

## TOUGH PARABLES

### Wrestling With Jesus' Challenging Stories

#### Week 3: The Two Prayers

**Main Point: Jesus wants us to be real with Him: in our prayers and in our lives.**

**Main Scripture: [Luke 18:9-14](#)**

### THE WHAT

#### ME

Share about a funny moment where you felt awkward in prayer and/or show this awkward prayer video: [youtube.com/watch?v=wuMvKwmMv5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuMvKwmMv5Q) (or find a video on the theme of awkward prayers). You will need an Internet connection and a computer or tablet to display the video for your students.

#### WE

Ask:

- What was the most awkward part of that video, and why?
- Why would someone pray the way Pastor Dave prayed in this video?
- What's it like to experience or witness this in real life?

#### TRANSITION

Awkward! While praying for and with someone is an incredible way to be a friend, Pastor Dave's approach just made things awkward and uncomfortable for Joseph. Like many people, Pastor Dave wanted to be seen as super-religious. He used all the spiritual words, drew a crowd, and sought admiration for his "spiritualness." But Jesus wants us to be genuine and authentic—that's the kind of prayer he desires and rewards.

### SO WHAT

#### GOD

Read [Luke 18:9-14](#) together.

This parable reveals a lot about prayer—how prayer has everything to do with the heart. Let's take a few minutes to explore the differences between the Pharisee's prayer and the tax collector's prayer.

#### 1. The Pharisee's prayer was weak.

We all compare ourselves with others—it's a tough habit to break. When we make good, healthy, Jesus-honoring choices, we can feel good about those choices—when our choices are a direct result of Jesus' work in us. In this parable, the Pharisee wasn't relying on God. Self-righteousness grows when we depend more on following the rules than depending on Jesus and the sacrifice he made for us on the cross. In other words, the Pharisee's prayer was EXTRA and we don't need to try to hold ourselves to the same standards because Jesus isn't looking for extra prayers.

#### 2. The tax collector's prayer was powerful.

The tax collector was deeply humble. He had nothing to bring to God but himself. He was a sinner with no righteous accomplishments. He needed God. He needed God's forgiveness and mercy. God honored the tax collector's genuine prayer. Jesus wants us to be real and authentic and honest when we pray. He wants to experience life right along with us—both the good and the bad.

### **3. Jesus wants us to be real with Him: in our prayers and in our lives.**

You decided how you pray. Jesus often said things that directly challenged the common thinking and religious teachings of his time. This was one of those times: “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Just like Jesus switched things up in society, you can switch things up in your own life. I used to be SO embarrassed to pray in front of others. I thought I had to use really big, strange words like “God, thank you for this bountiful meal” or something like that. But as I grew in my faith, and as I read this parable, I realize I don’t have to have things all fancy and together to pray to God - I can just be myself within - even when myself is a mess.

#### **GOSPEL MOMENT**

In fact, once I realized that I thought - of course! Because isn’t Jesus just gracious to us like that? We didn’t earn our salvation by being perfect and always having things together - we are saved by His grace - a gift freely given to us when we chose to believe and give our hearts to God. Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sins, even while we were still sinners.

#### **TRANSITION**

Jesus isn’t looking for us to act like we are perfect, He knows the real us and He loves the real us. Jesus wants us to be real with Him - in our prayers and in our lives.

### **NOW WHAT?**

#### **YOU**

Idk about you, but I’m real encouraged that Jesus isn’t asking for my prayers to be fancy - He just wants me to be real. That takes a LOT of pressure off! And I love that Jesus says He wants us to pray and talk to Him. Prayer is a conversation - one we can have at any time with God.

#### **WE**

Instead of just talking about prayer, let’s take some time together to PRAY! This will be a time of silent prayer—just you and Jesus. Remember what we discussed about being real with Jesus, reflecting the attitude displayed by the tax collector. Jesus knows what decisions you’ve made, what’s going well in your life, and what’s going poorly. Talk with him about anything that’s going on. Encourage students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection.  
PRO TIP: Pick a worship song to play quietly in the background, and let students know when the song is over you’ll close all together in prayer.

#### **PRAY**

Closing prayer [after a few minutes of silent prayer]: Jesus, thank you for loving the real us. Help us to remember we can always be real with you, and that you desire us to pray to you - we don’t need big words or to make a show for others - but we can just open our hearts and be real with you. Thank you for loving us so much! Please be with everyone this week and may everyone feel your love for them as they go through their lives this week. We love you and praise you. Amen.