

- **\*READ Luke 18:9-14\*** Jesus, being the master teacher that He was, always seemed to have had a purpose for what He said what He said and did what He did. For instance, these verses that we just read together begin with a clear indication as to why Jesus told this parable to those people who were listening. *"And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt."* (Luke 18:9) Jesus's parable is pretty cut and dry as far as what He is wanting us to take away. The first man in the story, a Pharisee, is an arrogant self-righteous man who thought he was hot stuff. He even goes so far as to look down upon the second man who is a tax collector. This tax collector is the polar opposite of the Pharisee in that he is extremely humble and simply begs God that his prayer might be heard. The lesson: Be like this tax collector and not the Pharisee. Again, pretty cut and dry.
- However, I think there are some secondary applications that we can take away from this parable that would benefit us greatly in our prayer habits. While it might not have been Jesus's primary reason for sharing this parable, I believe we can conclude what is an appropriate mindset that ought to be had as we pray to God on a daily basis. For the purposes of this lesson, I have entitled this mindset as a proper prayerful mindset. I think we see some attitudes in this Pharisee that we ought to give great effort to avoid in our prayers, and then there are some strong lessons that we can learn from the tax collector that will help us in having a proper mindset towards God in our prayers. Let's begin with the Pharisee by drawing two conclusions as to what a prayerful mindset must not include.

### **I. A Prayerful Mindset cannot include attitudes of:**

#### **A. pride and arrogance.**

1. While Jesus's point in telling this parable is for people to understand the general point that we ought not be self-righteous, prideful and arrogant, I believe it a good thing to consider why we should give just as much effort to make sure that we don't have these mindsets in our prayers. This seems to be a logical conclusion considering that this man is said to have been praying in such a way that his self-righteousness was made clearly evident. We might not say these exact same things about ourselves to God, so the question then becomes...how could this prideful arrogance be seen in our prayers?
2. A prideful and arrogant mindset could be seen in us simply being inconsistent in our prayers. If pride is seen in thinking we are great and have it all figured out then the opposite would be us humbling ourselves before God recognizing how badly we need Him in our lives. What do the humble do? I would suggest that the humble, those who see themselves as being ever in need of God's presence in their lives will be very habitual and constant in their prayers. Maybe we are inconsistent in our prayers because we simply don't see ourselves as being always in need of God's presence.
3. We might not literally pat ourselves on the back in our prayers and speak poorly of others, but it could be that we only find ourselves going to God in the most dire of situations when we see no other direction to go and we realize that we really don't have it all figured out. It might not seem like it in the moment, but we are treating God as if He is only a final lifeline that we reach out to when figure out that we actually don't have all the control we thought we had. That isn't truly devotion to God...that is someone who wants a deliverer to fly in and save the day when we see a need.

#### **B. a sense of entitlement.**

1. Additionally, how is it that we approach God when we go to Him in those situations? Aren't we usually going to God and pleading our case to get whatever it is that we are needing at the time? Don't we try to make ourselves look faithful in the eyes of God in an effort to motivate Him to intervene on our behalf? We might not see it in this parable, but it sets up as if this might be exactly what this Pharisee was trying to do.

2. *"God, I thank you that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get."* (Luke 18:11,12) I don't know about you, but this seems like an awfully strange prayer to just end like that. Could it be that this was just the lead in to this man making his request for what he desired to gain from God. *"Lord, look at everything that I am...I deserve to have all of your riches blessings to be showered upon me in this life."* I can see this as being the logical conclusion of this man's prayer, and maybe you can see the same. Maybe we can easily imagine this because it might be that this has been our mindset in our prayers in past times. If we have found ourselves in this place, then I hope that these considerations will help for us to turn from this type of mindset and be more like what God expects for a prayerful mindset to be.

