



Relationship Case Study: Jesus and the Pharisees

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Objectives

- Participants will learn that Jesus challenged the Pharisees and their hypocrisy.
- Participants will learn of a Pharisee who believed in Christ.
- Participants will learn how Jesus deals with people by His Word to correct them, teach them, and bring them to faith.

Opening Activity

Discuss with your group:

1. What do you do to make yourself look good to other people?
2. Discuss how long it takes to “get ready” in the morning. How long does it take to fix your hair? Pick out your clothes?

Background

The Pharisees, or “separate ones” were a group of religious Jews of Jesus’ time. Pharisees were dedicated students and teachers of the Old Testament laws. They were very strict in keeping the Laws of God, and believed that by obeying God’s rules, they could earn their way to heaven. The Pharisees often followed Jesus from place to place, questioning and challenging His teachings. Ultimately, the Pharisees couldn’t get their claims against Him to “stick,” but they and others had Jesus killed anyway.

Say a prayer before you get started in Bible study, asking God to lead your hearts and minds closer to Him.

Studying the Word:

Read Matthew 9:9-13 out loud in your group.

- Jesus is “reclining” in this reading, perhaps having a social visit or sharing a meal. Who else is there with him at the table? Why is this a big deal? Who are the people who might be sitting with Jesus if this story was happening today?
- What was the question that the Pharisees asked of the disciples? (see v. 11)
- Jesus responded by telling the Pharisees that only sick people need a doctor. What is Jesus saying to the Pharisees? Do you think that the Pharisees were “righteous”? (See Romans 3:10 and 3:20.)
- As Matthew 9:13 says, Jesus came to call sinners. What sins would Jesus be “calling out” in today’s teenage culture? Are you guilty of any of these?

Read Matthew 23:25-28.

- Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites. A hypocrite is a person whose actions conflict with their stated beliefs. Why were the Pharisees hypocrites?
- What two objects did Jesus compare the Pharisees to in this passage? What sin was Jesus uncovering in the Pharisees?
- Do people today still hide their sinfulness from others? Why

In the 1500s, Martin Luther coined the phrase “Simul iustus et Peccator,” which means “simultaneously saint and sinner.” Luther says:

“The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfil the law and are not without sinful desires. They are like sick people in the care of a physician.”

Read Romans 6:11.

- Are Christians hypocrites? Can a person be a forgiven believer in Christ and a sinner at the same time? What's the difference between a hypocrite and a forgiven sinner?

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and also served on the Jewish ruling council. He was likely afraid of what the other Pharisees would think about him associating with Jesus, so he approached the Lord at night.

Read John 3:1-8

- What words does Nicodemus use that shows he is different from the other Pharisees? From other places in the Gospels, what evidence has Jesus given that He is "from God"?
- What was Nicodemus' attitude toward Jesus—Curious? Questioning? Critical? Harsh? Other?
- Did Nicodemus' attitude make a difference in his faith? What do you think?

Throughout chapter three, Jesus and Nicodemus go through a question and answer session that builds up to the most famous verse of the New Testament—John 3:16. Everyone read it out loud together. What truth do you find in this verse?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

It takes one to know one. Throughout this brief study, we have begun to discover that we are not so different from the Pharisees. People are still hypocrites. Without Christ, people are still lost in sin and need to be born anew. What Good News does Jesus have for the Pharisees inside of each of us?

Take Action

Ask God for forgiveness for the sins that separate you from Him and the times that your words and actions have not matched up.

Thank God for the forgiveness and life that is yours because of faith in Jesus, as He suffered, died, and rose for you.

Commit yourself to connect to God's Word this week, asking for God's help to live as a sinner and a saint in His Kingdom.

