

January 18, 2026

“Prayer and Humility”
Lesson 3

Genesis 18:25-27
Luke 18:9-14
1 John 5:14-15

Intro

The word “pray” shows up in 348 different verses in the Bible in various forms. Today’s study looks at three different passages. Each of these passages show up below showing different aspects of prayer for the believer.

Read Genesis 18:25-27

This passage is Abraham talking to God about God’s decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

1. vs. 25: Abraham here asks God to “do what is right” as regards destroying these two cities
Part of Abraham’s concern is his nephew Lot, who lives in Sodom
Abraham appeals to God based on his knowledge of God’s perfection
God is the One who has decided what is right and what is wrong
It is impossible for God to do anything which is not right
2. vs. 26: In response to Abraham’s question in vs. 24, God answers what He will do
He will not destroy the city if there are at least 50 righteous people there
3. vs. 27: Abraham doesn’t stop asking, though God has agreed to do what Abraham has asked
In succeeding verses, he goes from 50 down to only 10 people
In each case, God says He will do as Abraham has asked (prayed)
Note that Abraham says he has been “bold” to ask God, since he is “dust and ashes”
This shows Abraham sees the difference between himself and God
This also shows that God listens to people when they talk to Him
Three things are important to us from this passage:
 - 1) Abraham appeals to God based on God’s character
 - 2) Abraham recognizes his own inferiority compared to God
 - 3) Abraham is confident approaching God because of a shared relationship

Read Luke 18:9-14

Jesus here teaches what the kingdom of God is like, and who will have a place in it.

4. vs. 9: This verse begins a parable
Jesus is telling this to those “who were confident of their own righteousness:
This definitely sounds like the Pharisees, though Luke doesn’t say so outright
5. vs. 10: The situation here would be familiar to devout Jews of Jesus’ day
The temple was where people went to be in God’s presence
It was also a place for prayer and to seek for forgiveness of sins

The Pharisees were known for committing their lives to holiness and worship
The people would have expected to see a Pharisee there
Tax collectors were despised as traitors for helping the Romans against the Jews
They were often dishonest (Luke 19:1-10)
No one would have expected a tax collector to come to the temple

6. vs. 11: Here is the Pharisee's prayer

He would have stood; here he stands apart from others
Thanking God is appropriate
This however shows pride; he is thankful for himself, not for God
He thanks God that he is not like "other" people
He specifically mentions robbers, evildoers, and adulterers
It's good he doesn't do what they do, but there's a problem here
His prayer and stance indicate he feels superior to these and all others
He specifically mentions and likely points to the tax collector ("this tax collector")
This looks like he believes God owes him approval for being "good"

7. vs. 12: The Pharisee continues to brag about himself and his accomplishments

"I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get"
Both of these actions are characteristic actions of a devout person
Outwardly the Pharisee meets or exceeds expectations
He has worked hard to avoid sinful actions and to do what is required
The result? He has become arrogant and prideful
He's not praying—he's bragging

8. vs. 13: The tax collector also stands while he prays, but that's the only similarity to the Pharisee

He stands "at a distance" because he is hesitant to approach a holy God
He is unwilling to look up to heaven
He beats on his chest—a sign of self-harm and self-loathing
What he says matches with how he acts
He asks for mercy, knowing himself to be unworthy of it
He admits that he is a sinner, not a person who has done great things
Note also the difference in the lengths of the prayers
The Pharisee's is over 30 words, the tax collector's just 7

9. vs. 14: Jesus concludes this teaching by giving his evaluation of each of the men

The tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home right with God
Jesus has made the same point in other places (Matt. 23:12, Luke 14:11)
Those who exalt themselves vs. those who humbly see their need
What Jesus says in this verse would have surprised his listeners
A tax collector justified, but not a Pharisee? No way!
This is another example where God exalts the humble
The proud are brought low

Read 1 John 5:14-15

In this letter, John encourages his readers to have confidence in their standing before God. He carries this encouragement to be applied to praying as well.

10. vs. 14: John tells his readers to approach God confidently *if* they ask “according to His will”

They cannot ask for things that go contrary to what God wants

This verse shows that both John and Jesus expect Christians to pray

It also shows that God listens to prayers and answers them

11. vs. 15: John notes to things here

First, we can be confident that God hears our prayers

Second, we can know this because we will “have what we asked of Him”

This is obviously dependent on us asking things that are within the will of God

God’s hearing leads to action

Application: God’s character is constant in all three of these passages. His character must serve as the foundation for our prayers. Christians can pray confidently knowing that God delights in hearing our prayers and granting our requests (as long as they are within His will). We also pray humbly, knowing that God is God, and we are not. Our posture is also important when we pray. Not how we stand, but the posture of our hearts. Finally, prayer is the way that we align ourselves to God’s will and character.

Prayer: Father God, You are worthy of all praise. We come to You, seeking Your mercy and knowing that You care to hear and answer our petitions. Conform our wills to yours. In Jesus’ name, Amen.