



WHAT ABOUT...? • COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY • WEEK 10

What About Hypocrisy?

A guided conversation from the June 14, 2026 sermon by Elder Rick Closius.

SUMMARY

What about the hypocrites in the church – and what if one of them is you? Preaching this Sunday at Christchurch Miami from Luke 18:9-14, Elder Rick Closius opens with the Hubble Space Telescope: a mirror ground to breathtaking precision against the wrong specification, then tested by a device calibrated to the same flaw – so it passed every inspection while being blind to its own blindness.

That, he says, is exactly what hypocrisy and self-righteousness do to the human heart. In Jesus' parable, the Pharisee measures himself not against God's holiness but against the people around him, and of course he comes out ahead. It's the trap of comparative righteousness – and it thrives even in sound, Bible-believing churches.

But the parable turns on the man who brought nothing. The tax collector couldn't even lift his eyes; he just beat his chest and prayed seven words: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' And Jesus says it was that man, not the religious professional, who went home justified – declared righteous as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

This guide walks your group from the wrong mirror to the great reversal: everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. The invitation is the one the Pharisee refused – to stop performing and come to the Physician sick.

PRAYER OPENING PRAYER

Father, before we say a word about anyone else, turn the mirror on us. Show us our own hearts, quiet our defenses, and make us honest enough to receive mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

START ICE BREAKER

Be honest: when you picture a 'hypocrite in the church,' who comes to mind – and how sure are you that you're not on someone else's list? Why is hypocrisy so easy to see in others and so hard to see in ourselves?

LUKE 18:9-14 • ESV

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

ROMANS 3:23-24 • ESV

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

MARK 2:17 • ESV

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

01 THE WRONG MIRROR.

Elder Rick opened with the Hubble telescope — a mirror ground to perfection against the wrong standard, 'blind to its own blindness.' Where have you caught yourself grading your life against the wrong standard? What were you using instead of the holiness of God?

02 TWO MEN, TWO PRAYERS.

Read Luke 18:9-14 together. What do you notice about HOW the Pharisee prays versus how the tax collector prays — their posture, their words, who they mention? What does each prayer reveal about how they see themselves?

03 COMPARATIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The sermon named the trap of feeling righteous by comparison — 'at least I'm not like them.' Who do you most often compare yourself to in order to feel okay? Be specific. How has needing to be better than them shaped the way you treat them?

04 CONTEMPT.

The Pharisee's prayer drips with disdain for the tax collector. Why does self-righteousness almost always curdle into looking down on people? Where have you felt contempt lately that might be exposing something about your own heart?

05 SEVEN WORDS.

The tax collector prayed, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner,' and went home justified. Why is it so hard for churchgoing people to pray a prayer that simple and that exposed? What do you tend to add to it to defend yourself?

06 JUSTIFIED AS A GIFT.

Romans 3:23-24 welds the bad news and good news together: all have sinned, AND are justified by grace as a gift. Why do we instinctively try to climb to God on our own performance? Where are you still living like you have to earn what you've already been given?

07 RESPECTABLE SINS.

Elder Rick warned that hypocrisy thrives even in sound churches — theology used as a weapon, performative family life, service without love. Which 'respectable' version of self-righteousness is most tempting in a church like ours? Where do you see it in yourself?

08 COME SICK.

Jesus came not for the righteous but for sinners — the sick, not the well. What is one specific area where you've been pretending to be well? What would it look like this week to stop performing and come to Jesus honest about your need?

APPLY LIFE APPLICATION

Elder Rick's whole message turns on the one move the Pharisee refused to make: admitting he was sick. This week, practice coming honest.

- 1 Name your comparison.** Catch yourself this week in the act of 'at least I'm not like them.' When you feel that little lift, name it out loud as the trap it is — then pray for the very person you were looking down on.
- 2 Pray the seven words.** Once a day this week, pray the tax collector's prayer with nothing added: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' No résumé, no defense. Let it be the whole prayer.
- 3 Drop one performance.** Pick one place where you've been projecting a devotion that isn't fully real — a curated image, a managed reputation — and tell one trusted person the honest truth about it.

You don't have to clean up before you come. The Physician came for the sick. Come sick.

REMEMBER KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Self-righteousness swaps God's holiness for an easier standard — and goes blind to its own blindness.
- ▶ Comparative righteousness lets us feel tall while standing in a hole — and it always breeds contempt.
- ▶ The tax collector's seven words — 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner' — are the shortest distance to grace.
- ▶ Justification is a gift, not a wage: declared righteous through Christ, not earned by performance.
- ▶ Hypocrisy hides best in sound churches, dressed up as theology, image, or service without love.
- ▶ Jesus came not for the well but for the sick. Your sin is why He came, not what keeps you away.

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Come sick — the Physician is in.

PRAYER CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we came in quick to spot the hypocrites and slow to see ourselves. Thank You that the parable ends in mercy — that the man who could only cry 'be merciful to me, a sinner' went home justified by Your grace, as a gift. Strip away our performances, make our devotion real, and let us walk out humbled, honest, and held — not by what we've earned, but by what Christ has done. In Jesus' name, amen.

CHRISTCHURCH MIAMI

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