

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

BIBLE PASSAGE: Luke 18:9-14

MAIN POINT: God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

SMALL GROUP OPENING

(10–15 MINUTES)

PAGE 74



LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(25–30 MINUTES)

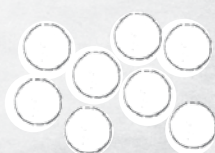
PAGE 76



SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

(25–30 MINUTES)

PAGE 82



Leader BIBLE STUDY

Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem—the place where everything written about the Son of Man would be accomplished. (See Luke 18:31-33.)

Jesus moved between towns and villages, teaching Pharisees and scribes, tax collectors and sinners, and His own disciples along the way. Luke 18:9-14 describes a parable Jesus told to a specific group: “to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else” (Luke 18:9).

The parable presents two men who went up to the temple complex to pray. The first, a Pharisee, was proud and

believed he was righteous because of his own deeds. He stood up and prayed, thanking God that he was not as sinful as other people.

The second, a tax collector, humbly acknowledged his sin and asked God for mercy. Jesus explained that the tax collector—and not the Pharisee—went home justified.

As you teach kids, explain that God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble. (See Jas. 4:6.) The sin of pride keeps us from Jesus. Pride is thinking we are better than we really are. Someone with the attitude of the Pharisee sees no need for Jesus. The Pharisee focused on sins he had avoided rather than confessing his sin, but the tax collector knew he had no standing before a righteous God. He asked for mercy, and God was merciful to him.

God did not look at the Pharisee—nor does He ever look at us—and say, “Wow, that’s impressive.” God sees us for who we really are: sinners in need of forgiveness. Jesus took the punishment for our sin by dying on the cross. God wants everyone to be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and we can come to Him with nothing but empty hands of faith. We can cry out to God like the tax collector and because of Jesus, God will forgive us.

5



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:9-14

- **Go vertical:** Use a ladder or low scaffolding to add a new dimension to the story. Consider standing near the top step as you say the Pharisee's proud prayer. Then climb down and fall to your knees to read the prayer of the tax collector.
- **Use dramatic lighting:** Dim the lights and use stage lights to draw attention to the storyteller. Shine a spotlight on the tax collector to indicate that God heard his humble prayer and forgave him.

Jesus told a story to some people who looked down on others. These people thought they were better than everyone else. **Jesus said, “Two men went into the temple to pray. One man was a Pharisee, or a religious leader.”** Pharisees tried very hard to please God by following the rules. They even made up new rules to follow. **“The other man was a tax collector.”** Many people did not like tax collectors. They were often dishonest and unfair in the way they collected money.

“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, ‘God, I thank You that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful like other people. I am glad I am not like that tax collector. I fast two days a week and tithe.’

“The tax collector stood far away. He did not even lift up his head because he was sorry for the things he had done. The tax collector pounded on his chest and said, ‘Have mercy on me, God! I am a sinner!’”

The prayer of the Pharisee was very different than the prayer of the tax collector. **Jesus explained that God was happy with the tax collector, and He forgave him. But God was not happy with the Pharisee.**

Jesus said, “If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you are humble, God will honor you.”

Christ Connection: The tax collector knew he needed God to forgive him, and he cried out to God. Everyone is a sinner who needs forgiveness. Jesus took the punishment for our sin by dying on the cross. We can cry out to God like the tax collector and because of Jesus, God will forgive us.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover that the Pharisee would not admit that he, too, was a sinner. We are all sinners. When we humble ourselves and call out to Jesus, we are saved. (Luke 18:14) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

BIBLE PASSAGE: Luke 18:9-14

MAIN POINT: God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, invite them to share something they saw or heard about this week that was impressive. Did anything make them say, “Wow!”?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Word Reveal” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete “Word Reveal” on the activity page. Kids should color the squares containing the number 8 to reveal two key words from today’s Bible story. (Answers: *humble, proud*)

SAY • What are some things you think of when you hear the word *humble*? What about the word *proud*? Remember those words when you hear our Bible story today. It’s about two men. One man was proud, and the other man was humble.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: One-upmanship

Choose a volunteer to be *It*. Call on kids one at a time to say something they can do. For example, “I can tie my



shoes in six seconds!” *It* should one-up this claim by saying something more impressive: “I can tie my shoes in *four* seconds!” Allow *It* to be creative or silly with his response, even if it’s not true.

Call on additional kids to share feats. Can *It* always claim to do something better? Let him try!

SAY • Today we are going to hear a story Jesus told about a man who thought he was better than everyone else. Let’s find out if the man was right.

OPTION 2: Class talent show

Before class, write several simple tasks on separate index cards. Suggested tasks: *hop on one foot, turn around, blink three times, say hello, clap five times, pull a napkin out of a bag*, and so on. Call for a volunteer to stand at the front of the room. Give her a prepared index card. Dramatically introduce the volunteer.

