

# Just Worship

From time to time, the gospel writers challenge our attitudes towards other people, as well as our deepest values. They jolt us to consider life from the viewpoint of God's compassionate openness. God's welcome is for all. We are encouraged to open our hearts in humility, and trust that we are accepted and loved for who we are.

## Focus Scripture: Luke 18:9–14

Through this parable Jesus not only teaches about prayer, but also about justice and worship. Chapter 18 begins with two parables that are found only in Luke. The parable of the unjust judge and the widow (verses 1–8) speaks to persistent prayer; the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (verses 9–14) speaks to issues of humility and prayer.

Luke 18:9 indicates Jesus' intended audience – the self-righteous ones who regard others with contempt. The audience also includes those within Luke's community who regard themselves too highly and disregard those who are considered "outcasts," like tax collectors.

Jesus teaches with a contrast in characters: a Pharisee and a tax collector. Jesus' audience would have appreciated the humour of what the Pharisee says he does not do. Furthermore, the depiction of a "remorseful" tax collector would have appeared as an oxymoron to Jesus' listeners and likely would have been received with either disbelief or humour.

Pharisees were an educated group, largely men who were not priests or rabbis, yet who zealously followed Torah in the midst of challenges from the Greek culture and the Roman occupation. The Pharisee's prayer was a common rabbinic form of thanksgiving, which included a reference to personal behaviour (Psalm 17:3–5). Still, this Pharisee's prayers seem boastful as he compares himself with others and puts emphasis on his own righteousness: "I... I... I..."

Tax collectors, on the other hand, were collaborators with the Roman occupiers. The Jews considered them traitors who worked for the enemy. They made their salaries by charging beyond the tax due to the Romans. Accordingly, the prayer of the tax collector echoes Psalm 51:1: "Have mercy on me, O God" and adds "a

sinner." Beating one's breast was a sign of remorse or grief, also shown by the crowd at the death of Jesus (Luke 23:48).

The standard posture for the prayer at that time was looking up to God with hands raised (1 Timothy 2:8). Because of the influence of this parable, however, some of Jesus' followers began to change to the posture displayed by the tax collector – a posture of contrition and remorse. This parable became instrumental in teaching the importance of humility before God both in words and bodily posture.

This passage concludes with a reference to justice, a recurring theme in Luke: "The proud are brought down, and the lowly are exalted" (Luke 1:52). In worship and in prayer, justice is important. All are welcomed in God's presence, whatever their stations in life.

Just as the parable holds important clues about what God values, so do the other readings. Encountering God's eternal ways prompts a faithful response born of gratitude and freedom. In joy and gladness, the prophet in **Joel 2:23–32** envisions a time of justice and God's saving activity. **Psalm 65** celebrates God as the gardener in creation who provides hope, forgiveness, and blessings in abundance. In **2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18**, Paul says a final good-bye, confident that through God's strength he has kept the faith for mission.

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God does not play favourites. All are welcome to worship God. All are fed at the banquet of joy. Who in your community seems to be longing for a place where they can know they are accepted? How might you extend such radical welcome and love in your community? What needs to happen in order for your community to be a stronger place of just worship?



October 24, 2010

## Focus Scripture

Luke 18:9–14

## Additional Scriptures

Joel 2:23–32

Psalm 65

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

*Seasons of the Spirit* is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

**Help us, O God, to open ourselves to the innermost depths, and know that you are with us in compassion and joy. May we discover our heart's deep longings and respond to others with the same love you show to us. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Given the range of ages in this group the children will have had little or a lot of experience with social groups and cliques. The older children may have known the pain of losing a best friend to a newcomer at school or in the neighbourhood. Being accepted is important at all ages, but in varying degrees when it comes to people outside the family. However, it is not likely that they have come up against a harsh attitude like that of the Pharisee in the story.

The children in your group may not know or use the word “humility,” but they recognize

it in action. They may call the child who lacks humility “bossy” or “a know-it-all.” With a little conversation, they will quickly get the idea of the difference in attitude between the Pharisee and the tax collector, even without knowing the technical differences between their acceptance and status in the community. Children often have a sense about people, especially adults, who look down on them.

Pray that the children in your group will always know themselves included in the church so that they can be welcoming to others.

