

HOW CAN WE BE FREE OF EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE THROUGH PRAYER?

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

DIGGING DEEPER....

Let's dig a little deeper now and see what some other Bible passages have to say about being free through prayer. We'll look at what the Scriptures say, then consider how it applies to our personal lives.

Running from God (from [Luke 18:9-14](#))

An eastern newspaper told the story of a woman who was driving home when she noticed a truck tail-gating her. She made a turn, but the truck stayed with her. She sped up, and the truck sped up, too. She ran a red light, and so did the truck!

Panicked, she screeched into a gas station, threw open the door, and ran screaming from her car. The truck driver braked to a stop behind her, and jumped from his vehicle as well. But instead of chasing her, he ran to her car, yanked open the back door, and pulled out a man hiding there! The would-be rapist had been crouched there, unknown to the lady, waiting for his opportunity. The truck driver, from his high vantage point, had seen him. He had chased the woman's car to save her, not to harm her.

When it comes to their relationship with God, many people are like the woman in this incident. They spend their lives running from God, convinced he is out to judge them for their sins, when in reality he is chasing them down to forgive them.

We have learned that in the **Model Prayer** Jesus said we could be forgiven just for asking. He told us to pray, "*Forgive us our debts.*" Since we know he would not have told us to pray a prayer that didn't work, we know God will forgive us when we ask him to.

But some people are unwilling to ask. It takes humility to admit that you have blown it and need forgiveness. But Jesus told a parable to show that admission of guilt is necessary before we can receive forgiveness. He said:

10 *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11 *The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.*

12 *I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

[LUKE 18:10-12](#)

The Pharisee, the first man to pray, was a religious man. The Pharisees were known in Jesus' day for their zeal not only for the Law of Moses, but for the "tradition of the elders"—a list of rules that had developed *in addition* to the Law of Moses. The Pharisees tried to keep all these rules, and looked down on others who didn't.

The Pharisee in this story apparently felt he was doing a pretty good job of keeping all these rules, because his prayer basically consisted of telling God what a good guy he was—especially compared to everyone else. And even more so when compared to this tax collector who was there praying, too.

Tax collectors were at the opposite end of the social and religious spectrum. They were despised by everyone. They were Israelites who worked for the conquering Roman government, and so they were considered traitors. In addition, they had a well-founded reputation for dishonesty. The Roman authorities tended to look the other way if the tax collectors collected a bit more tribute than they were supposed to. It made for motivated collectors. It was a perk for being so hated by their countrymen.

The tax collector who came to the temple that day to pray had apparently had a change of heart. He had perhaps heard Jesus speak, and wanted to get right with God. After all, one of Jesus' twelve disciples was Matthew, a former tax collector. Perhaps there was hope for him as well. Here is what Jesus said about him:

"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.'

[LUKE 18:13](#)

This man's prayer was much different than the Pharisee's. He prayed, "***God, have mercy on me, a sinner.***" He acknowledged his guilt. He made no excuses, and blamed no one else. He admitted it was all his fault. All he wanted was God's "*mercy.*"

Guess what? He got it! Jesus said:

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

[LUKE 18:14](#)

Jesus said the tax collector went home "***justified before God***"—that is, completely forgiven. What is sobering in this story is that Jesus said the tax collector "***rather than the other***" was forgiven—that is, the Pharisee did *not* go home forgiven. What was the difference between them? The tax collector was willing to admit he was a sinner who needed forgiveness. The Pharisee was willing to admit no such thing.

Forgiveness is ours for the asking. But the asking requires humility. We have to be willing to admit we have blown it and don't measure up on our own merits. Then forgiveness—and freedom from guilt—comes.

The story is told of a king who visited the inhabitants of a prison one day. He talked to a man accused of murder. "I'm innocent," the man said. "They arrested the wrong person." He talked to another man accused of theft, who told him, "I wasn't stealing the horse ... just borrowing it." Another man, accused of treason, said, "I was set up by my enemies." Every man had a claim of innocence.

Finally, the king stopped at the cell of a man who remained silent. "Well," the king said, "I suppose you are an innocent victim, too?"

"No, sir, I'm not," the man replied. "I'm guilty and deserve my punishment."

Turning to the warden, the king said, "Right now, release this man—before he corrupts all the fine innocent people in here!"

Likewise, our freedom before God does not come from covering up or denying our sin, but from admitting it. God is eager to forgive us. But we have to ask.