

Unit II: Grace and Reconciliation

A Time to Be Bold; a Time to Be Humble

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 141

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 18:23-33; Exodus 32:31-32;
Nehemiah 1:4-11; Daniel 6:10; Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:1-14; John 17:1-26;
1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 John 5:14-15

PRINT PASSAGES: Genesis 18:25-27, 30-32; Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 5:14-15

KEY VERSE

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.
(Luke 18:14, KJV)

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“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- **Contrast boldness in prayer (e.g., Genesis 18 or 1 John) with humility in prayer (e.g., the tax collector in Luke).**
- **Pray with the confidence that God hears your prayers.**
- **Boldly share the Gospel while staying humble in your community.**

*Key Terms

Be Merciful (Luke 18:13)—Greek: *hilaskomai* (hil-as'-kom-ahee): to be propitious; make propitiation for; appease; “have mercy on” (NIV).

Confidence (1 John 5:14)—Greek: *parrésia* (par-rhay-see'-ah): boldness in speech; openness; boldness; cheerful courage.

Hear(s) (1 John 5:15)—Greek: *akouó* (ak-oo'-o): listen(s); understand(s); come(s) to the ears.



The Biblical Context

The Genesis 18 account of Abraham's confident intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah—trusting God to spare these cities for a minimum number of righteous people—and the tax collector's humble plea for mercy in Luke 18 are strong lessons on the importance of exhibiting confident humility when approaching God. Following their examples helps us guard against the sin of pride, a trait of human nature that God detests. The context and setting of Genesis 18:25-27 occur within the broader narrative of Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah, which appears in Genesis 18:16-33. The immediate context of Luke 18:9-14 is Jesus' teaching ministry, where He addresses self-righteousness and humility in prayer. This parable is part of Jesus' more extensive teachings on humility, faith, and the kingdom of God. Abraham and the tax collector demonstrated a lack of self-righteousness and deep humility. Abraham's humility and unworthiness are evident in how he approached God, without arrogance or entitlement, while openly acknowledging his lowly position before Him, just as the tax collector did (Genesis 18:27; Luke 18:13). Yet, humility and confidence in God coexisted in both men's lives because of their relationship with Him. Abraham's confidence stemmed from years of communing with God, which allowed him to build and maintain an intimate, obedient relationship with Him. Likewise, the tax collector's confidence in God is revealed in his heartfelt plea for mercy, trusting that only God could grant him what he did not deserve.

Humble (Luke 18:14)—Greek: *tapeinoó* (tap-ino'-o): to make or bring low; abase; figuratively, to humiliate (in condition or heart); "humbleth" (KJV).

Pray (Luke 18:10)—Greek: *proseuchomai* (pros-yoo'-khom-ahee): supplicate; communicate with God.

Speak (Genesis 18:27)—Hebrew: *dabar* (daw-bar'): to declare, converse; command; promise; warn; commune.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

William R. Newell wrote one of the church's powerful hymns, beginning with the line, "Years I spent in vanity and pride, caring not my Lord was crucified."

The key words here are *vanity*, meaning thinking too highly of oneself, and *pride*, which is being overly focused on your own importance. As the verse suggests, pride and self-importance often lead people to ignore or reject God and His grace, taking credit for things that only belong to Him. Pride is the opposite of humility, and it displeases God. Scripture teaches that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (see Proverbs 8:13; 16:5, 18; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

At its core, pride is like worshipping yourself—putting yourself in God's place. But God

clearly tells His people not to do this (see Exodus 20:3; Luke 4:8). The problem is that pride blinds people. They either think they don't need God or believe He should accept them just as they are, without true repentance. This leads to spiritual destruction and separation from God.

That's why the best decision is to let go of pride, recognize God's authority, humble ourselves, and rely on Him. When we do, we open the way for God's healing, favor, and acceptance. A

great example of this kind of humility is the tax collector in Jesus' parable in Luke 18—told to people who were confident in their own righteousness.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Confident Boldness in Prayer

(Genesis 18:25-27, 30-32; 1 John 5:14-15)

KJV

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

26 And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes:

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30 And he said unto him, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

31 And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

32 And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

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14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

NIV

25 "Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26 The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, . . ."

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30 Then he said, “May the LORD not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?” He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

31 Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the LORD, what if only twenty can be found there?” He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

32 Then he said, “May the LORD not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?” He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

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14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Genesis 18 records events that occurred sometime after the Lord renewed His covenant relationship with Abraham in chapter 17. In this chapter, the Lord appeared to Abraham accompanied by two angels in human form—a theophany. During this visit, God revealed His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their grievous sins (see Genesis 18:20-21), doing so in light of His covenant relationship with Abraham. In response, Abraham began a bold intercessory dialogue with the Lord. Appealing to their shared relationship, he challenged the idea of the righteous perishing alongside the wicked, asserting that such an action would not reflect God’s character (Genesis 18:25). While acknowledging God’s sovereign moral authority and justice, Abraham humbly confessed his insignificance and unworthiness (Genesis 18:27). Yet he persisted, confidently asking God to spare the cities if a specific number of righteous people could be found among them (Genesis 18:30).

