

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read Luke 18:9-14 aloud.

1. What do you know about Pharisees?

Pharisees were the conservative fundamentalists of this era. It was a time when many Jews believed that their survival required blending in with Roman society. Pharisees were a “back to the Bible” movement who argued that the Jewish faith would survive only by devotion to God.

Turned out the Pharisees were right – when Jewish culture was crushed in the late 100’s, Judaism was preserved through their lives and writings.

Jesus once observed that Pharisees tithed out of their herbs (Matt. 23:23). How do you think their peers would have viewed them?

Who in our society is admired & respected for their piety & courageous devotion to God?

Nuns, missionaries, Equipping Ministers, etc.

2. How would you feel if you got a call from the IRS?

Probably not a fun way to spend a Friday evening.

What do you know about tax collectors in ancient Rome?

Rome collected taxes by region – each governor owed an annual payment. Governors appointed local leaders, who delegated to a team of workers. Nobody got paid, so each person over-collected and took a cut as money went up the line. Tax collectors were feared and a bit unpopular.

They were particularly despised in Jewish territory. Jews believed God gave them the land, so Rome had no right to levy a tax. Jewish men who collected taxes from Jewish people were viewed as crooks and traitors.

Who in our society is despised for greed and aggressive tactics?

Tax collectors, insurance companies, “ambulance chasers,” marketers, etc.

3. Given the reputation of these two professions, what do you think

Jesus’ listeners were thinking after verse 10?

“Do tax collectors pray?” “If anybody prays, tax collectors need to...”

How do you think they responded to the Pharisees’ prayer?

He probably sounded arrogant, but he had good reason to be thankful.

What phrases from our prayers could sound like the Pharisee?

“We thank you for our great church. We thank you for saving us from our past sins. We thank you for the opportunity to serve in your kingdom...”

How could the Pharisee have mentioned some of the same topics without making praising himself?

What was wrong with the Pharisee’s prayer?

What helps you avoid selfish or self-centered prayers?

Praying for others, prayers of silence, praying the Psalms, focusing on God.

4. What was right about the tax collector’s prayer?

What does it mean to be “justified before God”?

How do you know that you are “justified before God”?

5. Which of these men would make a better dinner companion?

Why does religion make some hearts better and other hearts bitter?

6. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

What does this story teach about being poor in spirit?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

How does this story apply to your life this week?

III. Other resources

The point – Whether you are grateful or penitent, be sure God is the one getting all the praise!

Prayer ideas

This passage forms the basis of a tradition known as the “Jesus Prayer.” It involves repeating a simple phrase: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It can also be a “Breath Prayer” when you pray it along with your breaths.

The Way of the Pilgrim is a 19th-century Russian story telling of one who longed to learn how to “pray without ceasing,” as Paul instructed. He was taught the Jesus Prayer, and he began repeating it all through the day. In the end, he realizes he is praying constantly and his heart overflows with joy.

Give it a try with your group, maybe 10 times.

Inhale: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God...”

Exhale: “Have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Pray for God to guide the Lockes, our leaders and our congregation through the preacher transition.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Send the kids to the back room with an adult, then have them come in and act out this story.

What do you think was going on in the Pharisees’ heart?

What do you think was going on in the tax collector’s heart?

What can we learn from this story that helps us today?

Offer a prayer for humility.



April 22, 2007

LIFE Group Guide

Luke 18 – Poor in Spirit

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: **Humble your heart before God at all times.**

Jim Woodroof’s sermon relates to growing in humility – being poor in spirit. As a follow-on to that message, this guide will consider how two lives reflect this teaching of Jesus.

Please remind your group about the worship seminar with Keith Lancaster, April 28 (this Saturday) at 3. Also, Keith will be leading our worship next Sunday. The weekend will be an even greater blessing if you purchase the “Glorious God” CD from the College Hills bookstore.

Remember that groups get to meet again next week!!! It is a fifth Sunday – a great time to invite guests or do something special as a group.

Leadership tip: Always comment on the comment. Listen to the group’s responses and thank people for their answers. Respond to what they say and invite others to chime in. If the comment is difficult to affirm (goofy/ half-baked/ off topic), at least say “thanks, other thoughts...”

I. Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone’s spiritual pulse, and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Who was the most popular person at your school? Why?
- ❖ How many times have you been audited by the IRS?
- ❖ Get a copy of the “Glorious God” CD from the College Hills bookstore. Play track 3, *I Worship You, Almighty God*. What does that song say about God? What does it say about the spirit we should bring to worship?