

ADMITTING OUR NEED FOR THE GOOD NEWS Luke 18:9-14

There they were. Two men...standing. Not close, to be sure. But, you could see them both.

And if someone could have spotted a greater contrast than what presented itself that morning in these two...Well, one can hardly imagine it.

They both had come to pray. Come the place where worship was what one should do. When nearby, you would come to the temple. If distant, you would nonetheless face it, like Jonah who prayed even from the stomach of the whale, "I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall look again toward your holy temple" (Jonah 2:4). When you prayed, somehow, someway you direct your heart toward the "holy of holies."

The one, a Pharisee, positioned himself inside, on the stairs leading into the Court of Women, not far from the "holy place." By himself. His posture confident, head raised, hands up and out. Yet purposely separate. It was *separation* that the 6,000 Phariseesⁱ were known for. A proud brotherhood fanatical to avoid *anything* considered unclean – unclean foods, unclean places, even all kinds of unclean people.

And so he prayed, not so much to God but rather about himself. About his successes in separation. About his own resume of righteousness. *God! I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers or...* [and clearly, he had noticed the other] *even like this TAX collector.*

He paused, but only for a moment. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I that I get...

Then oddly, his prayer (if you can call it that) ended. "Unusual," you say? Not really. Another, a Rabbi Nehunia, was often heard to pray:

I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou has set my portion with those who sit in the *Beth ha-Midrash* (House of learning) and Thou has not set my portion with those who sit in (street) corners. For I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk. I labour and they labour, but I labour and receive a reward, and they labour and do not receive a

reward. I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world, and they run to the pit of destruction.

"I," "I," "I"...the Pharisee's prayer. "I have done what I need to do – even more!" I am so good. Surely, I am acceptable to You. I am more than good enough."

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off...

If it was difficult to watch the peacock-like Pharisee, it was spell-binding to watch the broken businessman. He was a "tax-harvester," reaping in for Rome, and himself. Scouring the financial landcapes of his own burdened, weary countrymen. He knew he was hated...but even more, he knew he was far from God.

So he came to pray, but broken. So broken he could not come close. So broken he would not even look up. Expecting, it seemed, nothing. No recognition. No "There...there..." false assurances. He came in low with no excuses. No "but I's." Just deep guilt about his sin, and shame over choices made, dishonesties perpetrated, a life at least to this point mis-spent in pride, in greed, in "me."

GOD...BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER.

That's all? No promises made about what he would do *if* God extended his mercy? No bargain struck. No deal made? Just an open hearted-felt admission that at core he was a sinner, and a simple request: *God, please...be full of mercy*?

So...what did God do with these two men? Who stepped away from the temple truly **RIGHT** with and **RESCUED** by God? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ said it:

¹⁴ I tell you, this man (the tax collector) 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."

Australia's great theologian Leon Morris summarizes this so well:

[The tax collector's] is the plea that is accepted. The tax collector went home **justified**, reckoned (by God) as righteous, 'acquitted of his sins' (NEB). This is the great [word of Paul the Apostle], seen here in the teaching of Jesus. The principle behind it all is that he **who exalts himself will be humbled**. No man has anything of which he can boast before God. By contrast, **he who humbles**

himself will be exalted (cf. Luke 14:11). The penitent sinner who humbly looks for God's mercy will find it.iv

May I ask you before we go on...which one of these two men are you?

I have no doubt but that there are Pharisees and Tax-Collectors here today.

And, quite frankly, all of us start out as Pharisees...somehow convinced that what I really need to do to be accepted by God is to do enough good things. And unless we get over our own fascination righteousness—that somehow I'm better than all kinds of people I can think of--, someday we will stand before God and pathetically unveil our own trophy case of good deeds in the sight of a utterly perfect and holy God. Who will promptly say, "I'm sorry...I never knew you. Didn't you read, or at least listen to My word, which said "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

All peacock-like Pharisees need to become broken tax-collectors. Coming to God with but one prayer: "God, I'm a sinner. Please, be merciful." And here's the good news. Broken, humbled tax-collectors go home *justified*. Declared righteous, freely, by a merciful God because...because God the Son who became a man, paid the death penalty I and my sin deserved.

