

## ***Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor***

**March 16, 2025**

**Title: From Pride to Humility**

**Texts: Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 5:5**

Sometimes when we begin a study of a biblical text, we wonder if there is some hidden meaning. We ponder, “What is the context in which this text appears?” We ask, “What is the implication for how I live my life?” We dig to find a deeper level of meaning.

Not so for this week’s focal text. Our Lord is clear and pointed in telling this story. The point of the parable is transparent. When I read this text, I have no hiding place. Ego and self-pride stand in the way of my justification. It is when I acknowledge my sin that God has room to save me.

When we humble ourselves and admit our sin, we are exalted (Luke 18:14). The New Testament word for exalted is *hupsōs*. The roots for that word are Greek words meaning high elevation, above and beyond, height, altitude. An honest admission that we need God’s mercy is the key to receiving that forgiving mercy.

In this story, the Pharisee has a pretty good track record for doing good things: fasting and tithing (v. 12). Wouldn’t you think that would make God happy? The Pharisee had lived a life that separated him from crooks and cheaters (v. 11). Wouldn’t you think that would make God happy?

The problem was not that the Pharisee did good things; the problem was that he thought such behavior was his ticket into God’s favor. The only ticket into God’s favor is the grace of God.

Notice that the man who was justified simply went back home (v. 14). He went to where he did his daily chores, where he worked on family relationships, where life went on in ordinary ways. He had no badge that said, “One of God’s favorites.” He was made right by God’s grace and now went back to the places where he had, by his own admission, lived a life of sin, of brokenness.

Wouldn’t you like to know how things went for this man once he got back home? I have to ask myself: “What do I do with a new beginning that God gives me?”

**What Someone Else Has Said:** C. S. Lewis (*Mere Christianity*, Harper One) wrote: “The Christian does not think that God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayers begin: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner...”

F. Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in *Adult Bible Studies* for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.