



# WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT PRAYER SPRING 2022

Growth Group Curriculum  
May 22, 2022 – Luke 18:9-14

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

This week we wrap up our sermon series on prayer and also conclude growth groups until September.

Jesus follows up his parable about the persistent widow with a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector and their approach to God when it comes to prayer. The parable informs us about our posture or approach to prayer.

Two men went up to Jerusalem to pray at the temple. The times for public prayer were 9 AM and 3 PM and as Jesus tells the parable it appears that the men were there during one of the times of public prayer. They would both have been seen by other people who had made the journey to the temple to pray.

The Pharisee approaches God with great confidence as he lifts up his eyes to God, while at the same time looking down on his neighbors. He is grateful that he is not like others and that his actions are so faithful. The interesting thing is that the Pharisee does not ask God for anything. There are no petitions made to God. The implication is that he really does not need God because his righteousness and good works will suffice. The problem is that this religious leader has forgotten that humility and compassion for neighbor are key parts of God's expectations.

The tax collector takes a very different approach. He humbled himself before God. He stood at a distance from the temple, physically separating himself from the presence of God. He did not look up to God, but instead looked around at his own life and recognized how far he had fallen. He wanted God's mercy and forgiveness.

The idea of mercy is important. The verb for "be merciful" here has the connotation of making reconciliation for, or being gracious or favorably inclined. The idea is to show compassion and concern for someone in difficulty despite that person having committed a moral offense. The tax collector is in a sense throwing himself on the mercy of God. He knows what he has done and he has no hope apart from this mercy.

*Page 1 of 2*



The religious leaders would have been shocked that the tax collector went home justified and not the Pharisee. The idea of “justified” not only has to do with forgiveness, but also with a sense of a new standing before God. The tax collector was found to be righteous. The Pharisee, who tried to justify himself before God, did not realize that God’s justification is a gift and not something to be earned.

## Exploring the Text

Luke 18:9-14

<sup>9</sup>To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ <sup>13</sup>“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup>“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) As we wrap up the series on prayer, has your outlook on prayer, or your prayer life, changed over the last four weeks? What has been a takeaway from this series on prayer?
- 2) Pastor Paul began his sermon with the following quote from Henri Nouwen. “*The crisis of our prayer life is that our mind may be filled with ideas of God while our heart remains far from him.*” Do you find this quote to be true in your own prayer life and how does this quote relate to our text from this week?
- 3) What is your understanding of the roles of a Pharisee and of a tax collector in Jesus' time? Why were they each going to the temple?
- 4) Last week we talked about verses 1-8, where Jesus was talking to just the disciples, encouraging them to pray persistently. This week's passage about praying humbly is to a broader audience. Which issue, praying persistently or praying with humility, is the bigger issue today?
- 5) Read Isaiah 64:6: *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* What does God say about our righteousness or righteousness from within?
- 6) Humility is difficult and often times not highly valued in today's culture. What can we do to live humbly?
- 7) As Pastor Paul shared a couple weeks ago, many Christians feel guilty about their prayer life regardless of how much time they spend in prayer. How often or how long do you think we should we pray? How is your prayer life going?
- 8) Since you may not meet for a while, share your summer plans and how people can be praying for you.