It's called THE GOSPEL...the GOOD NEWS...and God loves to extend His mercy, His rescue, to anyone who will approach Him in faith like the broken Tax-Collector.

HOW WORN IS MY WELCOME MAT?

During these winter weeks, on Sunday mornings, this team – Christ Community Church – a bunch of tax-collectors who have been justified by the mercy of God through faith, are worshipping a God who loves to rescue anyone who will cry out to Him. But quite frankly, we live in a world where many of the people we live nearby, with whom we work, some even within our own families, still do not understand the rescue that is available. And...

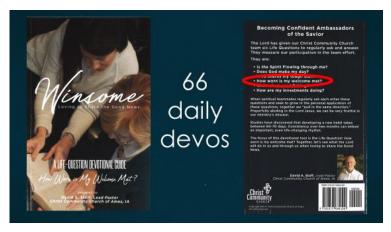
Winsome Teaching Series Key-Idea

Because we love God we disciples of Christ Jesus love to share what God loves to do

This morning, because of your generous giving, we are able to put into our hands a tool to help us

better share what God loves to do. So what is this, and how can I use this to better understand the gospel, and to share it with others?

In essence, this is a "devotional guide." It contains 66 devotionals, enough for seven weeks of meeting with the Lord in His word, and interacting with Him about understanding and sharing what it



means to become and be a disciple of Jesus

Christ. It's designed to imbed in our hearts our

4th life Question – "How worn is my welcome

mat"? That is, am I as Jesus' disciple regularly

welcoming anyone closer to meeting and

following Christ by faith. So, let's take a closer

look.

Suggested tips on using Winsome: Loving to Share the Good News

#1 Understand how it's organized (Table of Contents, pp.2-3)

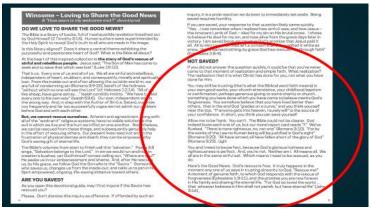


THE GOOD NEWS WHICH SAVES

THE DIFFERENCE
THE GOOD NEWS MAKES

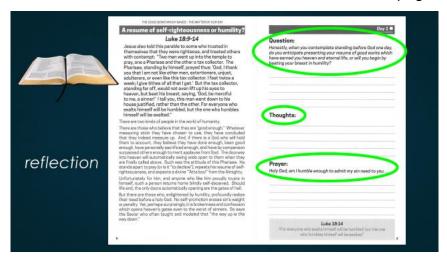
LOVING TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

#2 Listen to "the good news" in the introduction (pp.4-5)



#3 Interact with and talk to the Spirit of God over on the

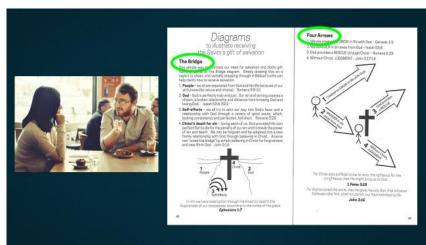
• QUESTION:, THOUGHTS, and PRAYER page



Journal Summary pages (after a section)

#4 Master the DIAGRAM pages (pp.62-63)...

- The Bridge
- The 4 Arrows... Practicing drawing and explaining them with your family members, your Connect Group members, others.

