

## The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Luke 18:9-14

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

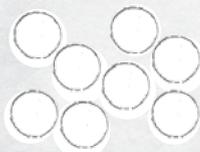
**KEY PASSAGE:** Mark 6:34

**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)

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**LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

(25–30 MINUTES)

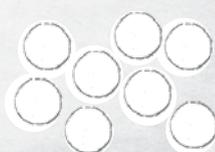
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**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES**

(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 other scaffolding to add a new dimension to your story time. Consider standing near the top step as you say the Pharisee's proud lines. Then climb down and fall to your knees to read the lines 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 has heard his humble prayer and forgiven 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.

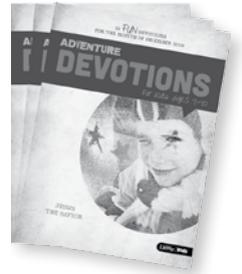
**“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, ‘God, I thank You that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful like other people. I am glad I am not like that tax collector. I fast two days a week and tithe.’**

**“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  
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover 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](http://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.

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## 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, ask them about their proudest moment. Discuss their accomplishments like learning to read, tie their shoes, ride a bike, or add numbers.

**SAY** • Sometimes we use the word *proud* to talk about things we are happy we can do. For example, a parent might say “I’m so proud of you!” The Bible teaches us about a bad kind of pride, such as when you feel like you are better or more special than someone else. That is a sinful feeling, but God can change our bad pride into something different. We’ll learn more about it soon.

## Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Humble Hearts” activity page. Help kids cross out prideful statements and circle humble ones. Then give them time to write a humble statement.

**SAY** • Humility is the opposite of pride. Humility comes from knowing that we are all sinners and that only Jesus can rescue us. We will learn a parable Jesus

- “Humble Hearts” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

taught about two men today. One man displayed pride, the other displayed humility.



## Session starter (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: Knee races

Hold a series of races where kids must remain on their knees instead of running on their feet. Consider allowing kids to race head to head in a tournament-style elimination until one kid is the knee race champion.

**SAY** • We don't have to kneel down to pray, but kneeling can be a way to show with your body that you are humbling yourself before God. To humble yourself means to make yourself lower or to understand that God is more important.

### OPTION 2: Charades

Before class, write or draw pictures of different simple actions on separate index cards. Invite kids to take turns drawing a card and acting out what is on the card. The other kids must guess what they are doing. Make sure each kid who wants to act gets a turn to do so.

- index cards
- pens

**SAY** • Have you heard the saying “actions speak louder than words”? That means that just saying something is true isn't as meaningful as showing it with your actions. What kind of actions might show that a person is truly humble? What kind of actions might show that a person is prideful? We will learn about two men whose words and actions showed who was proud and who was not.

## 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  
• dismantled tent

*[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a large backpack. A pile of cloth and poles from a dismantled tent is spread out on the floor.]*

**LEADER** • Hey there, kids! Welcome back to my campsite.

You may notice this tent collapsed. It's kind of embarrassing, but I will tell you what happened. Earlier in the day I had a conversation with my friend about setting up tents. I was bragging about how well I can set up tents. I told my friend that I was probably the best tent-builder in the country. I even said that I could set up any tent faster and better than she could. Well, wouldn't you know, I got the tent set up to prove my point and a big gust of wind came and blew it right down! I felt pretty silly. Her tent didn't crumple in the wind like mine. I spent so much time being proud of how good I was, that I didn't double-check the tent stakes.

Pride has a way of making us look foolish. Not only is it bad manners to brag, but if you make a mistake, your bragging and pride looks even worse! Actually, it reminds me of a Bible story. Would you all like to hear another of Jesus' parables?

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • Remember that a parable is a story Jesus told with a special message. Our big picture question is, *Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.* Many times, the things Jesus wanted people to know about God were too difficult to understand. Jesus told parables that put amazing facts about God into stories the people could relate to.

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

**LEADER** • [*Point to the previous sessions as you list them.*]

We learned about the parable of the sower the first week we were camping. Next we learned about the unmerciful servant. Two weeks ago we talked about the good Samaritan, and last week we studied three parables about lost things being found. This week we will hear a story called “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector.” Listen to find out how this ties into my tent fiasco!

• Giant Timeline

## 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.”

- Bibles
- “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

**LEADER** • Jesus knows everything, and He could tell that the people listening to Him felt pretty good about their lives. They thought they obeyed God's laws well. They thought they had earned God's love and their own salvation. Jesus was trying to help them see that God's love isn't something they *have* to earn, and that salvation isn't something they *could* earn. Their good deeds could not outweigh their sin, but they didn't believe that. That's why Jesus told the parable.

The Pharisee in the parable was supposed to be praying to God, but it sounded more like he was praying to himself. He wanted to brag about his obedience more than he wanted to ask God to forgive his sin. On the other hand, the tax collector in the parable understood that his actions were wicked. He knew that he deserved punishment from God. He didn't try to tell God about times he obeyed like the Pharisee, but he chose to confess his sin and ask God for mercy. **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.**

After hearing that parable, can any of you see the real reason pride causes so many problems? [*Allow responses.*] Good answers. When we are prideful, we are focused on ourselves. A prideful person thinks he or she is the most important person around. Instead of focusing on what God wants, a prideful person focuses on what he or she wants. In fact, pride is the feeling that makes us think we might not even need God. What a foolish idea! We all need God.

