


Humble Faith

Teaching Tips

May 15, 2016

Bible Study Guide 11

Words You Should Know

A. Unjust ([Luke 18:11](#)) *adikos* (Gk.)—Unjust or unrighteousness as pertaining to something that does not measure up to the law's standard of justice. 

B. Abased (v. 14) *tapeinoo* (Gk.)—To put in a low or humble state, to be made low or humble.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Valuing Humility. The faithful wonder whether their prayers, sometimes uttered out of desperation, will make a difference. Is there an attitude or posture that can assure them that their words are heard? Jesus taught that effective words of prayer are infused with power when uttered with humility of spirit rather than self-righteousness.

A. Read the Focal Verses in various translations.

B. Pray for wisdom and understanding.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Take time this week to examine your own heart concerning thanksgiving. How much do you complain? How often do you thank God for what He's already done rather than asking for more?

B. Have three students read the lesson title, Aim for Change, and Keep in Mind verse.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have someone in the class write the At-A-Glance outline on the board or newsprint.

B. Break into groups of 2 or 3 and have each group read the Focal Verses; The People, Places, and Times; Background; and In Depth. Allow them time to answer the Search the Scriptures.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Summarize Lesson in Our Society and Make It Happen. Ask the class to come up with a few things they can do this week to put the principles of the lesson into practice.

B. Have the class rewrite the Keep in Mind verse in their own words.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Ask a couple of students to summarize the lesson and share what impacted them.

B. Close with prayer. Pray about the specific challenges mentioned for the week.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Humble Faith

Song: "Have Thine Own Way"

Devotional Reading: [Micah 6:6–8, 7:18–19](#)



Bible Background • [LUKE 18:9–14](#)



Printed Text • [LUKE 18:9–14](#) | **Devotional Reading** • [MICAH 6:6–8, 7:18–19](#)



Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** why the Pharisee's words were wrong and the tax collector's words were right; **APPRECIATE** God's mercy and grace; and **INSPECT**, and if necessary correct, our motivation for our own piety.



In Focus

CEO Katelyn Jones sat in the sales team meeting doodling on a legal pad. She had heard three of five managers detail their annual performance. In each case, the manager extolled his or her successes without mentioning any of the other team members. Katelyn despaired of ever finding a "Salesperson of the Year" who epitomized the company's commitment to quality, service, and leadership.

John Zach-Smith stood up. "I am happy to report that I raised sales volume by 30 percent. I added four new clients this month, each bringing in annual sales over one million dollars. And I met my department's 'green' goals, saving \$250,000 dollars this quarter." Thunderous applause erupted as he took a bow.

Mike Frazier stood up. Greeting the group, he said, "My team increased our sales by 12 percent. Theo, Monica, and I each added one new client, grossing an additional \$3 million in sales. We also saved hundreds of thousands through our team's efforts to 'go green.'" Smiling, he sat down.

By the meager applause, Katelyn could tell that many of the managers were not impressed. But she was. Here was a humble manager who always gave credit where it was due, as he did today. She wrote "Salesperson of the Year" next to his name.

Humility is marked by the person who credits God and others for their success. What causes people to lift themselves up in pride?

Keep in Mind

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast,

saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” ([Luke 18:13](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

NLT

9 Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else:

10 “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!’

12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’

14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The People, Places, and Times

Pharisees. A religious group very popular in first-century Palestine. The name Pharisee could be rendered “separatist.” This name may have come from their tendency to stress the importance of ritual purity and eating exclusively with righteous Jews. They also stressed the importance of following the oral tradition in order to keep the Law handed down by Moses. As a result, they often came into conflict with Jesus, who summed up the Law as loving God with your whole being and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Publicans. Publicans were tax collectors and custom officers. They worked for Rome and collected taxes in various provinces. The tax system was open to abuse, and many publicans were extortioners who created taxes in order to profit. As most Jewish tax collectors would tax and extort their own people, they were considered traitors. To work for Rome was to be not only an outcast but a sinner in the eyes of the average Jew. The Gospel accounts record Jesus having two significant encounters with tax collectors: one with Matthew, who became one of the twelve disciples ([Matthew 9:9](#)), and the other with Zacchaeus, who repented of his extortion and paid back four times what he stole ([Luke 19:1–9](#)).



Background

Luke was a physician ([Colossians 4:14](#)), a ministry partner to the Apostle Paul ([2 Timothy 4:11](#); [Philemon 23–24](#)), and the author both of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts. To pen his Gospel, Luke relied on extensive investigative research believed to have been gleaned from the apostles, including Paul, and other eyewitnesses ([Luke 1:1–3](#)). Throughout his account, Luke hones in on Jesus' core teaching that salvation and redemption are available to anyone who believes—Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, Pharisee or tax collector.

