

# GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 16, 2015



# Discussion Guide

## Humility and Holiness

### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Is it possible to be a proud Christian? Could you explain?

### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Luke 18.9-14 out loud, slowly. Seek to imagine the scene unfolding as if you were present.
- In what ways does pride surface within the text? In what ways does humility surface?
- What are the outcomes of these two attitudes? Seek to find as many as possible.
- What forms does pride take in the Church today?
- On Sunday, it was stated that pride is the modern day prerequisite to being a “good” Christian. Would you agree or disagree with this statement? Could you elaborate?
- On Sunday, it was stated that humility is the true path to holiness. How do you understand this to work?

- What might true humility look like in the Church today? What, if anything, keeps us from practicing this type of humility?
- Conclude your time as a group confessing your heart’s desire to be great and the various pride-oriented paths you have followed to achieve this greatness within the context of the Church and the Christian faith journey. Ask for forgiveness and God’s grace to have a humble heart.

## Context and Background

### *Righteousness*

The term “righteousness” refers to things which are in keeping with law or the accepted norm. In the case of Scripture, something is righteous if it is in keeping with God’s law and his accepted norms. When something is made righteous or “justified” it is brought into line with God’s law and his accepted norms.

In Scripture, God is revealed as the source of righteousness because he acts and judges rightly (Genesis 18.25; Deuteronomy 32.4; Psalm 11.7; Daniel 9.14). In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the one who is truly righteous; that is, he lived a life in keeping with God’s law, and Jesus’ ministry is one which is bringing about a kingdom in which righteousness is the norm (Matthew 5.10; 6.33; 13.43; Romans 14.17). Such righteousness consists of right behavior, the typical focus of the Gospels, but is only possible insofar as God has granted righteousness to a person through the work of Christ (Romans 3.22; 5.1; 18).

## The Text

### **Luke 18.9-14: A story of two prayers**

The setting of Jesus’ parable about two prayers is that of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51). As Jesus neared Jerusalem, he paused and spent time with people, often using these times to teach. Jesus has just spoken a parable about prayer to his audience (Luke 18.1-8), but his next parable, though dealing with prayer on the surface, shifts the topic of discussion to who is truly part of God’s Kingdom movement (Luke 18.14, 16-17, 18).

Luke notes that Jesus speaks this parable to some within his audience who are confident of their own righteousness; that is, they believe they are in good standing with God. More than likely, Jesus has certain Pharisees in mind, though not all of them. What Jesus wishes to address is the pride present within the hearts of these people. They view everyone else with contempt. Simply put, because they believe they are in good standing with God, these people believe they are better than everyone else. This is an attitude of pride, which is the pleasure and pursuit of having more than the next guy.

Jesus speaks a parable about two prayers offered in the Temple, one by a Pharisee and the other by a tax collector. He begins by noting that two men went up to the Temple to pray. The typical times of prayer were 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Since the prayers offered are not traditional Jewish prayers, these men are most likely at the Temple for their own time of private prayer. The way Jesus sets up the parable indicates that he intends to contrast these two prayers.

The first prayer, by the Pharisee, is offered in the typical manner. The proper Jewish position for prayer was standing, arms crossed with one's face turned downward. It is important to note that the Pharisee has taken it upon himself to stand apart from all other people. This is most likely due to the Pharisees' desire to be holy and the belief that even the slightest touch of the clothing of a person not interested in pursuing holiness would defile them (Leviticus 15.4, 9, 20, 23; m. Hagigah 2.7). Jewish prayers were traditionally spoken out loud, though quietly, much as Hannah did (1 Samuel 1.13). The Pharisee's prayer begins with a thanksgiving, but this thanksgiving concerns the greatness of the Pharisee and not God. He is not like (think above!) any other person. He is especially not like morally degenerate people like robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or the tax collector praying in the corner! The tax collector here is not singled out as someone more reprobate but as a living example of one of whom the Pharisee is better. The Pharisee then reminds God that his life demonstrates he is better than all other people because he goes above and beyond the basic requirements of the Law. Even though the Mosaic Law only required fasting on the Day of Atonement, he fasts twice a week.

