**I Love to Tell the Story**

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**Day 156 The Pharisee and the Publican Luke 18: 9-14**

Guided reflection:

When do spiritual disciplines become empty rituals? I try to discipline myself in my spiritual growth with prayer and meditation, devotionals, worship, tithing, intentional reaching out to the poor but when do I become like the Pharisees in this parable?Maybe it is our motivation behind our lists – one is to be intentional about staying in love with Jesus. The other is to make myself look good and worthy. When the sinner man beat his breast and prayed “God be merciful to me a sinner”, it came from a broken and honest place while the prayer of the Pharisee came from a proud and arrogant place. Have you ever felt pleased with yourself for all your good works? Have you ever humbled yourself and faced your sin and asked God to forgive you, just as you are?

Guided prayer

 *“God, be merciful to me… me, a sinner… one who stands in the need of your grace. Amen”*

**We begin now (Matt 19-20; Mark 10/; Luke 18-19) to Journey to Jerusalem**

**Day 157 Marriage and Divorce Matt 19: 1-2, Mark 10: 1-12**

Guided reflection:

As a women who wrestled with divorce and dysfunction, I read a book about this scripture with the question in my heart: *is there grace for persons who leave to become more whole*? The author said that it was never God’s plan for marriage to end in divorce but neither was it God’s plan for us to live in dysfunctional situations. That is why Moses made the concept of divorce. Divorce offers grace when life falls short of God’s dream. Sometimes our reality falls short of God’s dream, but never short of God’s grace. But, obviously, ending a marriage is not something to do lightly.

Guided Prayer:

*“Dear God, help me to do all within my power to live as whole and loving as possible with my spouse. If there are places of deep pain, will you come and make us whole? Help me to know that your love and your grace is bigger than I am. Amen”*

**Day 158 Jesus Blesses the Children Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18: 15-17**

Guided reflection:

Babies and little children were a nuisance to the disciples. They wanted them out of sight and out of mind, but Jesus had another way of looking at children. Like the chorus, “Jesus loves

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the little children, all the children of the world”. That is why I like to make a big fuss about babies – the first time they come to worship, when they are baptized, when they go to Sunday School, when they sing their little songs. Oh, the joy of little children. They are filled with promise and potential.

Guided prayer:

*“I love to know that Jesus would have hugged and kissed me as a baby… and would want to hold my babies close. But now that I am grown, Loving God, help me keep my heart and mind open in the innocence and wonder of a little child. Help me give my inner child a chance to influence the way I look at the world and all of your children. Amen”*

**Day 159 The Rich Young Man Matt 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:-30**

Guided reflection:

A driven, successful young man has the chance to speak to Jesus. He wants to do everything right - but Jesus turns what he holds as truth, upside down! The young man believes that if you watch your behavior and do all the right things, you will get into heaven and be successful along the way! But Jesus must have sensed a hint of a compulsive do-gooder in this young man and tells him to give away all that he has. It says he went away sad but we do not know whether he eventually figured out that his stuff was not as important as loving people, I hope he did. Jesus explained to the Disciples that those who are rich in earthly things have a harder time facing their need of a savior – they think they can handle it on their own! But, Jesus adds : “Nothing is impossible with God!”Always a word of hope can be found!

Guided prayer:

*“Loving God, are there things in my heart that I have placed too much importance? I know you want me to be a responsible person, but do I think I can handle it all on my own? Do I think that my stuff is a measuring stick for my worthiness? Help me see past my stuff and find your heart. Amen”*

**Day 160 The Parable of the laborers in the vineyard Matthew 20: 1-16**

Guided reflection:

This parable has always made me uncomfortable because I have focused on the unfairness of the owner’s pay scale! The owner of the vineyard was never home, he was always out looking for more folks, so maybe the story is about the owner’s heart that wanted as many to work as they could that way the work was done and all had what they needed. You see, God does not give us what we deserve. God always gives us more and wants all included! That is what grace is about – unmerited favor! This is one of those “abundance vs. scarcity” parables – there is enough for everyone!

Guided Prayer:

*“Thank you God, for finding a place for all of us to work and be of value. Thank you for being more concerned about including us all than in what is fair or unfair. Thank goodness you do not give me what I deserve! Thank you for your love and grace to me. Amen”*

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