

## Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

### Week beginning Sunday 27 October 2019 Realistic view of yourself

Pray Praise God that we are accepted not on the basis of our “goodness” or effort but freely by grace, through the love and self-giving of Jesus Christ. Ask God for the grace to think realistically about yourself – not thinking too highly of yourself but not making out that you are useless either. Ask that the Christian community as a whole might neither boast nor run themselves down, but be grateful for the forgiveness and acceptance offered in Jesus – and treat others accordingly.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Luke 18: 9-17.

Background There was a lot of emphasis on adhering not only to the requirements of the law but also to all the minute detail of the religious authorities’ interpretations. While originally designed to foster closer obedience to God, in practice the onerous conditions tended to distance ordinary people from God. Those who were strict in adhering to the demands were prone to regard themselves as set apart and closer to God. In the story, the Pharisee thinks very highly of himself (at least in comparison) whereas the tax collector (regarded as of dubious character too closely aligned to money and the occupying forces) struggled to see himself as being able to draw near to God. Jesus is clear that the latter man was the one who went home forgiven.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Pride comes before a fall. And maybe religious pride is likely to lead to a very big fall! What is your first reaction to the two men’s different approaches to God in prayer? How did the first man view himself? And the second? And what do you think they imagined God’s response to them might be? Jesus comments suggest that God’s response was very different. Comment.
2. Without being too hard on the two men (because let’s face it, both of them prayed and so many people don’t these days what can we learn about prayer from the two different approaches? Where does humility figure in our prayers? How do we avoid trying to impress others or even God? You could argue that the second man’s honesty sits much better with prayer. Are we honest enough in our prayers? God knows everything anyway – how might we change the way we pray?
3. People say prayer is never wasted – it was good that the first man prayed but what needed to change? Was it more in him than in his prayer? So what might need to change in us?
4. Prayer is more about relationship than anything else. What can we learn about improving our relationship with God through prayer (from this passage)? Must it be what we each individually need to learn or how might we be able to assist one another to see prayer (and practice praying) in a way that sits comfortably with what God intends?
5. There might be some “error” in the second man’s prayer in that he does run himself down rather a lot. Though of course we ought to err on that side than the other! However, in Jesus we can be on firmer ground. How does this story help us (in Jesus) to take a realistic view of ourselves neither boasting, nor running ourselves down? How might that make prayer more meaningful, our service more effective and our view of others healthier?
6. Feel free to explore any topics from the passage/theme even if they weren’t raised on Sunday.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of prayer. Thank you that even our most hesitant and wayward efforts are something that you can use for your kingdom. Help us to deal with pride and esp religious pride, Help us to accept the goodness and grace you have for us in Jesus and never to think of ourselves as being beyond the pale. Help us to keep praying and to be open to a closer relationship with your Son so that whatever our words our hearts and our deeds are aligned with your plans for us and for the world. Amen.