The parable in today's lesson reveals how Pharisees and tax collectors—societal polar opposites—approach prayer. The Pharisee prayed from an attitude of arrogance and self-righteousness, detailing his good character and works in contemplative prayer to himself. The tax collector drew near to God, praying from a repentant heart that acknowledged sin and begged for His mercy.

Examining the dual prayers, we can appreciate the difference between self-righteous platitudes and true gratitude for God's mercy and grace. Jesus commended the tax collector, saying, "This sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God" (from v. 14, NLT). The parable's message to Christians is clear: humble faith encompasses every area of life, including our prayers.

At-A-Glance

1. Haughty Faith ([Luke 18:9–12](#))
2. Humble Faith (v. 13)
3. Humility's Rewards (v. 14)

In Depth

1. Haughty Faith ([Luke 18:9–12](#))

Jesus told parables to illustrate real-life issues. In the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, He highlighted the differences in the content and manner of their public prayer; these, in turn, demonstrated what was so wrong about what the Pharisee said and right about what the tax collector said. From their prayers, we learn that prayer mirrors the heart. We also learn that prayer is the ideal vehicle for expressing gratitude for all God has done for us and brought us through. Unfortunately, the Pharisee's prayer fell short of true thanksgiving because it exclusively focused on self-exaltation, exposing his prideful heart. [Luke 6:45](#) lets us know the importance of the heart as the source of good or evil.

Answered prayer can spark arrogance. How do we share answered prayers? Some give God all glory, humbly admitting His role in our provision, protection, or other answered prayer. Others give a testimony peppered with sentences and phrases that begin with "I." If we are not careful, like the Pharisee, we can become haughty, attributing answered prayers to our righteousness, eloquent or anguished words, acts of service, or financial stewardship (tithes, offerings, "love gifts," etc.). The Pharisee's prayer made mention of things he considered noteworthy; the tax collector's prayer was devoid of such items.

2. Humble Faith (v. 13)

The tax collector prayed to exhibit humility. He stood at a distance, considering himself unworthy to be near the temple grounds. In contrast, the Pharisee believed he was entitled to God's presence. The tax collector's avoidance of looking at heaven shows that he was aware of his sin and his unworthiness to stand before a holy God. His posture shows he wants to experience mercy versus one who has no need for mercy.

Instead of congratulating himself, he beats his chest in sorrow. This was not a happy or self-righteous prayer, but one

of sorrow. The tax collector was sorry for his sins. He has no religious resume. The only thing he remembers is that his sins make him desperately in need of God. He has nothing to bring to God but his need. This is the correct posture for prayer; it is not about what we have done or can do, but about our desire for God and His mercy in our lives.

In church, believers may look at how a person prays and assume that he or she is praying from a heart of arrogance or humility. All too often, we make snap judgments based on such attributes as volume (Is he/she “praying the house down” with loud, forceful words, or quietly asking for God’s help?) or posture (Prostrate or standing? Hands lifted or not?). However, as the parable shows, our words are the true harbingers of haughty or humble faith.

3. Humility’s Rewards (v. 14)

In the parable, Jesus identifies two key rewards of humility: first, God exalts those who are humble. According to this world’s way of thinking, we must exalt ourselves, but in the kingdom of God, those who humble themselves receive God’s exaltation. To go down in the kingdom is to go up. A second reward is that God justifies the person who prays humbly.

As maturing Christians, we want our prayers to be received and answered by God. That only happens when we walk before Him in humble faith, as evidenced by our daily Christian walk—including our prayers.

Search the Scriptures

1. The parable equates the Pharisees with which two negative attributes ([Luke 18:9](#))?
2. What was the primary focus of each man’s prayer (vv. 11–13)?
3. Why was only the tax collector justified (v. 14)?



Discuss the Meaning

Jesus shed light on the need for humility in prayer, an area of faith that many people prefer to keep private. How has the Holy Spirit nudged you about the need for humility in your prayer life?

Lesson in Our Society

Public prayer offers a forum for people to be drawn humbly into God’s presence. At times, however, public prayer can be a platform for individuals to showcase eloquence, educational training, or new attire. All prayer is not created equal. When given the opportunity, let us model humble faith via prayer that 1) seeks God’s mercy; and 2) extends an invitation for us to model humility in every area of Christian service, including prayer.

Make It Happen

Ask God to help you identify and eliminate self-exaltation in your own prayers. Try this: write down one of your recent public prayers (i.e., at a meal, at church, with a friend). Now, in light of today’s parable, ask God’s forgiveness for any pride that you exhibited. Then rewrite the prayer based on information you learned from today’s lesson.