October 24, 2010



### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Luke 18:9–14, and biblical background material (p. 59). Also read “The ‘Ins’ and ‘Outs’ of Language” (p. 108). With whom do you identify in this parable: the tax collector, the Pharisee, or someone listening to the story told by Jesus?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 8* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com).
- ❑ Bring songs “Let the People of God,” “Stand, O Stand Firm,” and “May Peace Be with You/Salumun Kullahee” (p. 2, 12, and 11 in *Music Section*; also on #27, #18, and #24 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth* for the Season after Pentecost, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*. Place *bookmark* at the beginning of Luke. Display *poster “Open Window”* so children can see it when seated.

#### Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story on *today’s resource sheet “The Story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.”*
- ❑ For puppet group, bring *today’s resource sheet “The Story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector,” paint stir sticks or wooden spoons, yarn, scraps of fabric, and ribbons.*
- ❑ For drama group, bring *copies of today’s resource sheet “Two Worshippers” and directions.*

#### Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *wire hangers, yarn or string, magazines, and card stock/heavy paper*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *songs “Trust Greatly” and “Fresh as the Morning” (pp. 1 and 8-9, Music Section; also #17 and #3 on Seasons Music CD)*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of today’s resource sheet “You Are Welcome” and sequins. Make a sample invitation.*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *poster “Wisdom’s Path,” paper footprints, and directions*
- ❑ **Game zone:** *jute or thick yarn, cut into 45 cm/18 in lengths. Bundle the lengths into groups of three. Secure one end of each bundle with a knot.*



# Just Worship

## Scripture

Luke 18:9–14

**FOCUS** To discover how God welcomes all worshippers.

## GATHER

**Welcome** the children and introduce guests or new children to the others. Play the song “Let the People of God” (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

### Opening ritual

**Call to learning** Light the Christ candle. Remind the group that its flame is a reminder of Jesus Christ’s presence with us. Invite the children to gaze at the poster *Open Window* and repeat each line of the call to learning after you:

This is the Season after Pentecost.  
During this season,  
we will learn from prophets  
and disciples,  
from the psalm writer  
and apostle Paul.  
The Bible will be like a window  
open to God’s ways  
and wisdom.

**Song** Play the song “Let the People of God” (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*). Encourage the children to sing with you. During the song, receive the offering.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Holy God, we gather to learn about you and how to follow Jesus. May our hearts and our minds be open to your teachings. Amen.

**Extinguish** the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

### Connecting with the focus

**Unique human beings game** Have the children stand in a circle facing out and separate from one another. Explain that you are going to tap someone on the shoulder and that person is to say “Good morning.” Everyone else tries to identify the person who spoke. Have the children close their eyes. After three or four times to identify voices, talk together about the ways we recognize people. Ask:

■ **How do you identify people? How do you tell people apart?**

Listen for such things as colour of hair or eyes, voices, the way we walk, haircuts, etc. Remind the children that God planned for each person to be unique, but each person is also special and loved by God. The story today is about two people who are very different.

## ENGAGE

### Preparing for the story

**Stories from Luke** Have a child get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Ask:

■ **In what book of the Bible is the story for today?**

Remind the children that the story for the last session was from Luke too. Invite them to tell you what they recall about it. Have a child turn to Luke 18. Point out that the story for today is right after the story Jesus told about the widow and the judge.

### The Bible story

**Two prayers** Tell the story on today’s resource sheet “The Story of the Pharisee and Tax Collector,” based on Luke 18:9–14. After the story, ask:

■ **What do you think the people who heard the story were thinking?**

### Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Puppet group** Making puppets will help the children see some differences between the two men and their situations. Provide paint stir sticks or

wooden spoons for the bodies of the puppets. With markers, draw faces at the top of the sticks or on the bowls of the spoons. Glue yarn hair and beards on the faces. To complete the puppets, add a bit of fabric, glued and tied at the waist with ribbon. Provide a variety of fabric for the children to select what they think each man would wear. Tell the story from today's resource sheet "The Story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" for the children to act it out with their puppets.

