



Normal Campus Sermon Study - 8.2.2026

Leader's Corner

The Parable of the
Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:9-14

Main Passage: Luke 18:9–14

Main Idea: The kingdom of God is not entered through our own goodness, but through humble dependence on the mercy and grace of God.

Main Practice: Practice humility by honestly confessing your need for Jesus every day, choosing confidence in His grace rather than your own righteousness.

Leader Summary: Jesus tells this parable to people who “were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else” (v.9). Two people enter the temple to pray. One lists his spiritual accomplishments before God; the other simply pleads for mercy. The shocking ending is that the religious man leaves unchanged, while the broken sinner goes home justified. Jesus reminds us that the pathway into God’s kingdom has always been humility, because throughout Scripture God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Prayer and Praise

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We come before You with empty hands. It is so easy for us to compare ourselves with others, justify ourselves, or quietly believe we have earned Your favor. Forgive us for the pride we often fail to see.

Like the tax collector, teach us to pray honestly:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Thank You that Your mercy is greater than our failures and Your grace is sufficient for every one of us. As we study Your Word today, soften our hearts, deepen our humility, and help us treasure Jesus more than our own accomplishments.

In Christ’s name,

Amen.

Praise & Worship Suggestions:

* Lord I Need You – Matt Maher

* Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me – CityAlight

* His Mercy Is More – Matt Boswell & Matt Papa

Group Discussion

1. Think about a time when you were tempted to compare yourself with someone else. What happened inside you during that comparison?

2. Read Luke 18:9–14 together. What details or contrasts between the Pharisee and the tax collector stand out to you?

3. Luke tells us exactly who Jesus is speaking to (v.9). Why do you think self-righteousness and looking down on others naturally go together? How can that temptation show up in both religious and non-religious people?

4. Compare the two prayers.

* What does each man believe about himself?

* What does each man believe about God?

What differences do you notice?

5. What does this parable reveal about God's character?

What does it teach us about:

* His holiness?

* His mercy?

* His justice?

* His grace?

How does God's response surprise you?

6. Pride is often difficult to recognize in ourselves. Where do you think pride tends to hide? What subtle forms of pride are easiest to miss?

7. Jesus says the tax collector "went home justified." What does that word mean? Why is it significant that justification comes through God's mercy rather than our own performance?

Read together:

* Romans 3:21–26

* Ephesians 2:8–9

How do these passages deepen what Jesus is teaching?

8. Where are you most tempted to trust your own righteousness instead of God's grace? What would humble dependence on Jesus actually look like this week?

9. How would our homes, workplaces, church, or small group look different if we truly believed that everyone stands equally in need of God's mercy?

10. This week, what is one practical way you can replace comparison with humility? Complete this sentence: "God, this week I need Your mercy most in _____."

Practice

Group Practice:

Spend several quiet minutes together. Invite everyone to kneel (if able), bow their heads, or simply open their hands.

Read Luke 18:13 slowly. Allow silence.

Then, together pray aloud: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Rather than expanding the prayer, let its simplicity shape the moment. Afterward, invite anyone who wishes to briefly thank God for His mercy.

Individual Practice:

Each morning this week:

1. Read Luke 18:9–14.
2. Pray: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”
3. Ask:
 - * Where am I tempted to prove myself today?
 - * Where do I need God’s grace?
 - * Who can I honor instead of comparing myself with?

End by thanking Jesus that your standing before God rests completely on His finished work.

Further Study

Supporting Scriptures:

Pride & Humility

- * Proverbs 3:34
- * Proverbs 16:18
- * Isaiah 66:2
- * Micah 6:8
- * James 4:6–10
- * 1 Peter 5:5–7

Jesus on Humility

- * Luke 14:7–11
- * Matthew 5:3
- * Matthew 23:1–12
- * John 13:1–17

Justification by Grace

- * Romans 3:21–26
- * Romans 5:1–11
- * Ephesians 2:1–10
- * Titus 3:3–7
- * Philippians 3:4–11

Theological Reflection:

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” — C.S. Lewis

“The doorway into the kingdom of God is low. No one enters except on their knees.” — Attributed to Roy Hession, reflecting the biblical theme of humility before God.

One of the great ironies of the gospel is that the closer we grow to Jesus, the more aware we become of both our need and His grace. Christian maturity doesn’t produce greater self-confidence—it produces greater confidence in Christ. The tax collector’s prayer isn’t merely the beginning of the Christian life; it remains the posture of a disciple throughout the Christian life.

Leader Encouragement:

Many people carry hidden shame and quietly wonder whether they’re enough for God. Others carry hidden pride and quietly believe they already are. This parable speaks to both. Keep bringing your group back to the central truth: the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We all come the same way—through the mercy of Jesus. The more deeply we understand grace, the more naturally humility, compassion, and gratitude begin to shape our lives.