



**The proud man and
the humble man**

Colour me!



Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told a story to some people who thought they were better than others and who looked down on everyone else: Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood over by himself and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. I go without eating for two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all I earn."

The tax collector stood off at a distance and did not think he was good enough even to look up towards heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded his chest and prayed, "God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner." Then Jesus said, "When the two men went home, it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God. If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honoured."

Commentary

It seems almost too obvious to us that God wouldn't be impressed by the one who was so full of himself, and that the other person experienced God's love and forgiveness. However, to the people of Jesus' day, this story would have come as something of a shock. The Pharisees were devout and God-fearing. They studied God's law carefully and kept it to the letter. They were examples of holy living for everyone else to follow, and surely, if anyone was going to be welcomed by God into heaven, it was them. As the Pharisee says, he does all the right things, just as the Old Testament law commanded, and lives a blameless life. Everyone would agree with him when he says that he is better than the tax collector, who works for the enemy – the Romans – and steals money from the people. But Jesus turns things upside down. The good Pharisee isn't God's favourite after all; it's the tax collector!

Why? It isn't about what you do, but the sort of person you are. You may be very religious, but if that makes you proud, then your religion means nothing. And you may be very much a criminal, but if you're truly sorry, your prayer is heard. This story is an important one for any of us who try to do the right thing before God. That's good, but if it means that we look down on others, we won't please God.

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Questions

- ▶ What was wrong with the Pharisee's prayer?
- ▶ What was right about the tax collector's prayer?
- ▶ How should the Pharisee have prayed?
- ▶ Who is like the Pharisee and who is like the tax collector today?



Visual aid

Find two balloons. Blow up one to represent the Pharisee, full of the hot air of his good deeds. The other should not be blown up: it represents the tax collector, who realizes that he's not worthy to be used by God.



Activity idea

Play a word game together in which you try to outdo each other by making up pretend good deeds you have done that will qualify you for a special award. For example: "I rescued a cat from a tree"; "That's nothing, I rescued a whole family from a burning building"; "Well, listen to this, I've just given \$10,000 to help the poor" and so on. All this boasting is just like the Pharisee's prayer.



Prayer idea

Take the balloon that was not blown up, from the visual aid suggestion, and choose one person to be the balloon blower. Each person takes a turn to make a prayer of saying "sorry" to God for the ways in which you have let God and other people down. After each prayer, the balloon blower will blow into the balloon, reminding you that God has heard your prayer saying "sorry" and forgives you.

Key verse

If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honoured (Luke 18:14).

Old Testament story link

Daniel 9:3-10: This is Daniel's humble prayer before God on behalf of the people of Israel who have done wrong.



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