## II. A Prayerful Mindset is:

### A. not defined by posturer or delivery, but by the contents of the heart.

1. When we look at the different between the two men of this parable, the first thing that is stated by Jesus concerning these two men is their posture. The Pharisee is said to be standing while praying to himself, and the tax collector is said to be standing some distance from him but he was unwilling to lift his eyes up towards heaven. He probably looked what we often look when we pray with our heads bowed and eyes closed. Is this simple difference in the posture the main difference between these two men? I would say that is not the case.
2. In fact, we can look throughout the Bible and find people who prayed with many different postures.
  - a) **Bowing:** Many times in the Old Testament we can find people bowing down before God in prayer and worship. This bowing could be done simply with the head or the entire body. It was seen as a symbol of allegiance to the one being bowed before. Moses did this before God on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 34:8**) and David did the same. (**Psalm 5:7**)
  - b) **Kneeling:** The most notable example of prayer by kneeling might be that of Daniel from **Daniel 6:10** who, despite knowing that the king had signed a decree to punish those who prayed to anyone other than the king, continued to kneel in prayer facing Jerusalem three times a day.
  - c) **Lying Prostrate:** Those most extreme examples of bowing all the way to the ground before God could be seen in **Nehemiah 8:6** as Ezra and the people *"bowed low worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."* Jesus also falls on His face and prayed to God in the garden of Gethsemane. (**Matthew 26:39**)
  - d) **Lifted Hands:** While we most often fold our hands in prayer, the lifting of hands is actually the more historical position that worshippers of God prayed in and this can be seen throughout the Bible. **Psalm 141:2** shows David speaking to God of *"The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."* Paul writes in **I Timothy 2:8**, *"Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, living up holy hands without wrath or dissension."*
  - e) **Lifted Eyes:** Again, our practice is to close our eyes in prayer to avoid distractions that might be around us, but in the Bible we often see individuals lifting their eyes towards heaven in prayer. Two times in His ministry we can find Jesus lifting His eyes towards heaven when He prayed. Once was when He prayed outside of Lazarus's tomb (**John 11:41**) and another was when He blessed the food prior to feeding the five thousand. (**Luke 9:16**)
  - f) **Silence:** The Pharisee in this parable is said to have been standing and speaking to himself in prayer. This isn't the first time we have seen such a thing done. Hannah in **I Samuel 1:13** is described as *"speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard."*
  - g) **Crying Out:** Asaph wrote in **Psalm 77:1**, *"My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; my voice rise to God, and He will hear me."* We might speak to ourselves in prayer, we might speak out loud so that others might hear us, and then there are times where we might lift our voices in a loud voice to God. Jesus did this while on the earth as is seen in **Hebrews 5:7**, *"He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears..."*

3. We see all of these different postures and deliveries throughout the Bible, and yet what is seen as the end of **Hebrews 5:7** seems to be what ties them all together. *"He was heard because of His piety."* All of these different people weren't heard by God because they were loud or silent. They weren't heard because some stood and others knelt. They were heard because they were not just offering up words, but they were offering up their hearts before God. Jesus was heard by His Father because of His heart of reverence and respect towards God. This is what is demanded of a person who wishes to have a proper prayerful mindset. No matter what position or voice we lift up, we must do so with respect for God through our humility.

**B. a mindset that recognizes our unworthiness to approach God.**

1. This type of mindset of a feeling of unworthiness is clearly seen in the heart of the tax collector in **Luke 18**. This was the reason that this man wasn't able to lift his eyes up towards God. The man felt unworthy to even do such a thing. Instead we see him *"beating his breast, saying 'God be merciful to me, the sinner.'"* This is exactly the type of mindset that we ought to have when we are approaching God in prayer. We must recognize it for the privilege that it is.
2. It is truly a privilege to be able to approach a perfect and holy God who created us and everything around us while being people who ourselves are much less than perfect. This should be our mindset in every prayer, but even more so when we go to God confessing our sins. We must never approach those prayers as if God owes us even a single ear to listen or an ounce of grace to give.
3. It is at those moments that we should remind ourselves all the more of the blessing of prayer that we have through being adopted by God as sons and daughters through Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross. (**Ephesians 1:5**) It is in those moments that we must remember that we only have Jesus as an advocate to God the Father because of what He did for us. (**I John 2:1,2**) Nothing we are able to do is a result of how great we are, but it is fully because of what has been for us through God and His Son.

**C. a mindset where requests are made, but God's will is relied upon.**

1. This mindset of unworthiness should also be seen practically in how we make requests before God. Our prayers are not only opportunity to lift up our voice and hears in praise to God for everything He is and everything He has done for us, but it is also an opportunity to make requests of God for things we feel like we need in this life. This is readily seen in **James 1:5-7**. *"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will relieve anything from the Lord."*
2. There are a couple of things that I would like to not from this text. Firstly, let's notice that James is inviting children of God to make requests of God. If there is something that we believe would truly help us in our faiths then we can ask those things of God. He reminds us that God is so generous to us. But secondly, we must be a people who actually believe that God will us these things. We must believe that God has the power to supply us with our needs, but at the same time we must not approach God as if He is required to give us just anything that we ask for. It very well might be that we believe something would be good for us, but God knows that this just simply isn't the case. Maybe in your own lives you can look back at instances where you prayed really hard for something but it didn't happen and looking back now you see that it as truly for the best. Our mindset should be like that of Jesus, *"yet not as I will, but as You will."* (**Matthew 26:39**)

The parables of Jesus give us innumerable opportunities to draw applications in a wide range of areas. While Jesus wanted to teach primarily about self-righteousness, this parable about two prayers does what we would expect and teaches us a little something about how we ought to pray to God. May these examples of the Pharisee and tax collector remind us and encourage us to always seek to have the proper prayerful mindset when we go to the Lord in prayer.