



THE NONCONFORMIST

THE PUZZLING STORIES OF JESUS



YES, NO + MAYBE

1. I'm not a very judgmental person.
2. There are certain classes of people that I'm uncomfortable hanging around.
3. I'm thankful for all of the improvements I've made in my lifetime.
4. There are some people who are so godly, that God listens to their prayers more intently.
5. There are some people who have walked so far from God, that they have a difficult time getting their prayers answered.

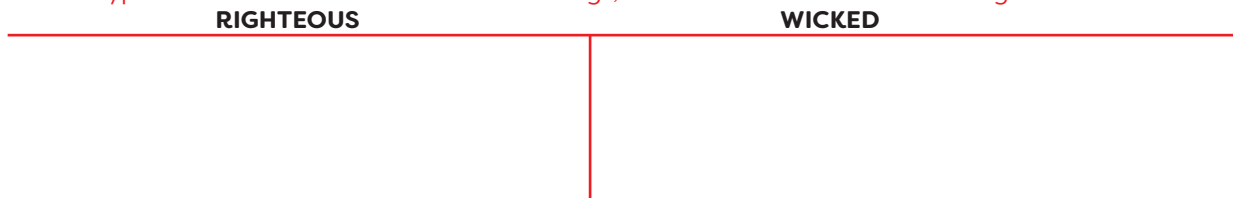
DIG DEEPER

● READ Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

9 Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 10 "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' 14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

● List the types of PEOPLE who do RIGHTEOUS things, and those who do WICKED things:



+ 9 Scorned - Literally, made nothing of. To despise, to look down upon, to treat with contempt.

+ 9 Everyone else - The expression is stronger than it sounds to us. Literally, "the rest." They threw all others beside themselves into one class--the lost.

● How do we fall into the trap of thanking God that we are not as bad as "the rest" of the people around us?

+ 10 To pray - One could pray privately at any time in the temple, but the times for public prayer were 9:00 a.m. (Acts 2:15) and 3:00 p.m. (3:1).

+ 10 A Pharisee...and a despised tax collector - The parable takes place at Israel's most holy site, the temple.

DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

The two visitors are on opposite ends of the social spectrum. The Pharisee is a respected religious member in a most honored social group, while the tax collector belongs to one of the most hated professions possible for a Jew. Many Jews likely regarded tax collectors as traitors because they worked for the Romans and often exploited their authority over fellow Jews to increase their own wealth

✦ **11 The Pharisee stood by himself** - Standing was the ordinary posture of the Jews in prayer. Here it may suggest that the Pharisee took a position where he could be seen by the public. "By himself" can also be translated "prayed these things **to** himself" (pros heauton) and can mean that his prayer never went to God because he was only talking to himself.

✦ **11 I thank you, God, that I am not like other people** - A Jewish saying is quoted that true Rabbi ought to thank God every day of his life; 1, that he was not created a Gentile; 2, that he was not a plebeian (belonging to the commoners/lower class of ancient Rome); 3, that he was not born a woman.

- Why do you think that God does not like us talking about our accomplishments?

✦ **12 I fast twice a week** - The present tense suggests habit. The law required only one fast in the year, that on the great day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; Num. 29:7); though public memorial fasts were added, during the Captivity, on the anniversaries of national calamities. The Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday during the weeks between the Passover and Pentecost, and again between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Dedication of the Temple. The reason assigned for the selection of these days is because it was supposed to be on the second day of the week that Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the two tablets of the law, and it was on the fifth day of the week that he came down on account of the idolatry concerning the golden calf. These days were chosen, not only when public fasts were to be observed, but also when individuals fasted privately.

- This man went above and beyond to show God how devoted he was. What does it say about God that He doesn't care about this level of self-sacrifice?

✦ **13 Stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed** - Eyes were raised in the direction of those that were going to be addressed (cp. 6:20; 16:23; Jn. 4:35; 6:5), hence before a prayer they were raised upward. But in shame, the tax collector could not.

✦ **13 He beat his chest** - This is one mode of expressing great grief in some nations, especially in mourning the dead. Its insertion in the parable is very expressive of the deep sorrow of the penitent tax collector. His grief on account of his sins was like the grief of those who mourn the dead

- Why do you think that this posturing by the tax collector is preferred by God?

✦ **14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee** - Jesus gave a surprise ending to the parable (cf. Luke 16:8). His audience would have seen the Pharisee as a positive example of true piety and the publican as a negative one of what they should not be like. For Luke's readers, familiar with Jesus' teachings and perhaps even this parable, the ending is not unexpected. They already knew that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (14:11).

- What are some of the things that we as Christians promote today that God may not like?

✦ **14 Returned home justified?** - This term means more than just being forgiven, for it also involves the gift of a new standing before God. This is evident from 18:9, where the noun is used to describe a "righteous" standing before God (cf. 16:15). The tax collector stood before God after his prayer possessing a new relationship (not a moral character) with God. He possessed a righteousness given him by grace (cf. Phil 3:8). In justifying himself before God, the Pharisee rejected the possibility of receiving God's gift of justification that comes through faith (Phil 3:9). What happens after justification is not mentioned in the parable, but Luke would demonstrate this in the story of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:8).

- What does God's actions here tell you about His nature?



MY PRAYER...

1. How do I naturally compare myself to others?
2. What is my perception of myself when I come to God in prayer?
3. What new aspect of God's character does He want me to know?