- index cards
- marker
- napkin (optional)
- paper bag (optional)

SAY • Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and girls! Get ready to witness an amazing, incredible, nearly unbelievable act of talent by the wonderful [*kid’s name*]! Are you ready? Are you set? Let’s go!

Prompt the volunteer to perform the assigned task. Then lead the kids to applause. Thank the volunteer and call for others to perform additional tasks as time allows.

SAY • Those were some marvelous displays. Weren’t you impressed? Why or why not? It seems silly to act like something is really awesome when it’s really not.

In today’s Bible story, Jesus talked about a man who thought he was better than everyone else. Let’s find out if the man was right.

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

• backpack

• Bible

• trophy or bronze medal

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a backpack containing a Bible. Leader holds a trophy or bronze medal.]

LEADER • Hey, everyone! Check this out! *[Hold up the trophy or medal.]* This is an award I won for being the third best campfire builder in the region. Did you even know people could compete to win the title of Best Campfire Builder? Amazing, huh? Well, I didn't win first prize, but that's OK. I did my best. The winner has been competing in campfire-building competitions for years. I even heard that she practices with her dad every weekend! That's impressive.

[Remove backpack and retrieve the Bible.] Now, the parable we are going to hear today isn't about a campfire-building contest, but it does have to do with a man who thought he was better than others.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Remember, the Bible contains lots of stories, but all these stories fit together to tell us a bigger story of how God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue people from sin. When Jesus was on earth, He taught people about God and His kingdom. Sometimes He told stories, or parables. Let's review our big picture question: *Why did Jesus tell parables?* The answer is, *Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.*

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • The other parables we have heard taught us about how people respond to the gospel, about God's mercy, and about His love. Today's Bible story is about a parable called "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector." This is a story Jesus told to teach people about prayer. It is found in the Gospel of Luke, in the New Testament.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Luke 18:9-14. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector."

LEADER • Jesus told parables for a reason. *Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.* Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to teach a lesson to some people who looked down on others.

Pharisees were religious leaders. They tried hard to

• Bibles
• "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

please God by following God's laws and even making up new rules. Tax collectors were often dishonest and unfair in how they collected money for the government. Both a Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray to God. But they prayed very differently.

What did the Pharisee think about himself? (*He thought he was righteous for not sinning in some ways and for doing good things.*)

What did the tax collector think about himself? (*He knew he was a sinner who needed God's mercy.*)

Mercy is not getting the punishment you deserve, but being shown kindness instead. The tax collector knew God would be right to punish him for his sin. But God forgave the man. He gave him *grace*, or undeserved favor. Jesus explained that God was happy with the tax collector, but He was not happy with the Pharisee.

God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble. The sin of pride keeps us from Jesus. Pride is thinking we are better than we really are. Someone with the attitude of the Pharisee doesn't think he needs Jesus. The Pharisee thought about the good things he did instead of confessing his sin. The tax collector, on the other hand, knew he was guilty before God. He asked for mercy, and God was merciful to him.

Christ connection

LEADER • God was not impressed with the Pharisee. When God looks at us, He sees us as we really are: sinners in need of forgiveness. God loves us and sent His

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Son to save us. Jesus was humble, coming down from heaven to live on earth as a man.

Jesus took the punishment for our sin by dying on the cross. God wants everyone to be saved, and we can come to Him with nothing but empty hands of faith. We can cry out to God like the tax collector and because of Jesus, God will forgive us.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Read Mark 6:34 aloud. Then lead boys and girls to read the key passage together.

LEADER • Jesus saw that the people were like sheep without a shepherd. So what did He do? He began to teach them! As we see from our Bible story and from previous Bible stories, Jesus taught people about God and His kingdom.

Lead boys and girls in singing “He Saw a Huge Crowd.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “He Saw a Huge Crowd” song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever met someone who was proud? How did you feel about that person? Check out this video.

Show the “Unit 22, Session 5” discussion starter video.

Then guide kids to discuss the following questions:

- Was the cupcake humble or proud?
- What are you tempted to be proud about?
- Do you consider yourself better or more righteous than some people because you attend church or read your Bible? What does Jesus say about this?

LEADER • The Bible is clear that **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.** People who are proud might think they are too good for God or that they

- “Unit 22, Session 5” discussion starter video

don't need Him. This type of thinking is foolish. God is great. When we come before Him humbly, confessing our sin and giving Him the praise He deserves, God will reward us and give us honor.