**Drama group** The play on today's resource sheet "Two Worshippers" will encourage the children in this group to explore the differences between the two men and the reactions of the listeners. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Two Worshippers" and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "Two Worshippers."
- 2 Decide who will read the parts of the narrator, the Pharisee, and the tax collector.
- 3 Act out the play.
- 4 Read about this story and talk about the questions in the box.



### The Bible story and us

**Play** the song "Stand, O Stand Firm" (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together. Invite the puppets group to show their puppets. Ask the drama group to present their play or to report on their answers to the questions in the box.

# 3

RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Mobile** Jesus' story reminds us that everyone is welcome to worship and pray to God. This mobile will be a visual reminder for the group about welcoming others. Provide magazines for the children to find pictures of people to welcome. Cut out the pictures and glue them to card stock or heavy paper. Tape a string to each one. Tie them at various lengths to the wire hanger. On a piece of card stock, print "God welcomes everyone." Tape it to the top of the hanger. Display the mobile in the learning area or elsewhere in the church building.

**If your group has many younger children, have pictures already cut out for them to glue to the paper.**

- **Music zone: God's love** Two songs that remind us of God's welcoming love are "Trust Greatly" and chorus of "Fresh as the Morning" (pp. 1 and 8-9, *Music Section*; also #17 and #3 on *Seasons Music CD*). The children may remember them from previous sessions. If not, both songs are short and they will learn them quickly. Each song can be sung over and over as a kind of mantra to reassure us of God's welcoming presence. Sing each song together several times. Conclude with a prayer of thanks for God's love.



- **Outreach zone: Invitations to worship** The children can participate in God's welcoming love by inviting people in their community to worship. Is there is a congregational committee that can distribute the invitations? If so, decide how many the children might make. This can be an ongoing activity for children who arrive early and who finish an activity early. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "You Are Welcome." Follow the directions on it. Show the children the sample you made earlier.

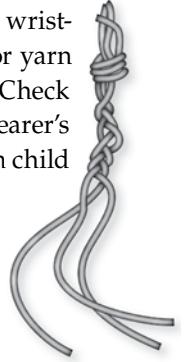


- ❑ **Quiet zone: Footprint prayer** The two in the story prayed for themselves, but we also pray for others, knowing that these prayers are important too. Trace around a shoe and make paper footprints. Display the poster *Wisdom's Path*. Provide paper footprints, markers and these directions:

- 1 God wants to hear our prayers. Sometimes we pray for ourselves and sometimes we pray for other people.
- 2 Think about what you want to pray.
- 3 Take some footprints and a marker. On each footprint, write one thing you want to pray about.
- 4 Take your footprints home as reminders to pray this week.



- ❑ **Cooperation zone: Bracelets** Jesus' story reminds us that we are all connected equally through God's love. Invite the children to make bracelets that require two people working together to make them. Distribute the prepared jute or heavy yarn. Show them how to braid the strands into a wristband. One person holds the jute or yarn while the other person braids. Check to see when it fits around the wearer's wrist and secure with a knot. Each child in the pair makes a bracelet.



**Gather** Play "Stand, O Stand Firm" (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle. Say:

The light of the candle reminds us that Jesus the Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be with us.

**Play** the song "May Peace Be with You" (p. 11, *Music Section*; also #24 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Invite the children to sing the parts they recognize.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, thank you for helping us discover more about you and your love. Amen.

**Blessing** To each child say, "(Child's name), go into the day assured that God's love is surrounding you and each person you meet."



How did the children hear this message of God's inclusive love? How might you see this message being played out in your multiage group?

How has Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector affirmed or challenged your idea of God and God's love?



# The Story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

based on Luke 18:9–14

As you say the words of each man, try to show their humility and pride by exaggerating the way they might have stood.

The people enjoyed hearing Jesus' stories, but Jesus also wanted them to learn from the stories. The stories always made the hearers think more deeply about God.

After Jesus told the story of the woman who would not give up, the persistent widow, Jesus told a story about two men who went to the temple to pray. Now in the back of his mind, Jesus wanted the people who thought they were more religious and better than others to learn from this story.

"On this day two men went to the temple in Jerusalem to pray to God. One man was a Jewish leader who knew all the laws of God. He belonged to a group called the Pharisees, all of whom knew all about the laws of God. The other man was a tax collector. He was Jewish too, but the tax collector made a living collecting taxes for the Roman government. Because he worked for the Romans, most

people didn't like him and refused to have anything to do with him.

