



The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

(based on Luke 18:9-14)

One day, Jesus told a story to people who were proud of the way they lived. They trusted in themselves, in their own sense of being right, and looked down on everyone else. Jesus said:

A prominent religious leader and a tax collector went up to the temple to pray. The religious leader was called a *Pharisee*, a word that means “separate.” He believed that people pleased God best by following the Law of Moses, so he worked hard to obey all the rules. He was a really good person, and all the people liked him.

The other person was a tax collector. He collected money for the Romans who had invaded the country. He knew that most people hated him and thought he was a bad person.

The Pharisee and the tax collector climbed the stairs and went inside the temple. The Pharisee walked quickly past the tax collector and marched right up to the front of the temple. He knew he was living a good life. He felt good about himself and stood proudly. The Pharisee lifted up his arms and began to pray:

“Oh God,” he said. “I thank you that I am not greedy, that I don’t lie and cheat like everyone else. I am very glad,” he puffed, full of himself, “that I am not like the tax collector. I am a very good person,” he admired himself, “and I work hard to obey all the rules. I keep myself separate from all wrongdoing. I am glad to be such a good person. Amen.”

Meanwhile, the tax collector hid in the shadows. The tax collector was very sad. He knew he hadn’t always done the right thing. He felt sad for the ways he had hurt others and turned away from God. He knew he needed God’s love. He did what Jewish people often did when they were sorry and filled with sadness. He kept his head bowed and began to beat his chest.

“Oh God,” he whispered, “I need your love. Have mercy on me. I am a sinner. Amen.”

Jesus continued: “Two people left the temple. The Pharisee had done everything right, but his prayer was not right in God’s eyes. He did not understand that he still needed God’s grace. The tax collector had done nothing right, but he had asked for and received God’s grace anyway. And the tax collector was forgiven. Now he was right in God’s eyes.”



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- God hears us even when we pray silently, but sometimes, when we are gathered together, we pray aloud. Who do you know that likes to pray aloud? Do you pray aloud at your house?
- Search presbyterianmission.org for The Lord's Prayer. Learn to say it from memory, or try some of the other languages you'll find there.



Responding to God's Grace

- Search for a recording of the song and listen to The Prayer of St. Francis.
- You can use the fingers of one hand to remind you of things to pray for. Practice using your hand to say a longer prayer.

Thumb: people who are close to you

Index finger: people who have been an example to you

Middle finger, the tallest one: government leaders

Ring finger, the least versatile: people who need help

Pinky finger, makes the word "I" in sign language: yourself

- We know that God hears our prayers, even the ones not spoken aloud. Invite your children to be silent for a moment while everyone talks to God.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Sing "Standing in the Need of Prayer." If you don't know the song, choose one from the several options on YouTube.
- Decide who will say the prayer with tonight's meal. Work together on writing a prayer.
- Search Biblegateway.com for Psalm 30 in the Common English Bible (CEB). Read a few verses of this psalm of thanksgiving every day this week.