

COGIC Sunday School Lesson 12 – 05-17- 2026, Humble Faith Luke 18:9–14

Bible Truth: Jesus taught that prayer spoken in humility has power over a prayer spoken in self-righteousness.

Memory Verse: [13](#)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!' (BRB)

3. Lesson Aim – Key Takeaways

- God is not impressed by spiritual performance
 - Pride blocks us from grace
 - Humility opens the door to mercy
 - The person who knows they need God is the one God draws near to
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People that Matter:

1. [Jesus](#)

The central figure in this passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the importance of persistent prayer.

2. [Disciples](#)

The immediate audience of Jesus' teaching, representing all believers who are called to a life of prayer.

3. [Tax collectors:](#)

Worked for Rome and were despised as collaborators and cheats.

1. Passage Overview and Background

Luke 18:9–14 is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, told by Jesus to people who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on others. It contrasts two

men praying in the temple—one proud, one humble—and reveals what kind of heart God accepts.

2. Scripture Summary

- The Pharisee stands apart, listing his religious achievements: fasting, tithing, moral superiority. His prayer is self-congratulatory, not relational.
 - The Tax Collector, despised by society, stands at a distance, won't even lift his eyes, and simply prays, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."
 - Jesus concludes: "*This man went home justified rather than the other.*" God honors humility, not self-righteousness.
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The Lesson: Luke 18:9-14 (BRB)

⁹To some who trusted in their own righteousness and viewed others with contempt, He also told this parable:

¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—swindlers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week and pay tithes of all that I acquire.'

¹³But 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!'

¹⁴ 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."

Filling in the blanks

Verses 1–8 – The Persistent Widow

Jesus tells an account of a wronged widow who keeps appealing to an indifferent judge.

Her steady pleas finally move him to act. He assures His listeners that God—who is just—will answer His people’s cries far more quickly, though He also asks if He will “find faith on the earth” when He returns.

What’s Happening Here?

1. Jesus aims this parable at a specific audience (v. 9)

He’s talking to people who:

- trusted in their own righteousness
- looked down on others

Trusting in one’s own righteousness is **self-reliance in spiritual matters** — believing that one’s actions, discipline, or moral record make them acceptable before God. It’s rooted in pride and comparison rather than repentance and faith.

- And viewed = Despise in the Greek.
- Contempt in the Greek = **Kataphroneō** which is a strong word. It doesn’t just mean disliking someone — it means:
 - considering someone beneath you
 - viewing them as insignificant
 - treating them with disregard
 - counting them as “nothing”
 - It’s a posture of superiority that comes from pride.

This is important.

The parable is a mirror for people who think they’re “good enough” and treat others as if they are not.

2. Two men go to pray — but their hearts are worlds apart (vv. 10–12)

The Pharisee

He stands confidently and prays about himself:

- “I’m not like other people.”
- “I fast twice a week.”
- “I tithe everything.”

He’s not praying for mercy.

He’s not praying for help.

He’s not praying to connect with God.

He’s performing.

His prayer is basically:

“God, You’re welcome.”

He compares himself to others to feel superior.

He trusts his résumé instead of God’s mercy.

Teaching Point:

Self-righteousness blinds us to our need for mercy.

It turns prayer into self-advertisement instead of communion.

Reflection Question:

- What are subtle ways pride can creep into our spiritual life?

3. The tax collector’s posture is completely different (v. 13)

He stands far off.

He won’t lift his eyes.

He beats his chest — a sign of deep sorrow.

He prays one simple, desperate line:

“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

No excuses.

No comparisons.

No performance.

Just honesty.

This is the prayer God responds to.

Who else in the Bible prayed for God to have mercy on them because of their sin?

✦ 1. David — “Have mercy on me, O God” (Psalm 51:1)

After his sin with Bathsheba, David prays:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.”

David doesn’t say “a sinner,” but he owns his sin and appeals to God’s mercy, just like the tax collector.

✦ 2. The Psalmist — “Be merciful to me, Lord” (Psalm 41:4)

“O Lord, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.”

Again, the same heart posture:

- confession
 - humility
 - dependence on mercy
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✦ 3. The Blind Men — “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (Matthew 9:27; 20:30)

They aren’t confessing sin, but they are crying out for mercy — the same Greek root word.

✦ 4. The Canaanite Woman — “Lord, help me... have mercy on me” (Matthew 15:22–25)

Her plea is desperate, humble, and persistent.

✦ 5. The Ten Lepers — “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Luke 17:13)

Again, a cry for mercy from people who know they cannot help themselves.

✦ 6. Daniel — “We have sinned... O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive” (Daniel 9:4–19)

Daniel confesses the sins of the people and appeals to God's mercy alone.

✦ 7. The Prodigal Son — “I have sinned... I am no longer worthy” (Luke 15:18–19)

He doesn't use the same words, but the same spirit of repentance is there.

Teaching Point:

Humility doesn't deny sin; it acknowledges it and turns to God for mercy.
This is the heart posture that leads to justification.

4. Jesus flips the expected outcome (v. 14)

The shock of the story is this:

The tax collector — not the Pharisee — goes home justified.

Justified = declared righteous by God.

The religious man leaves unchanged.

The broken man leaves forgiven.

Then Jesus gives the principle that runs through all Scripture:

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

God resists pride.

God lifts the humble.


Teaching Point:

Justification is God's declaration of righteousness based on mercy, not merit.
Humility opens the door to grace.

Discussion Prompt:

- How can religious activity become a substitute for genuine relationship with God?
- How does this parable challenge our view of who is “spiritual” or “worthy”?

- What does “going home justified” mean for us today?
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 5. Application for Adults

- In Prayer: Approach God with honesty, not performance.
 - In Community: Resist comparing your spirituality to others.
 - In Leadership: Model humility—acknowledge weakness and depend on grace.
 - In Daily Life: Let mercy shape how you treat others who struggle.
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