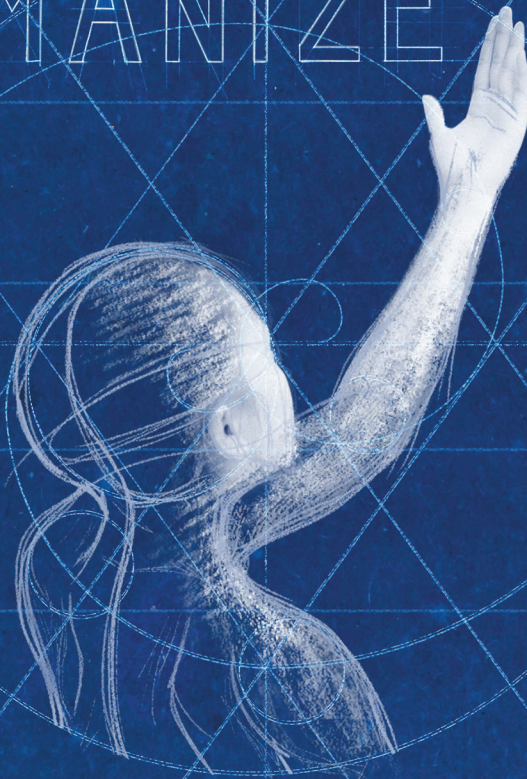


HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.

HUMANIZE ME • Luke 18:9–14 • Tim McConnell • October 27, 2019

There is a stage of human development when we realize that other people exist. I mean for infants. We all start out a little self-centered. You could lay two infants down and they hardly know the other one is there. But at some point we realize there is someone else present. One little child starts to interact with the other one. Share a toy. Smile back and forth. Smack each other in the mouth. That sort of thing. Very healthy. Psychologists call it decentering, realizing for the first time that you are not the center of the universe. There is a phenomenon, however, when a person fails to meet this stage of development. They fail to grasp that they are not the center of the universe. These people are called politicians. Oh, sorry. That's not kind to our public servants. These people are called celebrities. Well, that's not nice to our entertainers. These people are called Lead Pastors. Yeah, that's more in the spirit of our passage today. This is a mirror passage. This is a self-reflection passage. I wish we could each pick up a mirror and hold it out in front of ourselves. Decentering is actually an important capability in a mature adult, the ability to self-reflect. To look at yourself from the outside. To consider your emotions from an objective view. To think about what you think about. That, I think, is what we are called to do today, to self-reflect. What's the best way to be human? Is it the spirit of the Pharisee or the humility of the tax collector?

We close out a series today where we have been trying to figure out what it means to be human. As God made us to be. As Jesus is fighting for us to be. As something inside of us deeply wants to be. Human being. There are lots of forces pushing against our success at simply being human. We name them poverties and we've gone through a pretty good bunch of them, following a list given to us by people in Rwanda who live on less than \$2 a day. They taught us that the real poverties are poverties of hope, dignity, relationship, progress, justice and things like that along with the obvious human needs for food and shelter and health. There was one poverty on that list we have not addressed head on. They said real poverty is not knowing God. Why would they say that? People living hand-to-mouth, struggling, vulnerable lives. Why would they turn to us and say, "The real poverty is not knowing God"? No matter how well you've overcome these other poverties, no matter how much dignity and hope and progress and justice and health and everything else you have, you will never be fully human until you are at home with God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus draws two pictures for us: the spirit of the Pharisee and the humility of the tax collector. "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector" (Luke 18:9–10). I love how Luke sets the scene. He doesn't hold any punches, does he? "To some who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else..." Ouch! To them, Jesus told this parable. Two men went to pray. In what spirit do you look at those around you? Jesus is trying to teach you to be human, in the richest, fullest meaning of the word. How do you look at those around you? There is something ugly inside all of us, something that simply doesn't allow anything else to be said, but "I'm better than you." "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'" (Luke 18:11–12). Does that mean fasting and tithing are bad things to do? No. But look, the object of his prayer is "I." That's the main theme of his prayer, isn't it? I, I, I. His religious devotion fills him with pride. He is doing it right! He has it all together! Thank God I'm not like those other people, those messy ones, those off-beat folks who show up late, forget to sign their forms, lose track of their bills, forget their dry cleaning, can't get their kids to behave, struggle in their marriage, you know, those people whose cheese keeps slipping off their crackers, as Brennan Manning said. The spirit of the Pharisee.

But there's another guy in the room, says Jesus. "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). Pharisees were the high-religious. Tax collectors were the worst of sinners. Luke sometimes groups "tax collectors and sinners" together as though they were part of the same club. The humility of the sinner. He has come to pray but doesn't think he deserves to be there. He does not look up to heaven, but bows his head. His frustration is so deep, his disappointment with himself so profound, it comes out in this physical expression, beating his chest, fighting his own body. What's to be said before God? "Lord have mercy on me. I've got nothing to argue. I've got no leg to stand on. I don't have a record of righteousness, a case to make before your holiness. All I can say is, I want to be here, I want to be Yours, I want to be human again. Have mercy on me." Which one is closer to God?

The religious performer, self-righteous Pharisee? Or is it the broken-hearted sinner, a man without hope save in the mercy of God? 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" (Luke 18:14).

Jesus was a friend of sinners. Prostitutes. Tax collectors. People with failed marriages and bad business decisions and unruly kids and checkered pasts—they loved being around him. Isn't that strange? The holiest man to ever walk the streets, no one more filled with purity and holiness, and people loved being with Him. How is that? The Pharisees called him out. After all, you know a man by the company he keeps. Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus was a friend of sinners. There was no such thing as unclean in the presence of Jesus. How is it that we so often turn this on its head and get backwards again? The spirit of the Pharisee enters and the Friend of Sinners leaves. Jesus was as holy as it gets, and sinners loved His company. Would First Pres be called a friend of sinners? Would I? Would you?

