



# **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

**Luke 18:9-14**

**"Safari Sam said my Bible memory verse plaque was the best one in our cabin!" Billy called out in his usual loud voice as he and Louis entered the mountain chapel. Two pigeons that had been nesting in the rafters over the front glass doors of the chapel were startled by the noisy campers and flew up into a nearby pine tree.**

**"That's only because I haven't made mine yet," Louis responded. "Mine is going to be twice as big as yours!"**

**"It still won't look as good as mine because I have the best handwriting at camp," Billy shouted.**

**"Says who?" Louis replied. "Your writing is so sloppy that God can't even read your plaque."**

**"Shows how much you know! God can read anything! You take that back!" Billy exclaimed.**

**"I can't," said Louis, "the Bible says we should always speak the truth!"**

**"The Bible says to speak the truth in love," a voice from the front of the chapel corrected.**

**"Ranger Reggie...is that you?" Louis whispered.**

**"Yes, I like to come here for my quiet time," said the Ranger as he stood up and walked down the aisle toward them. "Although, I must say, the chapel is a lot less quiet than usual this morning."**

**"Sorry, Ranger Reggie. Louis is just jealous because I do better in crafts and Bible lessons than he does," said Billy.**

**"I am not jealous!" replied Louis.**

**"Are too! Safari Sam said my Bible memory verse plaque is the best, so I get to hang it on any wall inside the chapel that I choose!" Billy puffed out his chest as he held up a long wooden plaque for approval.**

**"And you're proud of that aren't you?" the Ranger asked.**

**"Yeah! My big brother says if you're good at something it's because God made you that way."**

**"It is true that every good gift comes from God but pride comes from within our hearts. God does not want us to be prideful," Ranger Reggie counseled.**

**Both boys stared down at the tops of their shoes. "He doesn't?" Billy squeaked.**

**Ranger Reggie sat down in the last row, opened the weathered leather Bible in his hands to the book of Luke, and said, "Perhaps we can learn the same lesson the Pharisee learned."**

**"What's a Pharisee?" asked Louis as he and Billy sat down next to the ranger.**

**"Pharisees were the very religious people that lived in Israel at the time Jesus was alive. This parable is called the Pharisee and the Tax Collector."**

**"I know what a tax collector does!" offered Billy. "My dad says he takes your money!"**

**"Yes, in a way," Ranger Reggie explained. "It was the tax collector's job to collect money from the common people. As you can imagine, tax collectors were not the most popular guys in town. The Bible says Jesus told this story to the religious people who were with Him. 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'"**

**"Wow, he sure does like to brag a lot!" Billy commented.**

**"Yes," said Ranger Reggie, "it's not very nice to listen to, is it?" Both boys stared back at the tops of their shoes. "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.'"**

**"What did Jesus say about that?" asked Louis.**

**"Jesus said, '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.'"**

**"Ranger Reggie," Louis asked timidly, "the Pharisee was trying to do the right thing, wasn't he?"**

**"Yeah!" Billy agreed. "He was praying and fasting and giving to the church. What's wrong with that? Those are all good things!"**

**"But he was also judging others, bragging, and showing off," added Louis.**

**"I guess..." Billy thought for a moment, "God wants us to be humble when we serve Him."**

**Ranger Reggie smiled, "I think you're right, Billy. God looks at the attitude of our hearts, not at all the deeds we do."**

**Both boys were quiet for a long while. You could hear the sound of birds singing and a soft breeze whispering through the trees. Ranger Reggie walked over to the double glass doors. He stood silently and watched as one by one the pigeons returned to their roost in the**

**rafters. Without turning, he spoke out loud, "I've been thinking about building a bird house to hang on that pine tree across from the chapel. That way the pigeons won't be disturbed as we come in and out of the doors but they can still be close enough to hear the worship."**

**"I'll help you!" Louis offered.**

**"Me, too," Billy exclaimed, "I'm really good with my hands...I mean, I like to make things. And, I like pigeons."**

**"They are very important birds," the ranger spoke softly. "They are often used to carry messages to people that would otherwise be hard to reach...remarkable creatures." He pushed the door open slowly and stepped out into the sunlight. "I'll be in the wood shop."**

**"We'll come, too," said Louis as the two boys hastened to keep up with the ranger.**

**"We want to help," said Billy. He leaned over and whispered to Louis, "And after we're done, I'll help you get started on your Bible plaque."**

**"Thanks, I could use some help with the letters," Louis replied.**

**Ranger Reggie smiled to himself and began to hum a familiar hymn as he hiked down the hill towards the wood shop with the two friends following close behind.**