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~ **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 18:9-14.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Luke 18:9-14 NASB	Luke 18:9-14 NLT
<p>⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”</p>	<p>⁹ Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ¹⁰ “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! ¹² I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’</p> <p>¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”</p>

2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

From *Through Peasant Eyes* by Kenneth Bailey

1. The scene is set in public worship in the Temple, not private worship.
2. In the West, we associate “pray” with private devotions and “worship” with public worship but they were used interchangeably. In Luke 1, Zacharias was burning incense while the people were in prayer. Isa 56:7, the house of God was to be a house of prayer. Acts 2:42, the church was devoted to “the prayers”. Acts 16:13,16 the place of public worship was a place of prayer.
3. During the incense offering, private prayers would be said. Some would offer prayers during this time even if they were not in the temple.

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4. Other prayers would be offered during the atonement sacrifices either at dawn or at 3pm. After the sacrifice of the lamb, when the incense would be offered, this would be an appropriate time to pray since the lamb sacrifice opened the way to God.
5. Those who kept the Law were in a fraternity called the Haberim. Those who did not follow the dietary or cleanliness laws were the people of the land.
6. The Pharisee would want to stand alone because he would not want to come into contact with the people of the land and contract their uncleanness. You could become unclean even by leaning against such a person or accidentally touching.
7. In the Assumption of Moses, one leader proudly said, “Do not touch me lest you should pollute me in the place where I stand.”
8. Hillel said, “Keep not aloof from the congregation and trust not in thyself until the day of thy death and judge not thy fellow until thou art thyself come to his place.”
9. Even private prayers were said aloud and the Pharisee is probably saying this to educate these less holy ones.
10. During the time when the priest would offer the incense in the Holy Place, the delegation of Israel was responsible to make any unclean stand at the eastern gate of the Temple. Perhaps the Pharisee was wondering why this tax collector was not ushered out of the service. But he “graciously” offers his prayer to instruct him.
11. A prayer was supposed to be thanks to God for his gifts and petitions for needs. The Pharisee did neither. In the first century a prayer has come down and is recorded in the Talmud: “I thank thee O Lord my God that thou hast given me my lot with those who sit in the seat of learning, and not with those who sit at the street-corners; for I am early to work, and they are early to work; I am early to work on the words of the Torah, and they are early to work on things of no moment. I weary myself, and they weary themselves; ; I weary myself and profit thereby, while they weary themselves to no profit. I run and they run; I run towards the life of the Age to Come, and they run towards the pit of destruction.” (Jeremias, 142)
12. A swindler and one who is unjust would be typical of a tax collector. Adultery is thrown in for good measure. Tax farmers in Roman empire known for extortion and swindling.
13. The Law of Moses called for a fast on the Day of Atonement. But this man fasted twice a week. (Lev 25:20; Numb 39:7)
14. The tithe on grain, wine, and oil – Lev 27:30; Numb 18:27; Deut 12:17; 14:13) But this man tithed on everything. See Amos 4:4.
15. The accepted posture was to cross the arms, but he does not keep them still. He beats himself on his chest for his sins. This would be done in rapid succession. The hands are closed into fists. It is used in times of extreme anguish or anger. This was a gesture of women, primarily and men would do this only in times of greatest sorrow. In the NT it is used only one other place, when the crowd left the cross and beat their breast. Luke 23:48.
16. Why on his chest? Because it covers the heart and this was the source of all evil.
17. “May the atonement be for me,” not the more general, “have mercy upon me.”

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Answer these reflective questions.

The Pharisee fasted more than the Law of Moses asked him to do and he gave more than the Law of Moses asked. Was it wrong for him to do these things?

Luke tells us that the tax collector was standing some distance away from the others? Why do you think he did not associate with others?

The tax collector asked for God's mercy, or, that the sacrifice would make atonement for him. In what ways do you need God's mercy in your life?

Jesus said everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and those who humbled themselves will be exalted. How would you assess your relationship with God right now? Is it a relationship where you have humility before him?
