

## STUDY GUIDE

**PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**BUILDING HIS CHURCH**  
**HUMILITY AND PRAYER**  
**LUKE 18:9-14**  
02/25/2018



### MAIN POINT

Humility in prayer recognizes God's power and provision, and also our weakness and need.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What sorts of things do you find yourself praying for on a regular basis?**

**What might we learn about ourselves from considering the things we tend to pray for/about?**

Our prayers not only reveal what we desire from God, but also reveal what we believe about God. We may claim to believe certain things about God, but when we are on our knees, our true theology shines through. By looking at the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we will be challenged to acknowledge God's immeasurable power and grace and our own sinfulness. We will see what it means to approach God humbly in prayer.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 18:9-14.**

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**What point was Jesus making with this parable (v. 9)?**

**It's been said that those who trust in themselves make an idol of themselves. What does this look like in our culture? How do people in our community tend to make idols of themselves?**

**How might trusting in yourself result in treating others with contempt?**

**What characteristics dominated the Pharisee's heart (vv. 11-12)?**

The Pharisee prayed about himself. He did not praise God. He thanked God for making him better than other people—especially better than the tax collector. The tax collector was grouped with robbers, unrighteous people, greedy individuals, and adulterers. The Pharisee confidently asserted his superiority before God over all these people. He

described all his religious acts. He praised himself in the face of God. This was not persistent prayer, depending on God for one's needs. This was self-adulation, giving all the credit to self and none to God.

**On the other hand, what characteristics dominated the tax collector's heart (v. 13)?**

An entirely different kind of prayer came from the tax collector's lips. It was a prayer of humility, dependence, and desperation. The Pharisee prayed to God; the tax collector looked to the floor but raised his voice to heaven. The Pharisee was proud and confident; the tax collector grieved over his own condition as a sinner. The Pharisee described his righteousness; the tax collector begged for mercy to escape the judgment his sin deserved. The Pharisee compared himself to the tax collector; we should recognize our unworthiness to even bring our prayers to God by looking to the example of Christ our Savior. No believer can be "good" enough to gain God's favor. Jesus taught we are to ask Him to forgive our sins.

**According to Jesus, which of the two men praying at the temple left in a right relationship with God (v. 14)?**

**If you were one of the people listening to Jesus that day, what impact do you think the parable would have had on you? How would your thinking about God and righteousness have changed?**

In verse 14 Jesus stated the unexpected reversal. The person who exalts himself will be humbled. The Pharisee judged himself to be approved and in no need of God's forgiveness. Conversely, the person who humbles himself will be exalted. God bestows mercy on those who admit their inability to attain it for themselves. God approves the repentant heart.

Jesus told this parable to discourage self-trust and self-righteousness, and to encourage humility in our approach to Him. He also laid the foundation for entering the Kingdom of God, which is mercy based on His work on the cross for us. This parable calls us to practice humility in our prayer and to live from the joy of being justified by God's mercy in Christ.

**How is your view of God, prayer, yourself, and others impacted by this parable? How is your appreciation for the gospel strengthened?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be "falsely confident"? What would it look like God to bring brokenness in that area of your life?**

**When have you been most aware of your need for God and your spiritual helplessness? How was your faith affected through that experience?**

**How does your prayer life need to change in order to better reflect God's holiness and grace?**

**How might your prayer life need to change to more accurately reflect your need for God?**

## PRAY

Thank God for revealing Himself to us in His Word and through the person and work of Christ. Pray that God would humble us and help us to see our desperate need for Christ. Ask God to help us to repent from trusting in ourselves and humbly rely on Christ in all that we do.

## Context

This parable is connected to the preceding material due to its being a parable and its reference to prayer (cf. 18:1, 7 with 18:10–13). Also Luke perhaps placed this parable here to serve as an example of those who will be found faithful when the Son of Man returns (18:8). Thus 18:9–14 and the three following accounts all deal with what it means to have “the faith” (18:8). The theme of the parable, God’s mercy to tax collectors and sinners, has been encountered earlier as has the form, a parable in which the behavior of two characters is contrasted.<sup>277</sup>

Within the parable we encounter a self-righteous Pharisee whose prayer in the temple is essentially a self-eulogy. He thanked God that he was not like others. In itself the prayer could be quite acceptable if the Pharisee were thanking God for protecting him from circumstances that might have led him to become a thief or an adulterer. However the Pharisee saw his not having succumbed to such sins as purely his own doing. There was no thanks for what God had done but rather a long list of personal achievements. (Note all the I’s!) He had no sense of being an unworthy servant and having done only his duty (Luke 17:10). Actually he believed he had done more than God required. He had not only kept the law perfectly and thus did not need to pray for God’s forgiveness, he even fasted twice a week and tithed everything he bought (not just what he earned). His attitude was clear. God was very fortunate to have someone like him. He knew nothing of God’s perfection and holiness and his own sinfulness! He possessed an unusually high self-worth and had learned nothing from the penitential psalms or such thoughts as Rom 3:10–20, which exclude all such boasting (Luke 17:10; Rom 3:27).

In contrast the tax collector demonstrated his attitude even by his physical stance. He stood “at a distance,” “would not even look up to heaven,” and “beat his breast” (Luke 18:13). Even apart from his prayer he exhibited humility and contrition. His prayer sought God’s mercy and forgiveness just like the psalmist (Ps 51:1). The result, which would have been shocking for many of Jesus’ hearers, was that the sinner who sought God’s mercy left justified, not the Pharisee.

