

Small Group #1 | Fake Life, or the Real Thing?

INTRO

This is a passage that contrasts two men who stood praying before God. One of them, a tax collector (who were hated members of Jewish religious society) was genuine. The other, a Pharisee (a highly respected religious leader) is fake. Read how Jesus responds to their hearts.

PASSAGE

LUKE 18:9–14
(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.”

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Jesus say that God will accept one prayer and not the other? What do you like about Jesus’ response to the self-righteous religious leaders?
2. Tax collectors were hated in Jewish society because they took money from Jewish people to give to the Roman occupiers. They were seen as traitors. What do you think helped the Tax Collector be honest with God in his prayer?
3. The crowd listening to this story think they are “right with God.” How do you think they feel after Jesus tells the story?

APPLY

1. God wants us to be real with him. He isn't afraid to engage our pain, problems, and mistakes.
2. What gets in your way of being more real with others? With God?
3. Would you be willing to quit faking it in an area of your life?
We want to become an honest and safe community for people to be their authentic selves.
4. Share something surprisingly honest about yourself with someone right now.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**Be Real with Jesus**

Let's practice experiencing God's radical acceptance of our real selves. Pick one of these emotions that you have experienced most this week. We are going to invite God's love into our souls and feelings.

Anger | Loneliness | Numbness | Sadness | Anxiety | Other

Pray this prayer: Jesus, I have been feeling *[emotion]*. Would you please speak to me about this right now? *(Pause.)* Fill me with your love. Share with the group which emotion you picked and how you felt during prayer. This week, practice this prayer everyday: "Jesus, I give you my old labels. I embrace the new label of 'Loved by God.' Help me feel your love today."