

5 Day Devotional

Day 1: The Danger of a Comparing Heart

Devotional

It is easy to walk into a room and quietly measure yourself against the people around you. Maybe you do not say it out loud, but the thought is there. You have it more together than that person. You are more faithful, more disciplined, more consistent. That quiet comparison is exactly what Jesus exposes in the Pharisee's prayer.

The Pharisee was not lying about his resume. He fasted. He tithed. He was outwardly devoted. But his prayer was not really directed at God. It was a performance, and the tax collector standing nearby was his measuring stick. His confidence was not rooted in God's grace. It was rooted in being better than someone else.

C.S. Lewis captured it well. Pride is not simply feeling good about who you are. It is the need to feel better than someone else. And that posture, however subtle, quietly closes the heart to genuine worship.

Here is the encouragement. Recognizing this tendency in yourself is not a reason for despair. It is actually the beginning of honesty before God. When you see the Pharisee in yourself, you are already moving in the right direction. Bring that to Him. He is not surprised by it, and He is not finished with you.

Bible Verse

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable." - Luke 18:9 (New International Version (NIV))

Reflection Question

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to measure your standing before God by comparing yourself to others?

Quote

"As C.S. Lewis once noted, pride isn't just saying, well, I'm glad I am so and so. No, it's glad I am better than so and so. I'm glad I am smarter or more clever or more handsome or wealthier or you add to it more. I am better."

Prayer

Lord, expose the pride in my heart that I have dressed up as faithfulness. Teach me to find my confidence in Your grace alone, not in how I measure up to those around me. Amen.

Day 2: Nothing in Your Hands

Devotional

The tax collector in Jesus' parable did not have a polished speech prepared. He did not arrive with a list of accomplishments or a record of good behavior. He came with nothing. He would not even lift his eyes toward heaven. He simply beat his chest and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

That is it. No negotiation. No performance. Just honest, desperate dependence.

And Jesus says that man went home justified. Not the one with the impressive spiritual resume. The one who came empty-handed.

This is the heartbeat of the gospel. You do not earn your place before a holy God through effort or achievement. No amount of discipline, generosity, or moral consistency can close the gap between a sinful heart and a perfect God. The tax collector understood this, and his humility was not weakness. It was wisdom.

If you have been quietly trying to earn your standing before God, today is an invitation to put that burden down. You are not justified by what you bring. You are justified by what Christ has already done. Come to Him with open hands, and you will find that His grace is more than enough.

Bible Verse

"Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." - Psalm 103:2-4 (New International Version (NIV))

Reflection Question

Are there ways you have been approaching God as though your obedience or effort earns His favor rather than resting in what Christ has already accomplished?

Quote

"This guy doesn't even look up from his wingtips. He just beats his breast in humility as he says, God have mercy on me, a sinner. Powerful story about a man who gets it."

Prayer

Father, forgive me for the times I have tried to earn what You have freely given. Remind me today that my justification rests entirely on Christ, and let that truth bring rest to my striving heart. Amen.

Day 3: You Are Both of Them

Devotional

It would be comfortable to read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and simply identify with the tax collector. He is the hero of the story, after all. But honest reflection reveals something more uncomfortable. Most of us carry both characters within us.

There are days when you feel the full weight of your need and come to God with genuine humility. And there are other days when pride slips in quietly, when you look at someone else's choices and think, I would never do that. When you feel a little more spiritually put-together than the person next to you.

This is not a reason for shame. It is a reason for honesty. The parable is not just a story about two men in a temple long ago. It is a mirror. And the most faithful response is not to pretend you only see the tax collector when you look into it.

The good news is that God's grace is big enough for both versions of you. He meets you in your humility, and He is patient with your pride. Bring all of it to Him. That kind of honesty is itself an act of worship.

Bible Verse

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable." - Luke 18:9 (New International Version (NIV))

Reflection Question

When you honestly examine your heart this week, which character do you most resemble, and what does that reveal about where you are placing your trust?

Quote

"These parables demand a response. Who am I in that story? I'll make a confession. I'm both."

Prayer

God, give me the courage to see myself clearly, both the pride I carry and the need I often ignore. Thank You that Your grace meets me in both places. Amen.

Day 4: Grace That Actually Changes You

Devotional

There is a version of grace that gets misunderstood. Some hear that the tax collector went home justified, despite his failures, and quietly wonder if that means obedience does not really matter. If grace covers everything, why bother trying?

But that misses what grace actually does. Grace is not a permission slip to stay the same. It is the power that makes genuine change possible. The tax collector was not justified because he had cleaned up his life. He was justified because he came to God honestly. But that encounter with mercy does not leave a person unchanged.

Think about it this way. When you truly understand that you have been forgiven much, that God met you in your worst moment and called you His own, it does not produce carelessness. It produces gratitude. And gratitude produces obedience, not as a way to earn favor, but as a response to the favor already given.

This is the Reformed understanding of grace. It is not cheap. It cost Christ everything. And because it cost Him everything, it calls us toward something. Not to earn our standing, but to live in a way that reflects the One who gave us that standing freely.

Bible Verse

"Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." - Psalm 103:2-4 (New International Version (NIV))

Reflection Question

How does understanding grace as a gift rather than a reward actually motivate you toward obedience rather than away from it?

Quote

"This guy went home justified. He went home justified. How does that sit with you? You say, well, praise God for His amazing grace. But that grace leads to change."

Prayer

Lord, let the depth of Your grace produce in me a genuine desire to follow You, not to earn Your love, but because I have already received it. Amen.

Day 5: We All Come the Same Way

Devotional

One of the most leveling truths in Scripture is that no one comes to God on better terms than anyone else. There is no express lane for the disciplined, no discount for the theologically trained, no advantage for those who have been in church their whole lives. Every person who has ever stood before God in genuine worship has stood there the same way: in need of mercy.

Revelation 7 gives us a breathtaking picture of what that looks like at its fullest. A great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne, crying out that salvation belongs to God alone. Not to their effort. Not to their heritage. To God.

That is where history is headed. And that vision reframes how we worship right now. When you gather with other believers, you are not gathering with people who have it more or less together than you. You are gathering with fellow recipients of the same undeserved grace, joining a song that has been rising since Christ ascended and will not stop until He returns.

Come to worship today with that in mind. Come as the tax collector came. Come with nothing to prove and everything to receive.

Bible Verse

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." - Revelation 7:9-10 (New International Version (NIV))

Reflection Question

How does the vision of a diverse, unified multitude worshipping before the throne challenge any sense of spiritual superiority you might carry into your own worship?

Quote

"Worship draws a sharp contrast between the kingdom of this world, which is competitive and comparative, and the kingdom of heaven. Because we all come the same, in need of God's mercy."

Prayer

Father, remind me that I stand before You only because of Christ. Let that truth make me humble with others and deeply grateful to You. Amen.