## Comments

18:9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness. As in 18:1 and 19:11, Luke gave the reason/interpretation of the parable at the very beginning. This can be translated “they trusted in themselves that they were righteous” or “they trusted in themselves because they were righteous.” The latter interpretation would understand the reason for their confidence as being their (supposed) knowledge of their righteousness. The former interpretation, however, is more likely because in every other instance in Luke where “that/because” (hoti) is used with a participle it is best translated “that.” Luke did not specifically identify the “some” of this verse, but the earlier reference to the Pharisees as those who “justify yourselves in the eyes of men” (16:14–15; cf. 10:29) and the reference to the Pharisee in the parable suggest them as the audience both in his (and Jesus’) mind.

Looked down at everybody else. Compare 23:11; Acts 4:11. Those who like the publican understand their sinful condition and know that they can only be saved by grace, find it difficult to despise others, for there is nothing of which they can boast. Only those who possess a false confidence in their own righteousness look down at others.

18:10 Two men. Compare Luke 15:11; 17:34–35; cf. 7:41–42.

Went up to the temple. Since the temple was on a hill, people went up to it even if they were already in Jerusalem (cf. 18:14, “went home,” literally went down to his house, and Acts 3:1, were going up to the temple).

To pray. One could pray privately at any time in the temple, but the times for public prayer were 9:00 a.m. (Acts 2:15) and 3:00 p.m. (3:1).

A Pharisee. See comments on 5:17.

Tax collector. See comments on 5:30. This term is often used in combination with “sinners” (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1; cf. Matt 9:10–11; 11:19; Mark 2:15–16) and even “prostitutes” (Matt 21:31–32).

18:11 The Pharisee stood up. This was the normal posture for prayer. Since the publican stood “at a distance” in the temple, the implication is that the Pharisee stood “at the front.”

Prayed about himself. This can also be translated “prayed these things to himself” (pros heauton) and can mean that his prayer never went to God because he was only talking to himself or that he was praying silently and not aloud. The former is too subtle and the latter is too contrary to normal Jewish practice. It is best to interpret this as the NIV does.

God, I thank you. Note that there was no petition in the Pharisee’s prayer. He really did not need God.

I am not like other men. If humility toward God and compassion for neighbor are excluded, the Pharisee possessed an impeccable life-style. But humility toward God and compassion for neighbor are the essence of true piety. See comments on 10:27.

Robbers, evildoers, adulterers. The first and third sins are forbidden in the Decalogue (Exod 20:14–15). The middle term (adikoi, unrighteous, evildoers) is more general and may be present to match the term “righteous” (dikairoi) in Luke 18:9.

This tax collector. For the deprecatory use of “this,” see comments on 15:30.

18:12 I fast twice a week. A “fast” would generally involve going without food or drink from sunrise to sunset. This is the earliest reference to the Jewish practice of fasting twice a week (cf. Did. 8:1). The two days of fasting mentioned in the Talmud are Monday and Thursday (Taan. 1:2a).

Give a tenth of all I get. Compare Luke 11:42. The Pharisee did more than the law demanded in that he tithed everything that came into his possession, not simply what he earned. He may have done this in case the person who sold this to him had not tithed it. By these two acts the Pharisee boasted of his works of supererogation, i.e., he thought he did more than God required of him.

Needless to say, not all Pharisees trusted in their own righteousness like the one in this parable (see comments on 11:42). Yet unless we claim that the entire Gospel depiction of the Pharisees is incorrect, some Pharisees were like this. That certain Pharisees did think this way is evident from the Talmudic materials.<sup>281</sup> Similarly, it should not be assumed that all tax collectors were like the one portrayed in the parable, but some were. Thus the parable is not a caricature.

18:13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. This indicates that he sensed a personal unworthiness to stand close to the sanctuary.

Would not even look up to heaven. Compare 1 Enoch 13:5. “For from thence forward they could not speak (with Him) nor lift up their eyes to heaven for shame of their sins for which they had been condemned.” For looking up to heaven in prayer, cf. Mark 6:41; 7:34; John 11:41; 17:1; cf. also Ps 123:1.

Beat his breast. As a sign of contrition or grief (cf. Luke 23:48).

God, have mercy on me, a sinner. The verb used here (hilasthti) is found elsewhere in the NT only in Heb 2:17. It means to expiate or propitiate. The noun (hilastrion) is used in this sense in Rom 3:25 (cf. also 1 John 2:2; 4:10), and in Heb 9:5 it designates the place where such expiation/propitiation takes place. The publican in his prayer sought God’s mercy in order to have his sins covered and the divine wrath removed from him.

18:14 I tell you. Note the Christological claim in these words. Jesus claimed to know the mind of God.

This man, rather than the other. Jesus gave a surprise ending to the parable (cf. Luke 16:8). His audience would have seen the Pharisee as a positive example of true piety and the publican as a negative one of what they should not be like. For Luke’s readers, familiar with Jesus’ teachings and perhaps even this parable, the ending is not unexpected. They already knew that “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (14:11).

Went home. “Went home” is literally went down into his house, i.e., left the temple for home.

Justified. This term means more than just being forgiven, for it also involves the gift of a new standing before God. This is evident from 18:9, where the noun is used to describe a “righteous” standing before God (cf. 16:15). The publican stood before God after his prayer possessing a new relationship (not a moral character) with God. He possessed a righteousness given him by grace (cf. Phil 3:8).

For everyone who exalts himself. The proverb of Luke 14:11 (cf. Matt 23:12) is repeated. For Jesus and Luke, as well as for Paul, salvation was by grace through faith (cf. Eph 2:8). In justifying himself before God, the Pharisee rejected the possibility of receiving God’s gift of justification that comes through faith (Phil 3:9). What happens after justification is not mentioned in the parable, but Luke would demonstrate this in the story of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:8).

Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 447–452.