

Widows & Tax Collectors

Learning

Introducing the Parable (some example content you can engage with to prep and/or use as a group)

- **Read - Luke 18:1-14**
- **Context:** Jesus is approaching Jerusalem and his impending crucifixion. These two parables come after a section of teaching on the Kingdom of God. There are some other parables alluding to the seriousness of how one lives impacting their eternal life (Luke 16). Then more teaching with a miraculous healing story in the middle (Luke 17).
- **Culture:**
 - It is especially significant that the woman is a **widow**, this means that she is undoubtedly of low social standing and has very little money beyond daily sustenance. And although both Roman laws and the Jewish prophets (Deut. 24:17-18; Exod. 22:21-24; Isa. 10:1-2) are clear that widows should be protected and cared for, all too often this did not happen. Anyone who does not *Fear God* (2 Chron. 19:5-6) is foolish in a Jewish culture, thus from the opening lines the **judge** is being set-up as the anti-hero. Bribery of judges was a common practice in the ancient world, thus then, as with today, those without financial means often did not get justice and were taken advantage of. Because there is only one judge in the story, it is a court case about money, and the story assumes the widow is justified in her requests, but is being ignored (perhaps because she has no bribe money).
 - **Pharisees** come from the Hebrew word meaning "separated one." They were a sect within Judaism who sought to live holy lives devoted to the Torah and God. Keep in mind they were the "good guys" in the Jewish mindset. Try to read the parable with this mindset. The other man is a "**toll collector**" who collected money along the road systems and they were notorious for trying to cheat people for money, he is definitely the crook in the story, the one to be despised.
- **Themes:** First Parable - When faced with opposition and you are in the right, keep petitioning and trusting in God. Use all that is at your disposal to get justice because even when you feel like you are in a position of weakness you have power. Second Parable - God does not require or prefer perfection, but he is looking for honesty, self-awareness, and tenderness. Far from glorifying "badness" or sin, this parable highlights that all are desperately in need of God, but the "bad" are often more likely to see and acknowledge it.
- **Quotes for expanding the discussion:**
 - "While you understand the thrust of the parable with your mind, your heart has a desperate need to believe its exact opposite. And so does mine. We all long to establish our identity by seeing ourselves as approved in other people's eyes. We spend our days preening ourselves before the mirror of their opinion so we will not have to think about the nightmare of appearing before them naked and uncombed. And we hate this parable because it says plainly that it is the nightmare that is the truth of our condition. We fear the publican's acceptance because we know precisely what it means. It means that we will never be free until we are dead to the whole business of justifying ourselves. But since that business is our life, that means not until we are dead." Robert F. Capon

Dialogue Questions (some example questions for this content above)

- **Read a 2nd time - Luke 18:1-14**
- What themes stand out in each parable? What connections do you see between them?
- Which of the four characters stands out to you? What is Jesus teaching through them?

Implication Questions (some example questions/challenges that engage real life now)

- Dialogue: Try reading the quote above and give space for reflection on it.
- In the parables we see those who seek God are the widow and the tax collectors. What might this mean for our discipleship journey? Does this shift your paradigm of power and influence? How so?
- We love to demonize the judge and the Pharisee, but take a moment to reflect on two things. (1) Where are you putting self interest above the needs of another? (2) Where are you convinced "you have it all right" while others are so "uninformed," "backwards minded," or "unaware"?