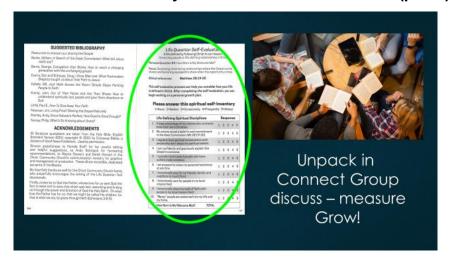


**TIP: tell "your story" by using a diagram

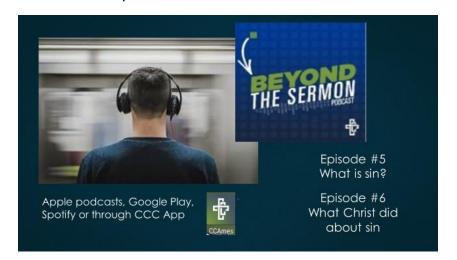
#5 Be ready to use the SUGGESTED PRAYERS (p.64)



#6 Assess where you are with Life Question #4 (p.166)



#7 Listen to BEYOND THE SERMON podcasts Episodes #5 and #6





A GOOD CHALLENGE

So the question might be: Can I really grow in sharing Christ?

On the first day of this new year, 90,000 orthodox Jews gathered at New Jersey's MET LIFE stadium for a celebration more than 7 years in the making. What were they celebrating?

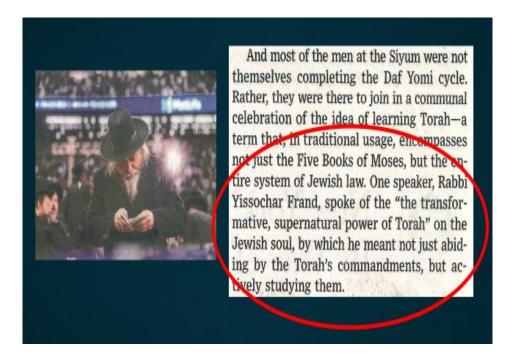
People who commit to Daf Yomi—Hebrew for "daily page"—read one folio page of the Talmud every day for 2,711 consecutive days, all following the same order, until they have traversed the entire text. The Talmud, which forms the basis of Jewish law, records the debates of ancient rabbis about ordinary civil matters like torts and divorce, as well as specifically religious topics like how to keep the Sabbath and celebrate holidays—not to mention the arcane ritual procedures governing animal sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem.

But this Super Bowl-like setting was permeated by references to the Talmud, which Jews were studying more than 1,000 years before Columbus. On the stadium's video crawl, instead of statistics about touchdowns, there were statistics about Talmud: which is the shortest chapter and which the longest, or how many times a particular rabbinic sage is mentioned in the text.

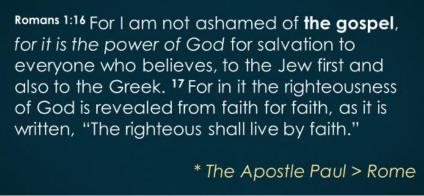
Meanwhile, in between speeches, the Jumbotrons showed expertly produced
videos like "Heroes of the Daf," an
inspirational montage featuring
people who overcame obstacles to
learn their page of Talmud every
day. They ranged from ordinary
fathers and husbands who got up
in the dark to study before work,
to Mendy-Rosenberg, a Brooklyn

man suffering from advanced ALS, who manages to study with the help of a computer that responds to his eye movements.

Why in the world would they do this?



Here is the truth – there is no true rescue, no salvation from sin, no forgiveness and adoption into the family of God through the Torah (i.e., the Law) nor the Talmud. With all due respect to their passion, they are celebrating something that cannot rescue.







Josephus' estimate, as noted by F.F. Bruce in New Testament History (Doubleday, 1969), 79.

9 | Page WINSOME #2

¹¹ Talmud, Berakhoth 28b (Soncino translation), cited in Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke: An introduction and commentary (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 264. Leon Lamb Morris was an Australian New Testament scholar. Born in Lithgow, New South Wales, Morris was ordained to the Anglican ministry in 1938. He received his PhD at the University of Cambridge in England on the subject which became his first major book, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross. Wikipedia Born: March 15, 1914, Lithgow, Australia Died: July 24, 2006, Kew, Australia

iii Commentators universally point out that fasting twice a week was more than the Law required.

V Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 265. V Adam Kirsch, "The Super Bowl of Jewish Learning," *Wall Street Journal*, Saturday/Sunday January 4-5, 2020, C4.