Abraham’s appeal reflects not self-righteousness but humility, reverence, and trust in God’s mercy and justice. His prayer is bold and selfless, springing from the intimacy of his relationship with God. He models how faithful believers can intercede for others: through prayer that is confident, humble, and bold yet submitted to God’s will. Because Abraham communed with and understood God’s character, he recognized that his request aligned with God’s nature and will. This echoes the assurance found in 1 John 5:14-15, where John affirms that our confidence in prayer is grounded in an intimate, obedient relationship with God and a commitment to pray according to His will.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does Abraham demonstrate how we can balance boldness and reverence for God’s holiness in our prayers?

Confident Humility in Prayer (Luke 18:9-14)

KJV

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.
14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

NIV

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:
10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
11 “The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.
12 “I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’
13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’
14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 18 opens with Jesus’ telling two parables about prayer—the first deals with persistence, and the second concerns how God’s people should pray. Jesus directed the second one, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, to those in His audience caught up in self-righteousness and viewing others with contempt (verse 9). The most likely but unnamed groups present were Pharisees and scribes who followed Jesus only to find something to discredit Him and His ministry. Ironically, Jesus identifies one of the significant characters in this parable as a Pharisee and the other a despised tax collector. Jesus begins this parable with the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the Temple (verse 10). The emphasis is on their contrasting attitudes in approaching God in prayer. The Pharisee stood at a distance and began his prayer thanking God by comparing himself to those he assumed he was more righteous than: extortioners, the unjust, adulterers, and the tax collector he observed in the Temple (verse 11). He continued by listing his virtues that exceed the Law’s expectations and warrant recognition from God (verse 12). However, Pharisees, though recognized for their piety even by Jesus, were notoriously guilty of sins that this Pharisee accused others of committing.

Tax collectors were hated by the Jews because they collected money for the Roman occupiers and often charged more than they required. In Jesus’ parable, the tax collector approached

God in prayer humbly and selflessly. He refused to look up and beat his chest, symbolizing his deep grief and repentance of his sin, and pleaded for God's mercy (verse 13). Jesus then declared that the tax collector, not the self-righteous Pharisee, went home justified before God because he humbled himself instead of exalting himself—which is the proper attitude for prayer that Jesus wanted to convey (verse 14). This is a crucial lesson for every believer about how to approach God in prayer—humbly acknowledging one's unworthiness, expressing deep remorse for sin, repenting, and seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What attitudes must we avoid to ensure that we approach God with a humble yet confident spirit in prayer?

A Closing Thought

This lesson asks a simple question: How can we avoid pride and self-righteousness? The Bible gives the answer in three places—Abraham's prayer (Genesis 18:25-27), Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), and 1 John 5:14-15. Together, they teach us to admit that we don't deserve God's favor, to stay humble and trust that our salvation rests on Him, and to submit to His will, relying on His mercy and justice. John assures us that when we pray with this humble attitude, God hears us and answers.

Your Life

Because of our inherent sinful nature, it is still possible to get caught up in pride and self-importance, like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable. However, when we deepen our relationship with God through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, studying His Word, meditation, solitude, and submitting to the Holy Spirit, we can develop Abraham's God-centered confidence and the tax collector's selfless humility.

Your World!

Confidence in prayer is not rooted in one's worthiness, religious activities, or perceived status but in who God is and alignment with His will. It is essential that we approach God with deep reverence and humility, trust His mercy to forgive and restore, and align our prayer requests with His will instead of establishing our own.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we approach You humbly, aligning our requests for Your mercy, forgiveness, and restoration of our fellowship with Your will, recognizing that those who humble themselves will be exalted and justified in Your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, January 19	“Grow by Following Jesus”	(Matthew 4:18-22)
TUESDAY, January 20	“Grow in Love for God”	(Deuteronomy 7:7-11)
WEDNESDAY, January 21	“Grow in Spiritual Wisdom”	(Colossians 1:3-6, 11-12)
THURSDAY, January 22	“Grow in the Fear of the Lord”	(Proverbs 1:2-7)
FRIDAY, January 23	“Grow in Discerning Good from Evil”	(Proverbs 1:8-12)
SATURDAY, January 24	“Keep On Growing”	(Philippians 3:10-16)
SUNDAY, January 25	“Grow in Grace and Knowledge”	(2 Peter 3:14-18)

Notes

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