

BIBLE TIME LINE ASSEMBLIES

63. THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Bible Base: Luke 18: 9-14

Key Christian Belief: Jesus came to bring us back to God.

Aim: To encourage children to come humbly to God.

You will need:

- the words SORRY and PLEASE written on separate sheets of card.

Introduction

Begin by reading the following poem and asking the children to think about what kind of person would say something like this:

They say my reading's wonderful -
My maths beyond compare;
I know my art is very good
And my writing's more than fair.

At PE I'm a whizz kid -
At most sports I excel;
At Music I beat all the rest
And in Science I do well.

I'm handsome and charming;
I'm graceful through and through.
I'm glad that I'm like I am -
It must be awful being you!

Point out that this is clearly someone who likes to boast and show off a lot; someone who thinks they are always better than everyone else; someone who is very **proud** of themselves.

Explain that we are going to meet someone like this in today's story. It's a story Jesus told to show how it can be dangerous to be proud, like this, in the wrong kind of way.

Point out that it is, of course, perfectly OK to be proud in the right kind of way. Every time they hand in a piece of homework, they should be proud of it - knowing that it is the best they could have done. They should never have to hand in anything that they are ashamed of! But when we boast and show off and start to think that we are better than everyone else it is then that we are being proud of ourselves in the wrong kind of way. This is the kind of pride that God hates - and that Jesus says can be dangerous.

Ask the children to show you what a proud person might look like - e.g. nose in the air, chest out, arms folded. Choose the child with the best pose to come out to the front. Explain that as you tell the story you want him / her to stand at the front of the stage in the centre adopting this pose. He / she is to represent the **Pharisee** in the story.

Explain that in the days when Jesus lived the Pharisees were very proud of themselves; they were proud of the way they kept all God's rules and were always boasting and showing off about it.

Ask the children if they know what the opposite of being proud might be? Explain that in this case the answer is being **humble**. A humble person is someone who thinks of others as more important than themselves and is always willing to help in any way they can. A humble person is someone who is willing to listen and to learn - because they realise that they don't know everything. A humble person is someone who is willing to own up to it when they have been wrong. A proud person would never do any of those things!

Ask the children what a humble person might look like - e.g. head down, hands clasped together. Choose one child to stand off to the back and to the side of the stage adopting this pose as you read the story. He / she is to represent the **tax collector** in the story.

Explain that in the days when Jesus lived tax collectors were often greedy and dishonest. They took more money from people than they should have, and kept some of it for themselves instead of giving it to the people in charge as they were meant to do.

Finally explain to everyone else that you would like them all to join in with the story as you read it from the Bible. When they hear the word 'Pharisee' they are to point to themselves and say proudly 'Oh look at me!' because that is the kind of people the Pharisees were. When they hear the word 'tax collector' they are to rub their fingers together greedily and say 'money, money, money' because that is the kind of people the tax collectors were. Finally when they hear the word 'pray' or 'prayed' or 'praying' they are to put their hands together and chant a loud 'Amen'.

Bible Story

Read the story straight from the CEV version of the Bible and encourage the children to join in as above.

Exploring Christian Belief

Ask your two volunteers to remain in their positions for a few minutes longer. During this part of the assembly, ask all the children to adopt a 'proud Pharisee' pose each time you stand beside the Pharisee and a 'humble tax collector' pose each time you stand beside the tax collector.

Point out that in the story both men went to the Temple to pray and invite the children to think with you for a moment about what they each said to God.

Stand beside the Pharisee and remind the children that his prayer went something like: 'God you must be really pleased with me. I'm not greedy and dishonest like that tax collector over there. I say my prayers every day. Two days a week I go without eating so that I can pray for longer. And as well as that I give lots of money away to the poor.'

Now it is good to spend time talking to God each day. I hope you do. And it is good to share what you have with others. I hope you do. But strangely, it was not this man who pleased God. His was not the prayer that God listened to. He was not the one that God said could be His friend.

Now stand beside the tax collector and explain that his prayer really meant that he was telling God that He was sorry for the wrong things he had done and was asking God to forgive him and to help him change. And Jesus said that he was the one who pleased God. He was the one whose prayer God listened to. He was the one that God said could be His friend.

This reminds us that a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is not someone who is better than everyone else. That's not what makes you a friend of God. The Bible says that a real friend of God is someone who knows they have said and done wrong things but who has put their trust in Jesus and asked God to forgive them and to help them to change.

Stand beside the Pharisee again and explain that the problem with him was that there were two important words He would not say. (Hold these up as you talk about them.)

He would not say **sorry**. He thought to himself: 'Why should I say sorry - I haven't done anything wrong!' But the Bible says that if we think like that we are kidding ourselves. All of us, whoever we are, at times need to say sorry to our friends, to our parents, to our teachers and especially to God. This Pharisee was so proud of himself that he would not admit that he had done anything wrong - and it kept Him from being a friend of God.

He would not say **please**. He never asked God to help him in any way. He thought: 'I don't need anyone to help me. I'm doing perfectly well by myself!' I don't know about you but the more I find out about the way God wants me to live, the more I know I need His help. I can't do it on my own! This Pharisee was so proud of himself that he wouldn't admit that he needed help from anyone - and it kept him from being a friend of God.

Now stand beside the tax collector again and explain that, according to Jesus, if we want to be God's friends this is the way to come to Him - saying sorry whenever we need to and asking Him to help us every day to do what is right.

So let's not be so proud of ourselves that we never say sorry to God. Let's not be so proud of ourselves that we never ask Him to help us. Instead, let's come to him like this tax collector did because I believe the good news is that if we come to God like this He will hear us. He will forgive us. He will help us. And best of all He will accept us as His friends!

Thank your two volunteers and ask everyone else to give them a round of applause as they take their seats again.

Reflection and Prayer

Ask the children to think if there is anyone they have been too proud to say sorry to, or anything they have been struggling with because they have been too proud to ask for help. Encourage them to say sorry and to ask for help whenever they need it.

Finish with a prayer on behalf of the children saying **sorry** to God for anything they may have said, thought or done that they knew to be wrong and using the word **please** to ask Him to help them do what is right, no matter how hard it may be, in the week that lies ahead.