

# PARABLE: A PHARISEE AND A TAX COLLECTOR WENT TO PRAY

Luke 18:9-14

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Jesus; in the parable: the Pharisee and the tax collector

**Key-location:** In the parable: the temple in Jerusalem

### **Key-repetitions:**

- Prayers: Pharisee's (Lk 18:11-12); tax collector's (Lk 18:13).
- Pharisee's bragging on himself: not like other people – not a robber, nor an evildoer, nor an adulterer, but fast twice a week and tithe on all his income (Lk 18:11-12).
- Tax collector's humility: stood a distance away from people (Lk 18:13); wouldn't look up (Lk 18:13); beat his breast (Lk 18:13); called himself a sinner Lk 18:13).

### **Key-attitudes:**

- Jesus' serenity when he told the parable.
- Pharisee's pride.
- Tax collector's humility.

### **Initial-situation:**

Jesus was in the second half of his third year of public ministry. The religious leaders' antagonism toward Jesus increased, and the people flip-flopped between excitement for Jesus when he performed a miracle, and anger toward Jesus when they didn't like his teaching. Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. As Jesus traveled, he interacted with the crowd that followed him, and he constantly found teaching moments for his disciples.

The Pharisees were the most influential of all the Jewish religious sects in Jesus' day. They were legalistic in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law. They pledged themselves to obey and observe all the rules and ceremonial laws of orthodox Judaism. They considered themselves to be the only true followers of God's laws and felt that they were better than everyone else. They separated themselves from the non-Jews, whom they despised, and they set themselves above and apart from their own Jewish brethren.

Tax collectors were under contract from the Roman occupying forces to collect taxes. Fellow Jews regarded tax collectors as thieves and robbers, and as traitors for selling their services to a foreign conqueror.

### **Initial-problem:**

Jesus told a parable to some who were sure that they were upright but despised everyone else.

### **Final-situation:**

Jesus stated the point of his parable. Everyone who honors himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be honored.

### **BIBLE STORY**

Jesus told the following parable to some who were sure that they were upright but despised everyone else, "Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood in front of everyone and prayed about himself, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other people. I'm not a robber. I'm not an evildoer. I haven't committed adultery. I'm definitely not like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

"However, the tax collector stood a distance from the people. He wouldn't even look up to heaven. Instead he beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that the tax collector, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified, being approved by God. For everyone who honors himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be honored" (Lk 18:9-14).

### **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

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|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. To whom did Jesus tell the parable?
2. Who were the Pharisees and who were the tax collectors?
3. How were the tax collector and the Pharisee different?
4. In their prayers, how did the tax collector and the Pharisee see themselves before God?
5. How does a person become justified or win God's approval?
6. Why is self-righteous religious pride dangerous?
7. What does the parable teach about prayer?

### **LIFE-LESSONS**

1. **The main lesson from the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is that those who take pride in their achievements will be cut off from God; but, those who are ashamed of their actions, yet beg God for mercy will be accepted by him (Lk 18:9-14).**

2. **God condemns self-righteous religious pride.** The thing that made the Pharisee so self-righteous and hypocritical was his pride. He couldn't confess his sins; he couldn't even see his sins. He judged himself as a good man and other people as sinners (Lk 18:11-12, 14).
3. **Self-righteousness is dangerous.** The Pharisee's self-righteous attitude made him prideful, intolerant, despise others and cut himself off from God (Lk 18:11-12, 14).
4. **The godless sinner who knows he needs God and depends on him for salvation, is considered by God a good innocent person.** The tax collector was considered by fellow Jews as one of the worst of sinners. The tax collector beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' He went home justified with God's forgiveness and approval (Lk 18:13, 14). Jesus did not come to save people who considered themselves righteous, but to save people who knew they were sinners (Mat 9:13; Lk 5:32).
5. **Sinners are not justified by the good they do, but by acknowledging their sins and calling on God for forgiveness.** The tax collector was not justified by obeying the Old Testament law, but by his repentance, his humble approach to God, his acknowledgment of sin, and his faith in God. He demonstrated his faith by calling upon God's mercy for forgiveness (Lk 18:13-14). The Pharisee was mistaken in his belief that he was innocent in God's sight because of his good deeds and obeying religious rules and regulations (Lk 18:11-12, 14).
6. **The person who is full of himself when he prays will not have his prayer heard by God.** The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, but was full of himself and his own goodness. God did not accept him nor his prayer (Lk 18:11-12, 14).

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:**  
Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

<b>ALL</b>	
“ <b>All of you</b> , clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God <b>opposes</b> the proud but <b>shows favor</b> to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may <b>lift you up</b> in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6 NIV).	
<b>GROUP 1</b>	<b>GROUP 2</b>
All of you,	<b>clothe</b> yourselves with <b>humility</b> toward one another,
because,	God opposes the <b>proud</b> but shows favor to the <b>humble</b> .
<b>Humble</b> yourselves, therefore,	under God's mighty hand,
Humble <b>yourselves</b>	that he may <b>lift you up</b> in due time
<b>ALL</b>	
“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6 NIV).	

2. **Pantomime Retelling of the Story:**

The storyteller tells the story one time. Then the storyteller:

- Asks for a volunteer to pantomime the story as the story is retold.
- Tells the story a second time with the volunteer pantomiming it.
- Invites a listener to retell the story.