"The Pharisee stood off by himself, but where others could clearly see that he was praying. He looked to heaven, raised his hands high in the air, and prayed, 'God, thank you that I am not like some people, those murderers, thieves, and the like, or even that tax collector over there. I follow your laws. I go without eating food twice a week. Instead, I pray to you. I give exactly the amount of money required by your law to people who are poor.'

"Meanwhile, in a corner where he could barely be seen, the tax collector stood all alone. But his head was not looking at heaven and his hands were not high in the air. He was hunched over as he prayed, 'God, I am a sinner. Show me your love.'"

Jesus paused so the people could imagine the two men praying in the temple. Everyone was quiet. Some were probably thinking what a good man the Pharisee was. Others might have been wondering why the tax collector was even in the temple.

Then Jesus said, "Listen, my friends, God listens to the prayers of everyone. No one is better before God."

Everyone was quiet because they were thinking about the two men in Jesus' story.



# TWO WORSHIPPERS

**Narrator:** Jesus told a story to the crowd. "Once there were two worshippers who lived in Jerusalem."

**Pharisee:** I am David.

**Tax Collector:** I am Matthew.

**Pharisee** I am a Pharisee and I believe that people can serve God best by following the Law of Moses closely. I have spent many years studying the Law, so that I know what it says. I love God and try hard to follow all the rules.

**Narrator:** *(Cue polite applause. David bows.)*

**Tax Collector:** I am a tax collector. I collect taxes for the Romans who have invaded our land. Being a tax collector wasn't something I wanted to do, but I have to earn a living don't I? I have to look after my family. The whole community regards me as a traitor for working with the Romans and they hate me for it.

**Narrator:** *(Cue boos and hisses. Matthew shrugs.)*

**Narrator:** One day both worshippers woke up.

**Pharisee and Tax Collector:** *(Yawn and stretch.)* Today I will go to the temple and worship God.

**Narrator:** *(Pause after each statement so players can mime actions.)* They washed their faces, brushed their hair, and carefully chose their very best clothes to wear. Then they ate their breakfasts and cleaned their teeth.

**Pharisee and Tax Collector:** Now I will go to the temple.

**Narrator:** *(Pause after each statement so players can mime actions.)* They waved goodbye to their families, went out of their front doors, walked to the temple mount, climbed the stairs to the temple, and went inside. They dropped money into the offering box for those who were poor. Then they followed the traditions of their people and carefully washed their hands and removed their shoes before going inside to worship. They came before God to pray. The Pharisee prayed first. He was careful to stand and pray just as he had been taught.

*(Pharisee moves to the front and lifts hands and head upwards. Tax Collector stays at the back, clasps hands to chest and looks down.)*

**Pharisee:** *(Emphasize word "I.")* I thank you God that I am a Pharisee and therefore I am not like other people. I am not greedy, or dishonest, and I am nothing like that worthless tax collector over there. I follow all the rules and I give you one tenth of my money. Thanks be to God.

**Narrator:** Then the tax collector spoke to God using the words of a psalm.

**Tax Collector:** Have mercy on me, O God, a sinner.

## Why did Jesus tell this parable?



Jesus told this parable to people who were very sure of their own goodness and put other people down. (Luke 18:9, paraphrased)

"I tell you," said Jesus, "it was the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, who went home set right with God. It doesn't matter to God how good you look on the outside. If you are honest about yourself and do not think you are better than anyone else, then you will be right with God." (Luke 18: 14, paraphrased)

## Something to talk about

- What would you say is the main point of Jesus' story?
- What would have been the biggest surprise to the people listening?



# You Are Welcome

## Instructions

- Cut out invitations and service cards.
- Fold invitation squares diagonally, so words show. Fold one corner to circle A. Fold the other to circle B.
- Fold top triangles down and tuck points between the flap pieces.
- Decorate with markers and sequins. Slide service cards inside.



You are welcome to meet with us for worship on

\_\_\_\_\_ (day)

at \_\_\_\_\_ (time)

We do hope you can join us.

print the name and address of your church here.

