



I Need You, God

(based on Luke 18:9-14)

One day, Jesus told a story to people who were proud of the way they lived. They trusted in themselves, in their own sense of being right, and looked down on everyone else. Jesus said:

A prominent religious leader and a tax collector went up to the temple to pray. The religious leader was called a *Pharisee*, a word that means “separate.” He believed that people pleased God best by following the Law of Moses, so he worked hard to obey all the rules. He was a really good person, and all the people liked him.

The other person was a tax collector. He collected money for the Romans who had invaded the country. He knew that most people hated him and thought he was a bad person.

The Pharisee and the tax collector climbed the stairs and went inside the temple. The Pharisee walked quickly past the tax collector and marched right up to the front of the temple. He knew he was living a good life. He felt good about himself and stood proudly. The Pharisee lifted up his arms and began to pray:

“Oh God,” he said. “I thank you that I am not greedy, that I don’t lie and cheat like everyone else. I am very glad,” he puffed, full of himself, “that I am not like the tax collector. I am a very good person,” he admired himself, “and I work hard to obey all the rules. I keep myself separate from all wrongdoing. I am glad to be such a good person. Amen.”

Meanwhile, the tax collector hid in the shadows. The tax collector was very sad. He knew he hadn’t always done the right thing. He felt sad for the ways he had hurt others and turned away from God. He knew he needed God’s love. He did what Jewish people often did when they were sorry and filled with sadness. He kept his head bowed and began to beat his chest.

“Oh God,” he whispered, “I need your love. Have mercy on me. I am a sinner. Amen.”

Jesus continued: “Two people left the temple. The Pharisee had done everything right, but his prayer was not right in God’s eyes. He did not understand that he still needed God’s grace. The tax collector had done nothing right, but he had asked for and received God’s grace anyway. And the tax collector was forgiven. Now he was right in God’s eyes.”

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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your child this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your child—imagine and wonder.
- The two men in the story talk to God in different ways. Talk about the differences in the prayers.
- Jesus tells the people listening to this story that the Pharisee's prayer was not right in God's eyes. Use words and actions to create a new kind of prayer for the Pharisee. Help the Pharisee recognize and receive God's grace.



Responding to God's Grace

- Sometimes it is hard to find the right words to talk to God. Introduce your child to breath prayer. Begin by identifying a quiet place for spending time with God. Help your child find a comfortable position to pray. Share two-part phrases to pray while breathing in and out. Here are some phrases to use: God, have mercy; Come, Lord Jesus; Holy Spirit, fill me.
- Invite your child to use his or her body to say the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, (*Lift one arm over head, fingers pointing up, and hold.*)
hallowed be thy name. (*Lift other arm over head, fingers pointing up.*)

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, (*Slowly lower both arms to sides.*)
on earth as it is in heaven. (*Sweep one arm across body.*)

Give us this day our daily bread; (*Cup hands in front of body as if holding something.*)
and forgive us our debts, (*Move fist to chest.*)
as we forgive our debtors; (*Bow head and fold hands as if praying.*)

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (*Hold hands in front of face, palms toward face.*)

For thine is the kingdom (*Arms down, angled out from body, hands open, fingers pointing down.*)
and the power (*Make fists with hands; cross arms at chest height by touching wrists.*)

and the glory, forever. (*Open arms and hands; lift arms over head.*)

Amen. (*Fold hands together as if in prayer.*)

Celebrating in Gratitude

- In celebration that God hears our prayers every minute of every day, sing a fun grace to the tune of the theme song for *The Addams Family*.

We thank you, Lord, for giving
the food we need for living,
for friends, for fun, and family,
we thank you now, O Lord.

Chorus: Na na na nah, (*Snap fingers twice.*)
na na na nah, (*Snap fingers twice.*)
na na na nah (*Sing three times.*)
(*Snap fingers twice before saying, "Amen."*)

- In gratitude for all of God's blessings, use a large map or a soft globe ball to identify people around the world to pray for each day. If you use a globe ball, toss and catch it, praying for the people in the country where your thumb lands. Ask God to provide basic needs such as adequate shelter, nutritious food, and clean water. Research other needs of the people to include in your prayers.