

# The Pharisee and the Publican

**Luke 18:9-14**

**Week of March 15 - 21**

As far as we know, humans have always wanted answers to the big questions of life: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? In this parable, Jesus gives us the answer to one of those big questions: What makes us right with God?

The answer Jesus gives in this parable likely shocked those who heard it for the first time. It still surprises us today.

**Key Point:** Our humble reliance on God, not our own actions, is what gives us a right relationship with God.

**Key Verse:** ... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. – Luke 18:14

## Segment 1 – What makes us right with God?

**Open your time of study with prayer:**

Heavenly Father, I struggle with the big questions of life. Why am I here? What does God want from me? What makes someone a good person? Please help me to look to you – the author of life – to find the right answers. Amen.

### **Read Luke 18:9-14**

In Jesus day, the Pharisee's were a religious group that dedicated their lives to rigorously following the laws of the Torah (Jewish scripture). In fact, they were so fanatical about this that they not only followed the original laws, but hundreds of additional or expanded versions of the laws just to make sure they were following all the rules!

In contrast, tax collectors (or publicans in some translations) were viewed as thieves and traitors. They worked for the Roman government to collect taxes from the people. Their salary was anything they collected above what was actually owed to Rome. Their methods of collecting these taxes were not always friendly.

If Jesus were to retell this parable today he may say something like, "A pastor and a drug lord went into a church to pray..."

**With this modern concept in mind – Read Luke 18:9-14 again.**

1. What does the word "righteous" mean, and how is that relevant to this parable?

2. How would you describe the difference between someone who is “righteous” and someone who is “self-righteous”?
  
3. What does justified mean? Why do you think Jesus says the tax collector went away justified, when the Pharisee did not?

**Pray:**

During Jesus day, it was common for Jews to pray standing up, with their arms outstretched, head turned upward and hands raised to God. It is likely the Pharisee’s prayed in this posture. The tax collector was also standing to pray, yet his posture is very different – head downcast, arms beating his chest which was a sign of lament and sadness. For both characters in this parable, their physical position and movement was a part of their prayer as well.

As you enter a time of prayer today, give some thought to your physical position as you pray and try something different. You may find that different postures/actions feel more appropriate for different types of prayer. Here are a few suggestions:

- Sit in a chair with your hands folded
- Stand with your head down
- Sit on the floor
- Walk as you pray
- Lay on the floor, arms out stretched, face down (prostrate)
- Kneel
- Kneel, and then lay forward as if bowing on the floor
- Stand with your arms out stretched and head looking up
- Pray as you workout (swim, run, elliptical machine, etc.)
- Lay on the floor, looking upward
- Sit, with your hands held open in front of you

Sometimes we can use movement as a part of our prayer. Try this:

- Stand up with your arms straight out to your side and your palms pointing to the ceiling and pray: "Creator God".
- Bring your hands together in front of you, forming a triangle with your thumbs and forefingers, and pray: "The three in one".
- Keeping the triangle shape, move your hands down to touch the ground and pray: "Be in this place".
- Stand up again and place the triangle over your chest praying, "Be in my heart", and over your forehead praying, "Be in my mind".
- Take the triangle above your head and pray: "I love you and adore you".
- Bring your hands down to the starting point and you can start to pray again.

4. How did it feel to move, or be positioned differently as you prayed? What effect did this have on your prayer?



**Pray:**

I love the use of exaggeration to make a point. However, I think exaggeration has its dangers too. When a problem is pointed out in dramatic, obvious fashion, it can be easy for us to ignore how it may be present in our own lives in less dramatic forms.

The Pharisee, full of pride, lists the ways he is better than other people, as though his actions will win God's favor. Most of us are not that brazen about pointing out how good we are, but we harbor similar thoughts and attitudes in our minds.

Enter a time of searching prayer now.

- Ask God to search your heart, and help you to see how he wishes to transform you.
  - Look back at the words you used to describe the Pharisee (question #7) and ask – in what ways are these attitudes present in my own life?
  - As you find these wrong attitudes, ask God to help you see how they are affecting your relationship with him and with other people.
  - If you are ready, ask God to forgive you for these attitudes. Ask for his help in changing your heart.
  - Thank God for showing you how to become more like him. Thank him for his love of you no matter what your faults.
  - Conclude your prayer by simply being in God's presence. Just be, and feel the love God has for you.
8. Were you surprised by anything that was revealed as you prayed for God to search your heart?

### **Segment 3 – Learning from the Tax Collector**

#### **Open your time of study with prayer:**

Dear LORD – As many times as I have heard it, I still do not like to be told that I am a sinner. I don't like to be told I have faults. I especially don't like to be told that my efforts to be good don't make me good! Please help me to have an attitude of humility before you, acknowledging and hearing your truth, even when I don't like it. Amen.

#### **Read Luke 18:9-14**

9. Do you think the tax collector in this parable believes he is a good person? What does the tax collector seem to think will make him acceptable to God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How would you describe the attitudes of the tax collector in this parable? How do the tax collector's attitudes contrast with those you saw in the Pharisee?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What is the significance of Jesus saying that the tax collector goes away justified? What does he do that makes him right with God?

**Pray:**

Spend some time in prayer now, focusing on **Luke 18:9-14**. Jesus used parables to illustrate profound points in simple and easy to understand stories. As you pray now, allow yourself to focus on the story, not intellectual questions. Allow Jesus to speak to you through this parable.

- Invite God to be with you. Ask Him to reveal what He would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- What word or phrase stands out to you?

---

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/images/feelings/impressions:

---

---

---

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

---

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

---

---

---

12. How did you encounter God through this time of prayer? What did you learn? What did God reveal to you about prayer?