Follow the Spirit


What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts


Special insights I have learned.



More Light on the Text





Luke 18:9–14

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican is found only in the Gospel of Luke. It focuses on the type of person God approves of, and contrasts pride and humility. 

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Jesus proposes a parable to certain people who consider themselves righteous and despise others; it may be a reference to the Pharisees or the legalistic Jews (cf. [Romans 10:2–3](#)). The Pharisees regarded themselves as the pillars of righteousness and maintainers of a higher standard for obeying Israel's covenant stipulations. As such they became guardians and enforcers in matters of the Law, especially ritual purity, Sabbath keeping, and tithing. The concern for ritual purity expanded into a concern for table fellowship and keeping proper company. Excluded from table fellowship were those sinners who broke the Law, such as publicans and tax collectors. This explains the Pharisee's later distancing of himself from the tax collector. 

A Pharisee and a publican went up to the temple to pray (v. 10). Private prayer in the temple was possible any time, and public prayers took place twice daily ([Luke 1:9–10](#); [Acts 3:1](#)). The first hour of prayer was 9 a.m., the second at 3 p.m. These two times coincided with the morning and evening sacrifice ([Exodus 29:39](#)). Prayer also came to be viewed as equal to a sacrifice to God ([Psalm 141:2](#), [Proverbs 15:8](#)). The two men may have gone to the temple at a spontaneous time or during these specific hours designated for prayer. 


The Pharisee “stood and prayed.” Standing was one of the many acceptable positions for prayer in Judaism, but in [Matthew 6:5](#), Jesus points out the hypocrisy behind that posture. The Pharisee, with self-confidence, thanks God, first for all the bad things he does not do, then for all the good he does (vv. 11–12). He went up into the temple to pray, but not to God; he “prayed thus with himself.” He shows his righteousness by holding himself against not the Law of God but “other men” and even “this publican” (v. 11). The good people are known by their religious practice such as fasting twice a week and tithing from their possessions. The Pharisee, in his pride and self-righteousness, was guilty of the sin of self-sufficiency, which recognizes no need of God's power. 





13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.




The publican's attitude and words show his humility and his profound repentance from his sins. First he is “standing afar off,” at a distance from the sanctuary and others. Second, he “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven” as a sign of his unworthiness before God. Third, he “smote upon his breast” as a sign of profound grief, a common expression of mourning in the cultures of the ancient Near East. Here the publican shows intense sorrow for his sin.

Finally, he speaks simple words: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The words “be merciful” translate the Greek verb *hilaskomai* (**hi-LAS-ko-my**), meaning to wipe away or show mercy (also Hebrew 2:17). The word conveys the idea of God's mercy giving a total pardon. The publican prays for God's mercy so that his sins may be forgiven. He does not use a lot of words; his prayer is a cry from his soul.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Jesus declares that the publican goes back forgiven, unlike the Pharisee. The Pharisee goes home unaccepted, unjustified, and still under God's displeasure because he counts on his own merit. The publican is justified by faith

without work (cf. [Ephesians 2:8–9](#); [Genesis 15:6](#)). Through His parable, Jesus teaches that justification is by faith, not works. 

Jesus concludes the parable by saying “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (cf. [Matthew 23:12](#); [1 Peter 5:5–6](#)). He here warns the disciples against the consequences of pride. Whoever exalts himself before men will be lowered. We cannot approach God on the basis of our own justice. Self-confidence and proud judgment toward others close the door of heaven, even if we are zealous and religious as the Pharisee. True humility and repentance open the door of heaven and get answers to prayer. When we pray, we must see God’s holiness and our own miserable state as a repentant sinner. Then prayer becomes genuine. 



Say It Correctly


Pharisee. **FAIR**-ih-see.

Publican. **PUH**-bli-kin.

Extortioner. ek-**STOR**-shi-ner.

Daily Bible Readings


MONDAY

Faith in a Merciful God
([Deuteronomy 4:32–40](#)) 



TUESDAY

Faith in a Trustworthy God
([Daniel 9:15–19](#)) 


WEDNESDAY

Living Humbly
([Micah 6:6–8](#); [7:18–19](#)) 


THURSDAY

Living a Blessed Life
([Matthew 5:1–10](#)) 


FRIDAY

Living a Peaceful Life
([1 Peter 2:9–16](#)) 

SATURDAY

Living a Fulfilled Life
([Luke 1:68–80](#)) 

SUNDAY

Humble Faith
([Luke 18:9–14](#)) 