The spirit of the Pharisee is an all-too-common feature of our churches today. It comes when we start to forget, when we fail to remember, we are sinners. Would First Pres be known as a friend to sinners? I hope so, because that's all we've got! I'm the pastor, and I have no business standing here but for the grace of Jesus Christ, the Friend of Sinners who named Himself my friend when my heart was in open rebellion against Him, held onto me, shook off my confusion, filled my wounds with the healing balm of love, and carried me home. Forget that, and the spirit of the Pharisee enters and the joy of the gospel walks right out the door. The way to be human, says Jesus, is not the self-assertive humanism of the world or the self-righteous pride of the churchgoer, it is the humble spirit of the needy, hungry soul, battered and bruised, appealing to the mercy of God. "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

The author Philip Yancey was once teaching a class on Christianity to college students in Chicago. He pointed out the hypocrisy of Moody Bible Institute for not allowing beards when the founder, Dwight Moody, had a rich, full beard. They were all laughing at the inconsistency until one student stood up, red in the face, and said "I feel like walking out on all of you right now! I came to Christ through Moody. All

a Pharisee is, is someone who finds somebody else to be superior to and puts them down. That's what you just did. You're the Pharisees!" Philip was humbled. In pointing out the pharisaism of the pharisaical he had become a Pharisee himself. How do you escape that? How do we escape the tendency to be better-than, superior to, holier-than-thou? How? We come to Jesus on our knees, as sinners, with no hope apart from His saving grace. That's how. And we don't forget.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about how to keep the church in the right spirit, he told him about how he was saved. That he was a sinner. That he was in open rebellion against God when the love of Jesus came to get him. He said it this way, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:13–16). He says, "I think God saved me just to show that he has the power to save the very worst! Just to show how awesome his grace is!" But look at verse 15: "Here is a trustworthy saying... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15). Here is a trustworthy saying, something to keep in mind and never forget: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."

Can you say that? Jesus came for sinners, of whom I am the worst. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. It says it's good to repeat that, it's worth committing to memory, it's worth saying again and again—lest the spirit of the Pharisee infect and the joy of the gospel be expelled. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. I like the Apostle's Creed and that line "he will come to judge the living and the dead." It kind of matters where you put the emphasis. Do you put it on "judge"? He will come to judge! I put it on "he." "He will come to judge." Not you; not me. Jesus is the only judge. Jesus is the one, the only one, who ultimately judges me. He will judge. He will judge. And He came to save sinners like me. Christ

Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. My only hope is in Jesus.

And who is Jesus? At every step, Jesus is the one who took on our inhumanity so we could be human. The weight of all our sin was cast on His shoulders. He died on the cross for us. He made himself less than human so that you and I could be restored to humanity. He gave His body as broken bread, so you and I could be fed eternal life. He became paralyzed, pinned to the cross, burdened and bound, so that you and I could be set free. Jesus took the lowest place, so you and I could sit in honor. He took on indignity, so you and I could have dignity. He took the bite of the wolf, the bloodthirst of the lion and the poison of the serpent—all the hatred of the flesh, the world and the devil—so that you and I could know peace. Jesus suffered injustice, so we could know justice. Who is Jesus? Jesus carried His cross outside the city gates, so you could enter God's City. He became alone, so that you and I would never be alone. Though He was rich, He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. Who is Jesus? He faced down the judges, the judges in this world, the judges in the church, the judges in your own mind—yourself, when you judge yourself too harshly—he faced down all the judges to become our only Judge. And what is His judgment? His declaration is made on the cross. Right there is where He nailed it up for all to read. "I love you so much I died for you."

Do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus this morning? He's right here. I've done what I can to introduce Him to you today, and I want to offer a moment for you to introduce yourself to Him. Many in this room may know Him, and love Him, and try to follow Him. But others of you have never opened your heart to Jesus Christ. Now is the time. This is the moment. I'm going to pray, after just a brief silence, and if you want to introduce yourself to Jesus today—He already knows you, He knows and loves you through and through—you can follow after me in prayer. But nobody prays alone, so every voice, follow along and pray after me now: *Jesus, friend of sinners, before You this morning is one more. I am without hope, except for Your amazing grace. Lord, forgive my rebellion, wash me clean of my sins, carry me home to the Father. Thank You for giving Your life, now I give You mine. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

STUDY GUIDE
HUMANIZE ME • "Human Being"
Luke 18:9–14

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 18:9–14.

- 1) Reread verse 9. Do you know anyone like this? Who do you know who exhibits this level of arrogance and judgment?
- 2) Reread verse 10. These men are in very different social circles. Pharisees tended to be very legalistic and often viewed themselves as the morality police. Tax collectors were typically viewed as outsiders; traitors who had sided with Rome. Do we typically see these people at our church? What other sorts of people tend to make their way into the pews?
- 3) Reread verses 11–12. When have you had these sorts of thoughts or viewed yourself in this way?
- 4) Reread verse 13. When have you been like the tax collector?
- 5) What has influenced you to be more like one or the other?
- 6) Reread verse 14. When have you experienced these things to be true?
- 7) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Being truly human involves being like Jesus and coming into a right relationship with God, by humble repentance and faith. Who in your life needs to know Jesus in this way? Pray for this person.

IN: Connect with Each Other

How might you encourage this person in their journey toward Jesus? (e.g. pray for them, have a spiritual conversation in the coming week, invite them to join you at the winter Alpha course, etc.)