

## Luke 18:9-14

<sup>9</sup>To some who trusted in their own righteousness and viewed others with contempt, He also told this parable: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was 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 the other men—swindlers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week and pay tithes of all that I acquire.’

<sup>13</sup>But the tax collector stood at a distance, unwilling even to lift up his eyes to heaven. Instead, he beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’

<sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Berean Study Bible

---

1

### **You are in for a real treat. Luke 18:9-14**

How to treat God.

I need His righteousness. 9a “trusted in their own righteousness”

I give Him my devotion. 12 “I fast... I tithe”

I need His mercy. 13b “God, have mercy on me”

How to treat others.

I look on others with compassion. 9b “viewed others with contempt”

I come with others to worship. 11a “stood by himself and prayed”

I avoid ‘straw man’ generalisations. 11b “swindlers, evildoers, adulterers”

How to treat yourself.

I know my distance from God. 13a “stood at a distance”

I know my difference from God. 13a “unwilling even to lift up his eyes to heaven”

I know my dependence on God. 13b “God, have mercy on me, a sinner”

---

2

### **Is anyone listening to your prayers? Luke 18:9-14**

A parable with two purposes. 18:9

This is to give me a clearer view of myself. 9a “their own righteousness”

This is to give me a clearer view of others. 9b “and viewed others”

An introduction to two people. 18:10

Pharisee, respected. 10a "Pharisee"

Tax collector, despised. 10b "tax collector"

The presentation of two prayers. 18:11-13

From me to God. 11-12 "God, I thank You that I..."

From God to me. 13 "God, have mercy on me"

The conclusion with two principles. 18:14

Up yourself leads down. 14b "exalts himself will be humbled"

Down on yourself leads up. 14b "humbles himself will be exalted"

---

3

### **Pray better prayers. Luke 18:9-14**

I pray better, when my prayers are humbling. 18:9-13

I pray better, when my prayers are heart-based. 18:13

I pray better, when my prayers are helpful. 18:14

---

4

### **Adjusting your attitude. Luke 18:9-14**

Adjust your appearance. 18:9-13, 1 Samuel 16:7

Outward piety can be misleading.

Outward pragmatism can be misleading.

Adjust your approach. 18:11-13, Luke 17:10

Come with self-confidence. 11a "stood by himself"

Come with self-contempt. 13a "stood at a distance"

Adjust your appreciation.

Value your gifts to God. 11 "not like others... fast... tithe"

Value your gifts from God. 13b "God, have mercy on me"

Adjust your application.

God's evaluation may be different. 14b "exalts himself will be humbled"

God's endpoint is always better. 14b "humbles himself will be exalted"

---

5

## **How prayer works. Luke 18:9-14**

Prayer works best when it is humbling. 18:9-13

Remember to whom you are praying. 13

Remember who you are who is praying. 13

Prayer works best when it is wholistic. 18:9-13

Some prayers need to come from our head. 11 "God, I thank You"

Some prayers need to come from our heart. 13 "beat his chest... sinner"

Prayer works best when it is helpful. 18:14

In response to prayer, God acts. 14 "justified... humbled... exalted"

In response to prayer, I act. 14 "went home justified... exalts himself... humbles self"

---

6

## **Come and get your prayers answered. Luke 18:9-14**

Come as yourself. 18:10-13

Come as a saint. 13a "stood at a distance" Hebrews 4:16

Come as a sinner. 13b "God, have mercy on me, a sinner"

Come, as a whole. 18:11-13

Come with your head. 11-12 "God, I thank You that I..." - praise, thanks - what

Come with your heart. 13 "God, have mercy on me" - worship – who

Come, but go forth. 18:14

Come humble; go justified. 14a "went home justified"

Come humble; go exalted. 14b "humbles himself will be exalted"

---

## **Other possible titles**

Up is down, and down is up, in an upside-down world

Put some power into your prayers

How to feel good about yourself

The church of the happy hypocrites

Prayers that do/do not produce change

Don't confuse fruits with roots

Pray like God is listening

Get healing from "I" disease

How to know if you are right, or wrong, with God

Pow! When pride collides with prayer

Thank God, I'm not like...

Almost praying  
Optical illusions  
Who is that person in the mirror?  
Some take the high road, and some take the low road.

---

### **Quotes and illustrations**

So, you also, when you have done everything commanded of you, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' Luke 17:10

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant of loving devotion for a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. Deuteronomy 7:9

Show some examples of optical illusions. The Pharisee appeared to be righteous. The tax collector appeared to be a worse sinner. But Jesus' evaluation in v14 proved otherwise. Other examples of misrepresentation include a magician's sleight of hand tricks; and the revelation of a serious criminal living among us who appeared to be 'a good neighbour'.

A 2010 study by Canadian psychologists found that people who purchase environmentally friendly items feel a "moral glow" that makes them more likely to cheat and act selfishly elsewhere in their lives. In the study, which was a computer game, subjects rewarded themselves with money based on certain results. The "Green" consumers were more likely to lie about test results so that they could take more money. The explanation for this is that acting virtuously in one area seems to make people feel they have earned "credit," and now they have a license to act unethically and selfishly in other parts of their lives. Our lives are to be an open book before the Lord. Because we are righteous in one area doesn't give us license to fail to live for God's glory in every other area. (Credit: Jim L. Wilson and Rodger Russell, "Righteous for Being Green?," in 300 Illustrations for Preachers, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press, 2015.)

---

### **Commentary**

The previous parable, Luke 18:1-8, the widow and the unjust judge, is about our "need to pray at all times and not lose heart". This text, Luke 18:9-14, the Pharisee and the tax collector, is about "who trust in their own righteousness and view others with contempt". I addressed the previous parable in terms of 'What to pray', whereas this parable is more about 'How to pray'.

---

## Music and songs

### Songs about prayer

As I went down in the valley to pray  
Before You I kneel / a worker's prayer, Ot 98  
I'm praying for you, Ot 33  
Prayer (Petra)  
Standing in the need of prayer, FE 18  
Whisper a prayer in the morning, CWH 85  
With a prayer... Love incarnate, Ot 38  
You must pray every day

### Songs about God hearing us

Hear my cry, O Lord... Lead me to the Rock,  
I'm praying for you... God hears our prayers, Ot 33  
What a friend we have in Jesus ...to the Lord in prayer, H 421 / C 279  
Thank You Jesus for Your great love. Hear our praises, Ot 27

### Songs about God's mercy, v13

His mercy is more (Getty)  
O the mercy of God  
Surely goodness and mercy, CWH 10

### Songs about humility, v14

Humble yourself before the Lord  
Lord, show me what it means to have a humble heart, 413  
Replace it with Your love... make me be humble

### Songs about justification, v14

Heaven came down... justified fully thru Calvary's love, CWH 46  
One day... rising He justified freely forever, H 756  
Therefore being justified by faith, SiS 29  
This Kingdom... Now glorified. Now justified, Ot 47

---

## Thought starters for personal reflection or group discussion

1. To other people who were in the temple, what might they conclude about these two men, the Pharisee, and the tax collector?
2. Why might it be helpful, or harmful, to observe other people while we are at worship?

3. Everything the Pharisee said (v11-12) was true. So, why did Jesus refuse to honour him (v14)?
  4. Can those who do not work for the Tax Office also pray the prayer of v13? Why, or why not?
  5. List what the tax collector did and said. Which of these is a good role model for you?
  6. Both men prayed only for themselves. How do we balance praying for ourselves with praying for others?
-