason, within the goals Zacchaeus set for himself, being a tax collector made sense to him at some point in his life.

The text tells us that to some extent, Zacchaeus had been successful as a tax collector. "...he was a chief tax collector and was rich." Yet, Zacchaeus wasn't satisfied. He wanted something more. Becoming a tax collector hadn't given him what he wanted. Zacchaeus had a faulty strategy. Zacchaeus probably would have agreed with Stephen Covey when he said, *It is incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busy-ness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall. It is possible to be busy – very busy – without being very effective.*

Looking for something more, he wanted to see Jesus. He needed to keep a safe distance between himself and the crowd, and between himself and Jesus, so he climbed a tree.

The crowd paid no attention to Zacchaeus' motivation. They only judged his character. To them, he did bad things because he was bad. Bad actions come from bad people.

Jesus doesn't judge Zacchaeus's character, he discerns his actions. I imagine the encounter went something like this:

Jesus, walking down the street, through the crowd, looks up and sees Zacchaeus in the tree. "Zacchaeus, what are you doing up in that tree?"

Zacchaeus is startled by three things. Jesus sees him. Jesus knows his name, and Jesus speaks his name as if he were a friend he hadn't seen in a while. "Zacchaeus, what are you doing up in that tree?" Jesus asks again.

"I wanted to see you, but I couldn't for the crowd. I climbed the tree so that I could see you."

"And...?" Jesus asks.

"And...?" Zacchaeus responds.

"Why else did you climb the tree?" Jesus pushes.

“I climbed the tree,” Zacchaeus adds, “so that others wouldn’t see me. I wanted to be away from the people.”

“So that others wouldn’t see you?” Jesus questions. He looks around the crowd. Those that weren’t looking at him were looking at Zacchaeus. “How’s that working for you?”

“Not very well,” he admits.

“Well,” Jesus says, “you wanted to see me, come down. I am going to come to your house.” Zacchaeus’ heart races. ‘He spoke my name! He’s coming to my house!’

At his home, the two men sit together with others gathering around. The crowd from the street has gathered within and outside Zacchaeus’ home. Jesus says to Zacchaeus, “You chose to be a tax collector. Tell me about that choice. What were you looking for? Why did that make sense to you at the time?”

“I thought it would give me status. Make me a powerful person in the community. Get me respect from others.”

Outside the crowd grumbles, “Why is Jesus eating at the home of a sinner?” Zacchaeus thinks of his life over the past few years.

Jesus asks, “So, how’s that working for you?”

“Not very well,” Zacchaeus admits.

Then Zacchaeus offers, “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.”

Jesus then points to Zacchaeus and speaks to the crowd, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham... My primary purpose is to seek out and to save those who are lost.”

Salvation came to Zacchaeus’ house. Zacchaeus was saved, but saved from what?

The answer, I think, is in Zacchaeus’ action. He responds to this salvation by becoming responsible. He says, “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.” Given Jesus’ response and the stance of the text, I think we can assume that this is no idle promise. This is a sign of transformation. So, what is different? What is Zacchaeus delivered from?

In a word, shame. There was no sign of Zacchaeus taking responsibility for his actions before meeting Jesus. The reason is easy to understand. Before his encounter with Jesus, he lived under the oppression of an *actions=identity* psychology. With that mindset, shame dominates. The strength of shame comes from the combination of shame and guilt. In an *actions =identity* psychology, if you do bad then you are bad. Under the oppression of this mindset, few are able to absorb the shameful implication of mistakes, misgivings, errors, or flaws. The pain is so great. *Action=identity* psychology is rooted in a value recognizing love. The chief symptoms are: shame and guilt are identical; responsibility is painful; and any sign of weakness, flaw or error shows a defective, deficient, depraved soul. “He is a sinner,” the crowd judged.

Jesus showed him a value giving love. This love frames Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus. Jesus knows his name when they meet. He speaks it in love. He affirms him by eating at his home (to eat at someone’s home is a sign of equality, if Jesus is God’s beloved then he only eats with God’s beloved). The encounter then ends with Jesus calling Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham” (which means part of the community, child of God’s calling, or child of God).

Jesus looks at Zacchaeus through the eyes of value giving love. Jesus saves him from the mind set of guilt (I did badly) and shame (I am bad) being the same. He saves him from his shame and liberates him to a new world of value giving love. Secure in his value, he is liberated and can then be responsible for his actions shame free. Zacchaeus finds a new world of possibility. Now able to own that his former strategy wasn’t effective, he can look for another. While shame bound him to his past, Jesus interaction frees him to live in the present. He cannot change his yesterday, his previous choices and actions, but he can amend them in the present.

Application

Freed from shame and his past, Zacchaeus was enabled by Jesus to evaluate his choices by their effectiveness. Whether he was 'good' or 'bad', 'holy' or a 'sinner' became muted because at the center of his understanding of self, he saw himself as valuable, as loved. Though he had been called many names in the community, Jesus called him by his name. Though many voices rejected him, Jesus' voice claimed him and confirmed for him that he is a son of Abraham, or translated, child of God.

Choices and behavior are better understood from the perspective of goals and strategies. Like the riddles, understand the motivation, understand the behavior. As Adler said, *When we know the goal of a person, we know approximately what will follow.* Adler took this search for goals into some unexpected areas of human. Here are three places where understanding goals as motivators gives us insight to our behaviors and the behaviors of others in an evaluative but non judging approach.

