



# Links Players

## A STORY WE NEED TO READ AGAIN

*“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, NIV)*

THE WORLD IS SO FULL OF BOOKS that Winston Churchill reportedly once wept in a library because of all the good books he would never read. He was, like all of us, a victim of Solomon’s observation: “Of the making of books there is no end” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Solomon, remember, wrote this centuries before the printing press.

I am a reader, as most writers are. And my practice, since there are so many of them, is to zip from one book to the next. Others read the same books again and again. When we approach Scripture, we should actually do a bit of both: read sweepingly and read deliberately. Hurry up and wait, we might say. Return again and again to central passages, but try to read them all from time to time. Come to think of it, a lot of golf’s teaching professionals will tell you the same: Spend a lot of time working on your putting, chipping, and driver, but be sure to stay comfortable with every club in your bag.

Reflecting this way caused me to think of one of Jesus’ parables that I need to read repetitively. Its driving truth corrects me every time—which means I’m sadly prone to falling off the line in this matter.

That parable is the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. If you need to read it again like me, in synopsis it goes like this: The two men head to the temple to pray. The Pharisee, confident in himself and especially his “rightness,” thanks God he is not like sinners, including the tax collector. Meanwhile, the tax collector cries out in humble contrition. He knows he’s a sinner and he needs God’s mercy. Jesus, as you might guess, concluded by saying it’s humility God rewards.

You see the problem? It’s very easy to slip into thinking we’re smart. Our savvy decisions lead to success and favor with our investors; our politics are confirmed by popular pundits and our near neighbors. We may even get to feeling certain that no church has it as right about God as ours does. And then someone like Brant Hansen reminds us to read the story again when he writes: “I get the impression from Scripture that God would rather be in communication with an immature, selfish person than be ignored by a theologically fastidious one.” Gulp.

The story is simple. So is the lesson. Now why is it so hard to remember?

**Opening questions** When it comes to golf, what kind of practice do you most enjoy? How do you know that it helps your game?

**READING** Luke 18:9-14; 1 Samuel 2:6-10; Philippians 2:5-8

### Examining the parable (Luke 18)

Who is the stated audience of the parable? Do you think you fit the bill? What stands out about each man? How does Jesus’ teaching train your own disavowal of pride and move toward humility?

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### God’s eminent place (1 Samuel 2)

First a story, now a prayer. How do Hannah’s words put us in our place before the Lord? What value would come from committing a passage like this to memory and carrying it with you throughout the day?

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### Christ’s humility (Philippians 2)

What does Christ’s demonstration of humility stir in you? With Christ in mind, can we say that is possible to go too far in pursuing humility?

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