Although the Law required tithing on all a person produced (Leviticus 27.30-32; Numbers 18.21-24; Deuteronomy 14.22-27), this man tithed on all he obtained; that is, he tithed on all he purchased, even though its previous owner has presumably already tithed upon it! This man clearly engages in serious religious activity. However, his heart is filled with pride because he believes his religious activity sets him apart from others as one more pleasing in God's sight.

The second prayer, by a tax collector, is likewise offered in a typical manner, but the content is much different. The tax collector, too, stands at a great distance, but from God, not people. One might imagine him in the outermost court of the Gentiles. He refuses to look toward God. (Did the Pharisee look upwards contrary to tradition?) He beats his breast. This behavior is not unheard of in Jewish prayer but it is not common. The significance is typically one of deep anguish over sin as the heart was viewed as the seat of sin and by striking at the breast one was striking at the heart, seeking to "conquer" it. Rather than speaking with confidence, this tax collector simply acknowledges who he is in God's sight and asks for mercy. One can assume the behavior of the tax collector to be despicable, therefore it is not illustrated. However, this man's heart is humble as he views himself as above no one.

When one compares the two prayers, one would think that the prayer of the Pharisee would be better than that of the tax collector. Surely, God would hear the prayer of the first man because he engaged in such wonderful behaviors. Jesus turns the tables and claims that only the prayer of the tax collector was effective, resulting in the justification (salvation!) of the tax collector, not the Pharisee. It is the tax collector and not the Pharisee who ends up in good standing with God. Jesus' point is clear, though surprising. What makes one right with God is not actions of merit but the state of one's heart. A humble heart makes one right with God.

## Real life with Blake:

What makes God like you? I know. It sounds ridiculous, at first, but deep down we really want to know. I know I do. I want God to like me. I want him to love me. I want to be his treasured possession. So what does it take? I don't know if anyone ever said this outright, but I certainly picked up that what tickles God's fancy is what we do. In our churches, we celebrate people who do all the right things. We honor people who have achieved much. We lift up people who have labored to know it all. So we get the idea that we need to engage in activities which lead us to achieve, to do, to know. The problem is that we are never really sure when we have done or achieved or learned enough. So, we start comparing ourselves to others. I look at you and say, "I do more than you, so I must be OK." Sounds good, but this kind of comparison is rooted in pride. Because this kind of comparison is rooted in pride, we have gradually come to the place where pride is something of a prerequisite to being a good Christian, but pride has no place within the heart of a Christian. Pride is incompatible with our faith because our pride makes us immune to grace and incapable of love. We look down on others who are not as good as we, and we engage in breathless activity seeking to be "good enough." What would happen if we simply said, "God loves me not because of what I do but because of who he is"? What could happen if we stopped trying to know and do and achieve to be somebodies and simply allowed God to make us into the people he means for us to be? For a start, we might discover that humility would replace our pride, and with that humility, grace and love would flow in ways we never thought possible.

## Real life with you:

We all want to be great. Everybody wants to be somebody even in the Church. But what does it take to be a somebody within the Church? The common theory is that in order to be great you have to have all the "right" answers, engage in all the "right" behaviors, and at a minimum only engage with the "right" people. Sounds "right" but it isn't. This kind of approach to greatness rests upon a spirit of pride. It sets us up to set ourselves up as better than others and good enough for God. Nothing good can come of this kind of faith. Pride utterly corrupts this approach to faith, making it something other than faith. So how do you become great, a somebody in the Church? Humility is the only sure path. Humility leaves no room for thinking you have all the "right" answers. It gives no comfort in doing all the "right" things and hanging out with the "right" people. Humility understands that in God's sight, none of us is "right" and it casts itself upon God's mercy and extends loving acceptance to others who too are in need of God's mercy. Greatness isn't found in the person who has achieved much. It is found in the one of whom we know little but in whom God has done much. In what ways are you seeking to measure greatness? Have you set yourself up as one who knows or does more? We encourage you to spend time with God this week and allow him to show you any aspects of pride which might be within your heart. Confess these to him and ask that he create in you a humble heart.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

 [twitter.com/blake\\_shipp](https://twitter.com/blake_shipp)

©2015 Union Center Christian Church