

# Daily Discipleship

## Luke 18:9-14

**Discipleship:** *A New Humility*

**Focus Question:** *How does a disciple of Jesus become humble?*

### word of life

**“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”** Luke 18:14 (NRSV)

Read Luke 18:9-14

Chapter 18 of Luke begins with Jesus telling two parables on prayer. In the first parable, Jesus describes a widow who persistently petitions a judge to act justly towards her. Jesus points to her constant and fervent mind-set as a model for prayer. Each disciple is encouraged to pray always and to not lose heart. (See Luke 18:1-8)

Next, Jesus shares his concern about those who trust in themselves and judge others with contempt. The parable in Luke 18:9-14 describes two men who are praying in the temple. One is a Pharisee, and the other is a tax collector.

1. *What do you know about Pharisees?*
2. *What do you know about tax collectors in the first century?*
3. *What might be a stereotype of each of them?*

The Pharisee knows the law. He is a disciplined and faithful man who does more than the law requires. He practices tithing and fasts twice a week (although only once a week is required). Consequently, he is pleased with himself and confident of God’s favor. His prayer is “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” (Luke 18:11 NRSV)

4. *How can such a religious man be so judgmental of others?*

The other man in the story is a tax collector. The Jews did not live in a free democratic country and did not establish their own tax guidelines. Tax collectors of that time collected for the Romans, the government in power. They were known for adding extra to supplement their own income. No wonder the tax collector could not look up to heaven, but instead beats his breast as he makes confession to God. He knew he wasn’t perfect. Far from it. Consequently, the tax collector begs for mercy saying “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

5. *Does it sound like the tax collector intended to change his job or his ways?*
6. *What is your opinion of this tax collector?*

In the first century, the Pharisee would have been perceived to be more faithful and righteous before God. Once more, Jesus uses a parable to reverse things and surprise the audience. The sinner who collects taxes finds God’s favor. This does not mean God approves of cheating one another. But the tax collector comes before God in humility, acknowledging his sinfulness and shortcomings. He is relying on the mercy of God.

7. *What surprises you about this parable?*
8. *Where do you find yourself in the story?*

This parable reminds us not to be so quick to judge others in their faith journey. No one is to get too comfortable in one’s righteousness or guilt. God surprises us with grace upon grace. We are to share that grace with others.

## **word among us**

Noah loved making New Year's resolutions. He loved challenging himself to a specific task and striving to reach it. He shared with everyone in his family his goals and his progress. They were invited to celebrate with him when he reached his goals. Over the years, his family teased him about his big ego and complained he was too full of himself.

Thus, Noah decided to prove something to the entire group. His goal for the New Year was to become humble. Down deep, he knew he could prove he was humble and could barely keep from grinning about his plan. To his surprise, when Noah announced to the group his goal of humility for the coming year, they all laughed. In fact, they could not stop laughing.

1. *Why do you think Noah's family laughed?*
2. *How does one learn to be humble?*
3. *Describe someone you know who is humble.*

Consider the parable told by Jesus about the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee appeared to do everything right, but he did not find favor with God. His prayer to God revealed his heart and his own pride of perceiving himself as a more righteous man than the tax collector.

4. *This man appeared to follow the law and does everything right, but is wrong. How can that be?*
5. *What would you want to say to this Pharisee?*
6. *How might this Pharisee learn humility?*

The intensity of the tax collector's guilt caused him to stand at a distance, looking downward and beating his breast. He knew he had done wrong and was unworthy to stand before God. His prayer revealed the depths of his heart, his humility, and his awareness of guilt.

7. *What can be said to someone filled with such shame?*
8. *How does this parable give you hope?*
9. *What about this parable concerns you?*

It is easy to pray, "Thank God I am not like that other person." We judge others all the time, often unaware of the other person's internal struggles and prayers. Consequently, we may miss the opportunity to meet and learn from amazing people who are deeply trying to be faithful in difficult times and circumstances.

Jesus jolts us back to reality with this text. All is not as it seems. Take a moment to tell this parable in contemporary terms. Who would be the Pharisee? The tax collector?

10. *Summarize the main point of this parable.*
11. *How will this coming week be different if we keep this lesson in mind?*

### **Prayer**

Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner of your own redeeming. Fill my heart with love and grace towards those around me. Amen.

### **Dig Deeper**

Psalm 121

### *last word*

Seek out a humble person  
and discover his or her  
faith story.



*Daily Discipleship*

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2007 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

[www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship](http://www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship)

Oct. 28, 2007 Page 2 of 2