• “The Kingdom of Heaven” song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • I am so glad that we can come to God as we are. God doesn't love us because we are good; He loves us because He is good. Let's sing about His kingdom. Sing together “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • God, we come before You with the same prayer of the tax collector: “Have mercy on me—a sinner!” Forgive us for thinking too much of ourselves and for looking down on others. You sent Your Son to rescue us—not because of anything we have done to impress You, but because You love us unconditionally. Thank You, Lord. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- strips of paper
- marker
- tape
- paper lunch bag

Before small group, write the key passage as phrases on several strips of paper. Put the strips in a paper lunch bag.

Call on a kid to pull a strip from the bag and tape it to a focal wall. Choose another kid to pull a second strip and tape it before or after the first strip, leaving room for other strips if it does not immediately precede or follow the existing phrase.

Allow kids to continue to pull and arrange the paper strips until the words of Mark 6:34 are in order. Then guide kids to read the key passage aloud together.

SAY • Jesus had compassion on people who came to hear Him teach. In our Bible story today, we learned that not everyone comes to Jesus with the right heart. In fact, **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.** We can come to Jesus humbly like lost sheep, and He will be our Good Shepherd.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Provide Bibles and guide kids to find Luke 18:9-14.

Remind them that the Gospel of Luke is in the New Testament. Explain that you will say a statement about the

Bible story. If the statement is true, kids should lower their eyes and put a fist to their chest—like the tax collector. If the statement is false, kids should stand tall with their head held high—like the Pharisee.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

1. Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. (*true, Luke 18:9-10*)
2. The Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not ugly.” (*false, not like other people; Luke 18:11*)
3. The Pharisee fasted and tithed. (*true, Luke 18:12*)
4. The tax collector stood next to the Pharisee. (*false, he stood far away; Luke 18:13*)
5. The tax collector was sorry for the things he had done. (*true, Luke 18:13*)
6. The tax collector prayed, “Have mercy on me, God! I am a child!” (*false, I am a sinner; Luke 18:13*)
7. God was happy with the tax collector, and He forgave him. (*true, Luke 18:14*)
8. God was happy with the Pharisee too. (*false, God was not happy; Luke 18:14*)
9. God rejects the humble, but gives grace to the proud. (*false, **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble;** Luke 18:14; Prov. 3:34*)

SAY • Good job, everyone. The tax collector’s prayer was different than the Pharisee’s prayer. The tax collector knew he needed God to forgive him. The Pharisee thought God would accept him for doing good things. Who was right? (*the tax collector*)

Because Jesus died on the cross for our sin, we can cry out to God like the tax collector and God will forgive us.

**LOW PREP**

- strips of paper
- pen
- paper bag

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Charades

Before small group, list various professions on separate strips of paper. (*chef, crossing guard, firefighter, police officer, baseball player, doctor, mail carrier*, and so on) Then put the strips into a paper bag. Instruct kids to take turns pulling a strip from the bag and acting out the profession. Kids may make gestures but may not speak.

SAY • Charades is a game in which you pretend to be something or someone you're not. In our Bible story, the Pharisee acted like he was righteous. He was prideful, thinking he was better than he actually was.

The Bible says that **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble**. The tax collector was humble. He recognized who he really was—a sinner who needed God's mercy.

OPTION 2: Be served

- cups
- pitcher of water
- Bibles

Instruct kids to form pairs. Guide kids through a variety of tasks. One partner must do the task for the other. Prompt partners to switch roles after each task.

Consider these sample tasks: remove your partner's shoes and then put them back on his or her feet; fill a cup of water for your partner and help him or her take a drink; choose a passage from the Bible and read a few verses to your partner. Call for kids to gather and debrief.

SAY • How did you feel when you served your partner? How did it feel to be served? Did you ever have trouble allowing someone to help you do something you thought you could do for yourself? [*Allow kids to respond to each question.*]

In today's Bible story, the man who was proud

thought he could do enough good things to impress God. The Bible is clear that we can't impress God with our good works. The man who was humble in our Bible story knew he deserved to be punished for his sin. He admitted his sin and cried out to God for mercy. The Bible says that **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble**. If we admit that we need Jesus and that we are not good apart from Him, God will give us grace. He will forgive our sin and give us eternal life.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Encourage kids to write about if they ever consider themselves more righteous than others because they attend church or read the Bible.

SAY • The Bible says that everyone has sinned. Our sin separates us from God because He is holy. God loves us not because we are good but because He is good. We can thank God for giving us special talents or abilities, but we cannot trust in ourselves for our purpose or salvation. Jesus gives us mercy—favor we do not deserve. He alone saves us from our sin.

Lead kids in prayer. Thank God for His mercy toward sinners. Ask that God would help us view ourselves and others in a way that brings glory to Him.

As time allows, lead kids to complete “Words Matter” on the activity page. Direct kids to cross out the statements that do not bring honor or glory to God. (*Answers: “I am glad I am not like that tax collector”; “God, I thank You that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful like other people”; “I am the best person here. I fast two days a week and tithe.”*)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- “Words Matter” activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.