



LEGALISM, OBEDIENCE AND FREEDOM | ANDREW MATRONE

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

Think of one high point from your week, and one low point from your week. Feel free to share one or both with your group.

SHARE

Throughout this series, we wanted to change it up, to be a little unpredictable. As a leadership team, we prayed and decided that instead of packaging a series together, we could do a series of individual messages. Our prayer has been that these messages would be timely and allow those teaching to have the flexibility to talk about whatever they feel led to talk about from their own individual time with Jesus. Our hope is that first we would all grow deeper in our relationship with God and with each other. Second, that we would really allow God to speak to us individually about our lives, and third, that we would then be in a position to respond and take action.

This week Andrew shared the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector who both went to the temple to pray. After reading the separate prayers of these men, you might find yourself resonating with one or both of them. We all have those times that we feel like we are really hitting our strides as Christians. We might have just come off a really disciplined week, we've spent time with people who really don't have it together with Christ like we do, and we feel pretty great about where we are. Then we have those other weeks where we feel hesitant to even pray. We recognize our depravity, or maybe we've just lost our momentum and we feel our need for our Savior on a very real level.

The question is, what posture of our hearts reflects the Lord's desire for our lives?

Let's refresh our memories and read Luke 18:9-14.

Andrew started off his message by speaking about rules. Our lives are filled with hundreds of spoken and unspoken rules. Don't speed on the freeway, don't forget to notice your wife's new haircut, turn that assignment or project in on time, you fill in the blank. If you think about it, a lot of our actions and behaviors have been conditioned to ensure that we do not break the rules. The Pharisee in this story was being very thorough in informing the Lord of all the rules that he had kept. He wanted to remind the Lord how "well" he was serving him. He accomplished this through expressing false thankfulness. He was attempting to appear thankful while his true prideful motives were exposed.

Can any part of you, past or present, relate to the Pharisee's desire for the Lord to "remember" all the good things you've done or have been doing? Describe what that was like.

The end of the story makes very clear the Pharisee was not justified in his actions. “For everyone that exalts himself will be humbled... (v. 14b).” Yet if we are honest, most of us are guilty of having done this very thing. Why do you think we look for opportunities to exalt ourselves? What are you afraid will happen if you don’t exalt yourself? What do you believe about yourself when you choose to self-exalt?

God seems to be pretty adamant that we humble ourselves before Him and be humble in our dealings with others. What does that say about the nature of God? Why is humility the right posture for us in our relationships with others?

G R O W

When we allow ourselves to buy into the lie that our worthiness and value increases when we are living a good life and doing all the right things, we are destined to achieve the very thing we wish to avoid. When we have not been able to muster enough of our human strength to behave well, we feel worthless and guilty. Some of us may believe that the Lord is mad at us, that he does not want us near until we have it together, and that loving God means always doing the right things. Even more devastating, as Andrew talked about, there are dangerous lies at each end, waiting to further distort the authentic relationship the Lord desires to have with each of us. The common theme here is this: when we look to ourselves as either the object or the source of our worthiness, we are going away from the way we were designed. Worthiness is found only in Him, who makes us worthy through His work on the cross.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

I remember very vividly driving through the dark night in my car, as tears drained in a constant flow down my face. The stains they left felt like a tangible representation of the stains on my heart. I was failing at life, failing in relationships, and I had always thought I was better than this. I was embarrassed, and could feel nothing but unworthiness. Then the Lord spoke to me softly and said *You will never be more loved, or worthy of my love than you are now. Even when you are out of this place, my love and the worth I have given you will not increase. It is constant and not determined by you.*

If we stay determined to not let our works define who the Lord says we are, and what he has done for us, then we are not tempted to boast when we have a good day, and we are not devastated when we have a bad one. We are also not tempted to look at the lives, accomplishments, abilities, and talents of others and rank ourselves against them. We are at rest with who the Lord has called us to be, and are concerned only with loving our brothers and sisters well.

Are you currently on either end of this spectrum? If you feel comfortable, share with your group where you feel you are landing right now.

Comparison is a slippery slope. In relation to this story, how has or does comparison play out in your life? In what areas of your life do you struggle with comparison?

What would be different in your life if you constantly approached the Lord with your heart and not your works, or lack of?

What do you think is the biggest barrier to you really accepting the idea that you are already worthy through Christ?

MOVE

The humble tax collector in this story was not trying to be anything more than he was. He understood his need, and asked boldly for mercy. But let us back up for a moment. The tax collector, despite knowing that he was unworthy, despite knowing that he was a sinner, *went up to the temple to pray*. He could have stayed home; he could have talked himself out of pleading to God for mercy. He could have recanted all his sins to himself, been honest about all his failings, and easily convinced himself he needed to first clean up his life a little to even be worthy enough to go ask for mercy. Yet he went up to the temple, he bared his soul to his heavenly father, and asked for mercy. How many times do we start to talk to God, start to be honest with him, and stop because we are reminded of our failures? We let our unworthiness determine our steps and words instead of the finished work on the cross.

Andrew spoke powerfully about the direction of our hearts. The tax collector's heart was directed and focused on the worthiness of the Lord. It can be easy to be disconnected from our hearts at times. Life gets busy, patterns get created, and before we know it, we are living like the Pharisee or walking only in condemnation. We have to stay in touch with our hearts. Let's take a look at some powerful words from John Eldredge in his book, *Waking the Dead*:

To remain present to God, you must remain present to your heart. To hear his voice, you must listen with your heart. To love him, you must love with all your heart. You cannot be the person God meant you to be, and you cannot live the life he meant you to live, unless you live from the heart.

So, where is your heart directed today? When was the last time you tuned in and became truly present with your heart? When was the last time you let his words about who you are be the last words? Let us not be fooled into thinking we can faithfully walk with Christ and be detached from our hearts. He deeply desires for us to be known by him, and to know him. He has seen your life. He knows what you have done and what you are capable of doing. Yet he still chose you. We get to walk in close relationship with Christ not because of what we have done – good or bad – but because of what he has done. We get to live obedient lives out of our love for him. Remember that his love won, his love is forever, and his love is for you.

Hebrews 10:14 (MSG)

It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process.

What lies have you believed about the acceptance that Christ gives you daily?

What would be different in your heart and your life if you lived your life out of God's love, and not for God's love?

If you could describe your obedience to God, what would you say? What is the resounding theme in your obedience toward him?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the directions of your hearts. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Matthew 11.28-30 (MSG)

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on
Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show
you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.
I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*