Memories: Freud believed the answers to a patient's problems often resided in their past. For Freud, to understand the person, you must understand their formative past. For Adler, it wasn't the past which was as significant as what the person chose to remember from his or her history. Adler said, *Every memory, however trivial they may consider it, is important because by definition it represents to them something memorable, and it is memorable because of its bearing on life as they picture it. It says to them 'This is what you must expect', or 'This is what you must avoid,' or even 'Such is life!' Again we must stress that the experience itself is not as important as the fact that this particular experience persists in memory and is used to crystallize the meaning ascribed to life. Every memory is a chosen reminder.*

Adlerian counselors will often ask, "What is your first memory?" What they mean is, "Of all the experiences you had, what have you chosen to remember?" Those choices reveal often hidden goals and hidden worldviews.

One example Adler offers is a person who cited this as her first memory, "The coffee pot fell off the table and scalded me." Because she chose this as her first memory, Adler suggested that her world view would be that the world is a dangerous place and she is helpless in it. He also expected that she would frequently criticize others for not taking adequate care of her.

In churches, I ask leaders, "What's your first memory of being in a church?" Following Adler's lead, believing that we choose our first memories for a reason, I ask the leaders, "Why is that memory important to you?" "What do you see in that memory that a church should or shouldn't be?" "What do you want to create (or not create) at this church that you value from your first memory?" The discussions are often quite lengthy and full of insight.

Dreams: Whereas Freud and many others examined dreams for mystical allusions, Adler was much more practical. Adler looked away from universal symbols or connections and instead looked at the results of the dreams. Adler examined the emotions the dream aroused and the behaviors the emotions seemed to encourage. For Adler, in the dream, it is the emotions that matter. That is why, according to Adler, long after the dream images are gone, the emotions remain. You may awake from a dream in which you remember nothing except the emotion, but the emotion is usually ample for motivation.

For example, if you are facing a difficult decision and are unsure of what to do, if you go to bed and dream of flying, you likely awaken with a feeling that you can do something that didn't seem possible. Your dream will give you encouragement (which you are seeking) to go forward unafraid. However, if facing that decision, you dream of flying then falling, your dream will give you discouragement (which you were looking for) to avoid the decision.

Adler shows how a dream may serve a specific behavior of a much broader goal. He gives the example of a man whose goal is to get money without working for it. He wants to buy a lottery ticket. He knows that others buy lottery tickets or gamble in other forms and fail. That night he dreams many people are jumping over a ditch. They all fail the jump and fall into the ditch. The man leaps it with ease. What do you think he did the next morning?

Love at “First Sight:” Though I haven’t found this in Adler, it is a reasonable application. In each of us, we have our goals, our sense of our ideal future. As we live seeking our goals toward our perfect worlds, we encounter others. We can have a sense of ‘love,’ for persons who nicely fit our goals and future hopes.

For example, when I met my wife, I was training to be a minister and on break from graduate school. My obvious goal was to be a pastor, to work primarily with children and youth, to raise a family with someone who loves the church. When I met Carrie, I was working as program director for a summer camp. Intuition told me she would be a great wife, but looking back, it didn’t take a reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes to figure out how she fit into my image of a perfect world. She was at camp (loves children). She was a preacher’s daughter (loves church). And thought I was special (every preacher wants someone who thinks they are great).

Challenge for Us

Rather than judge others, or ourselves, as the crowd judged Zacchaeus, we should examine goals and strategies. If we understand our goals and the goals of others, we will likely understand behavior – including memories, dreams and attractions. Frustration, discouragement, and loneliness are likely the byproduct of poor goals or ineffective strategies. Sociability, self-assurance, and charity are often the result from healthy goals and effective strategies.

Reflection

Read the following quotes. How do they relate to the text and the concepts above?

*When Michelangelo chiseled marble,
he could see the unfinished figure in the stone.
We are all sculptors in our behavior,
attempting to change the world outside us
to match our internal pictures of what we want.
This is true of the most simple
as well as the most complex behavior.
– Robert Wubbolding*

Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives. – Viktor Frankl

The goal of behavior is to close the gap between what the person wants and what the person perceives he or she is getting. – William Glasser

*Three frogs were sitting on a log.
Two decided to jump.
How many frogs are left?
Three.
Deciding to jump means nothing.*

Exercise

What is your earliest memory? What is your world view that the memory reinforces?

Think of a dream you had? What feeling did the dream stir in you? What behavior did the feeling encourage?

Zacchaeus thought that being a tax collector would give him a respected place in the community. He was

mistaken. Examined goals and examines strategies are always more productive. Do you have any goals which have disappointed you?

What is a goal you have for life?

(adapted from Robert Wubbolding, *Using Reality Therapy*ⁱ)

Ask yourself, “What do you want?”

(If you don't know what you want, you'll never get it.)

Evaluate your wants: Ask, “What do you really want?”

- *What would life be like if you get what you want?*
- *If you got what you want, what would you have?*
- *Is what you want attainable or realistic for you?*
- *Is there a reasonable chance of getting what you want in the near or distant future?*
- *How likely is it that the world around you will change to meet your desires?*
- *Are your wants truly in your own best interest?*
- *Would getting what you want help you? How? Would others be helped? How?*

Ask, “What are you doing?”

- *What: specific not general*
- *Are: focus on now*
- *You: personal, not external*

Evaluate behavior:

- *Is your present specific behavior helping or hurting you?*
- *Is it helping or hurting the people around you?*
- *How is it helping you get what you want?*

Ask, “What are you willing to do?”

When evaluating wants, willing action is important. Speaker Ken Davis describes meeting with his college advisor who asked him, “What do you want from life?”

Ken told him all his goals and dreams.

“I don't believe you,” his advisor said.

“What do you mean?” Ken responded. “They are my dreams.”

“They're your dreams alright,” his advisor told him, “but I don't believe you because there is nothing in your actions that would lead me to think you're serious about them.”

Your real dreams are shown through your actions – not your ‘convictions.’ What are you willing to do?

ⁱ Summarized from Robert Wubbolding, *Using Reality Therapy*, pp. 28-57.