

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – Season after Pentecost, Proper 25
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

In the final 6 weeks of this Lectionary Year C, a firm and hopeful tone soars in Jesus' teachings in a rich symphony of themes. The background music of the Hebrew Scriptures holds the notes of the new covenant — a law written in our hearts rather than codified in legal structures — The Spirit poured out, a vision for the appointed time, God with us, a new heaven and a new earth, and a branch from the tree of David — the remnant gathered. We can believe that Jesus heard this cosmic music as he distilled his huge message to the disciples.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

The promise echoing through the centuries, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh," rings in Jesus' ears as he tells the disciples a story about the risk in assuming we "have it right."

Theme: Aligning our Hearts with our Behavior

Beginning: Invite the group to think about a person whom they know that is humble. What words would you use to describe that person?

The Scripture: Luke 18: 9-14 Invite someone to read the passage for today. After reading the passage, sit in a few moments of quiet before starting the discussion.

Questions:

- I wonder what stood out for you in this passage today?
- What might have caused this overconfidence in the Pharisee? (They had high positions in their society; they knew what the rules were and how to follow them. They put 'getting it right' over noticing the needs of others.)
- What might have happened to the tax collector to make him so aware of what he had done wrong? (Perhaps he had heard Jesus speak; perhaps he noticed how hard it was for the people after he took their money.)
- The Pharisee, mired in his assuredness, repeats his rigid pattern. The tax collector, perhaps noticing the consequences of his cheating ways had opened his heart to Jesus' message. Most of us have a bit of both in us. How do we balance these two?
- I wonder what it looks like, sounds like, feels like to be humble?
- I wonder what this story might look like today?

Discussion Option: The line is sometimes not clear between noticing a job you have done well and becoming conceited. I wonder how we can be alert to this distinction in ourselves. The line between honest self-disclosure to God and maudlin staying stuck in the sin can be confusing. Discuss ways we can watch out for this in ourselves.

Getting Closure: Invite the group to reflect on these two statements: 1) I see the Pharisee in myself, and I wince. 2) I see the tax collector in myself, and I long to comfort that person.

Allow a moment or two for reflection. Then, together, discuss ways to heal both of these "persons" in ourselves.

Closing prayer: Collect For Vocation in Daily Work (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 261)

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Luke 18:9-14

9 Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income."¹³ But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

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