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.

## Christ connection

**LEADER** • Way back in the Book of Genesis, pride caused

Adam and Eve to choose sin. They thought they knew better than God. Ever since then, all people have been sinners who think they know better than God. That's why we all deserve death. Thankfully, God's plan was a plan of mercy and love. He sent Jesus to take our place. Instead of us dying the death we deserve, Jesus died a death He did not deserve. On the third day, God raised Jesus to life to show that His sacrifice was perfect and complete. It takes humility to see that we need help. When we believe in Jesus, God forgives us and adopts us into His family.

### **Key passage (5 minutes)**

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

**LEADER** • Does anyone remember our key passage? It shows us the compassion Jesus had for people. He knew they were lost and that they did not know much about God. Jesus wanted people to know God, so He taught them in ways they could understand, like parables. Then He died for sin to make the way back to God.

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** • Can you think of a time pride got you into trouble? Think about that as we watch this quick clip.

Show the “Unit 22, Session 5” discussion starter video. Discuss with the kids why it was a bad idea for the deluxe cupcake to call attention to himself. Can they think of a

- “Unit 22, Session 5” discussion starter video

situation in their lives when they had a prideful attitude about something? What happened?

**LEADER** • Pride is the feeling we get when we think we are more important than the people around us. Having talents and special skills is not bad, but we need to remember that God is the One who made all of us in His image. Humility doesn't mean you think bad things about yourself. Humility means you understand that everyone needs Jesus, including you.

### **Sing (4 minutes)**

**LEADER** • I'm so thankful for our good God who loves us and gives us grace. He sent Jesus to teach us about Him and die for our sins. Let's all praise Him by singing.

Sing together "The Kingdom of Heaven."

### **Pray (2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

**LEADER** • Father, it is so hard for us to be humble. Help us see that You are the most important and that we all are sinners. Help us to learn true humility that seeks to put You first and others before ourselves. Help us confess our sins and our pride so that we can follow You. Amen.

### **Dismiss to small groups**

• "The Kingdom of Heaven" song

## 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. 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

Allow volunteers to say the key passage from memory. Then instruct the class to stand in a circle and say the verse one word at a time going around the circle. Each time a kid makes a mistake, show the key passage poster and ask him to read the verse aloud. Then start again. Play until the kids complete the verse without mistakes.

**SAY** • Jesus taught using parables because He knew that some things about God are too complicated for us to understand unless He used stories we could relate to. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and He can lead us to God no matter how far we've wandered from Him.

## Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

• Bibles, 1 per kid  
• Main Point Poster  
• broomsticks or yardsticks, 1 per team

Distribute a Bible to each kid and help them look up Luke 18:9-14. Form two teams of kids. Invite the teams to stand in two single-file lines. At the other end of the room, place two limbo sticks, one for each team. Alternate between teams reading the statements included below. Teams must decide if the statement is true or false. Each time a team answers correctly, award a point and a chance to walk beneath their limbo stick for an additional point. If

they are wrong, their limbo stick is lowered, but they still have a chance to pass under it for a point. Kids should use their Bibles to find answers.

Questions:

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*)
10. ***Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.*** (*true*)

**SAY** • Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to show that pride is a real problem that makes us think we are able to earn salvation with good works. Humility comes when we understand that we deserve punishment and need Jesus to save us from our sin. The tax collector received mercy because he knew he was a sinner. The Pharisee did not receive mercy because he was prideful and

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

thought he didn't need mercy from God.

## Activity choice (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: Kind of a big deal

Give each kid a sticky note. Ask them to write or draw a picture representing something about Jesus that is worthy of praise. Collect the sticky notes and place them on a focal wall. Discuss how important Jesus is and how amazing He is. Remind kids that He still displayed humility.

**SAY** • When we are prideful, it is sort of like we are worshiping ourselves. We focus on the things we have done instead of on the things God has done for us. Jesus deserves worship as God the Son. He came to earth and lived a perfect life and still remained humble. Jesus was so humble, He allowed men to kill Him so that sinners could be saved and glorify God. **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble**

### OPTION 2: The three-headed kid

Before class, cut two additional head holes in an oversized adult T-shirt. Select three kids to wear the shirt. Instruct the rest of the kids to ask questions of the “three-headed kid.” The three kids wearing the shirt will form a silly, jumbled answer by each saying one word at a time.

**SAY** • Pride can cause us to pretend we know things we don't. Sometimes it leads us to talk to God in long, jumbled up sentences that we think might sound good or impressive to God. The truth is, God knows what is in our hearts and what we are thinking before we even speak. We don't have to use special words or long sentences when we talk to God. God wants us



LOW PREP

- sticky notes
- pens or markers

- oversized adult T-shirt
- scissors

to remain humble and speak to Him like our Father because that's who He is. **God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.**

## Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of one way they can practice humility this week.

**SAY** • Humility can be difficult. Sometimes it feels like the key to humility is to pretend you think you are worse than you really are. That's not true humility. Humility comes from knowing that we need Jesus and realizing that He loves us. True humility means we aren't thinking about ourselves but about God and other people.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, asking God to bless your group and help each kid grow in their relationship with Him toward Christlike humility.

- markers or crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible story coloring 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.