

# Parable of a Pharisee and a Tax Collector

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**Scripture Reference:** [Luke 18:9-14](#)

**Suggested Emphasis:** Be humble and do not compare yourself with others.



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



Review Questions



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## Story Overview:

Jesus told the parable of two men who went to pray at the temple. The Pharisee (who most people thought was good) had too much pride and just told God all of the good things he had done and how he was better than other people. A tax collector (who most people thought was bad) was humble and just asked God to have mercy on him because he was a sinner.

## Background Study:

We know the exact audience to this parable. Jesus was telling this parable to “those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else (verse 9). It is one thing to be confident of your salvation (through the righteousness of Jesus Christ) but it is another to be confident in your own righteousness.

Jesus contrasts two different attitudes in this parable. Jesus makes the parable even more interesting by using

unexpected characters to represent the attitudes.

In this parable an incorrect attitude of pride was displayed by a Pharisee even though Pharisees were held in high religious regard by the people of the day. The Pharisees were scholars who studied the Old Testament Scriptures and developed the traditions that governed the Jewish religion of the day. Theirs was what Paul later referred to as the “strictest sect” of the Jewish faith (Acts 26:5). They were outwardly religious but Jesus often referred to them as hypocrites (Matthew 3:7).

The correct attitude of humility was displayed by a tax collector even though tax collectors of the day were despised by the Jews. Sometimes referred to as “publicans” these Jews acted as collection agents for Roman taxes. Their job was to collect the taxes from the Jews. They had a bad reputation because they often increased the taxes so that they could take a big percentage off the top. They were often considered unclean because they mixed with Gentiles and worked on the Sabbath. They were despised and yet many of them turned to God when they heard John the Baptist preach (Matthew 21:31-32).

Prayer times were scheduled twice each day (morning and evening) at the temple. People could also go the temple anytime for private prayer.

Even though the Pharisee was outwardly religious he had a heart full of pride. He did not have God on his mind when he went to the temple to pray. He was only thinking about himself. If he would have compared himself with the perfection of God, he would have seen himself as a sinner. Instead, he picked a man with a bad reputation (tax collector) and compared himself to him. We will never see ourselves in a true light until we compare ourselves to God (Matthew 5:48).

The tax collector in this parable is totally humble in the presence of God. He centres all of his thoughts on God when he prays. He does not think about anyone else and what they have and have not done. He knows he is not worthy but he throws himself on the mercy of God.

Other Scriptures to help in your study: [Romans 3:23](#); [1 John 1:9-10](#); [James 5:16](#); [Proverbs 3:34](#); [James 4:6, 10](#); [1 Peter 5:5-6](#)



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## Way to Introduce the Story:

Use a fine waterproof marker to draw a face on a balloon. Blow up the balloon slightly so that the balloon looks like the head of a child. “Children, let me introduce you to Puffy. Puffy really likes to brag about herself. Sometimes she says things like, ‘Don’t I look beautiful today?’ (Blow some more air into the balloon) Sometimes she tells her mum, ‘Mum, you have to buy me lots of presents because I am the nicest person in our whole family.’ (Blow some more air into the balloon.)” Think of more things Puffy might say to compare herself with others. (The children will help you think of things) and keep adding more air until the balloon finally pops. “Oh, no, Puffy just thought too much of herself. She spent too much time trying to compare herself with others. In today’s lesson, Jesus talks about a man who liked to compare himself with other people. Let’s learn about this parable . . .”

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# The Story:

Have you ever met someone who thinks they are better than everyone else? They like to brag about themselves. They think they are better looking than other people. They think they are smarter than other people. They think they are faster or stronger or more popular than other people.

There were people like that when Jesus was preaching. Sometimes they even thought that God should treat them better just because they were so good.

Jesus did not like it when people thought they were better than everyone else. He said that people who thought like that had too much pride. Jesus said that people should not be proud. Instead, people should be humble.

Being humble means that you do not brag about yourself. If you are humble you do not expect everyone to always give you special treatment.

Jesus wanted the proud people to understand about being humble so he told them a parable. Do you remember what a parable is? A parable is a simple story that helps us to understand something very important.

Here is the parable that Jesus told to the people who had too much pride:

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

Pharisees were teachers of the Scriptures and they knew a lot about God's word. But when this Pharisee prayed he only thought about how good he was. He stood up and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not bad like all the other people. I am glad I am not bad like robbers and cheaters. I am glad I am not bad like that tax collector over there."

Then the Pharisee continued praying, "Lord, I am so good. I give lots of money and I pray a lot. I am really good."

What do you think God thought about the Pharisee's prayer? (Let children answer.) The Pharisee was not humble when he prayed. He had too much pride in himself. Jesus said the Pharisee was not right with God.

Then the tax collector prayed. Sometimes tax collectors cheated people. It was good that this tax collector wanted to pray to God. He did not stand up in front of everyone. He stood off at a distance and he prayed, "God, you are so good. I am sorry that I have done wrong. Please help me to be better."

What do you think God thought about the tax collector's prayer? (Let children answer.) The tax collector was humble when he prayed. He did not think about how good he was. He thought about how good God was. Jesus said that the tax collector could be happy because he was right with God.

After Jesus said the parable he told everyone to be humble before God and that God would make them great.

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## Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

## Review Questions:

1. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, which one's prayer pleased God? The Tax Collector.
2. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, why was God not pleased with the Pharisee's prayer? Instead of praying and talking about God, he only bragged on himself and tried to tell God how he was better than other people.
3. In Jesus' parable why was God pleased with the tax collector's prayer and not the prayer of the Pharisee? The tax collector prayed with humility while the Pharisee prayed with pride.

## Song Suggestions:

- [Booster Song](#)
- [I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Song](#)
- Humble Yourselves in the Sight of the Lord
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

## Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

### Activities:

- Talk to children about how to pray (don't assume all children know how). One simple way is to use the words J-O-Y. This helps us to remember to pray about (J) Jesus first- praise and thanks, (O) Others next- help for friends and those in need, and (Y) Yourself last- requests about self. A song that goes with this is sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells". The words are: J-O-Y, J-O-Y, this should truly be, Jesus first, yourself last, and others in between.
- Have a chain prayer where each child takes turns saying part of the prayer. You may wish to ask for prayer requests from the students and write the requests on cards. Pass out the cards and let the children pray for the thing on their card.
- Give each child a balloon. Let the children take turns making pride statements (bragging about themselves). Each time they make a pride statement they should blow a big breath into the balloon. Soon they will have bragged so much that the balloon pops. Talk about how pride is just a bunch of hot air. We hurt ourselves and others when we have too much pride.
- Write the letters P-R-I-D-E on the chalk/white board. Think of words relating to pride that begin with each of the letters. For example, P is for puffed up and pushy, R is for right all the time, etc. Do the same thing for the letters in the word "humility".

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



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[Click here for "Parable of Pharisee and Tax Collector" to print on Letter size paper \(USA\)](#)  
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## Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Interactive group activities \(sermons4kids.com\)](#)
- [Pharisee and Publican handout \(sundayschoolsources.com\)](#)
- [Video of the story. Music only and no words. Youtube video 2 minutes 12 seconds.](#)

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