

Prayers God Always Answers—
Prayers that Are Humble Cries for
Mercy



LUKE 18:9–14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ 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. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ 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!’ ¹⁴ 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.”

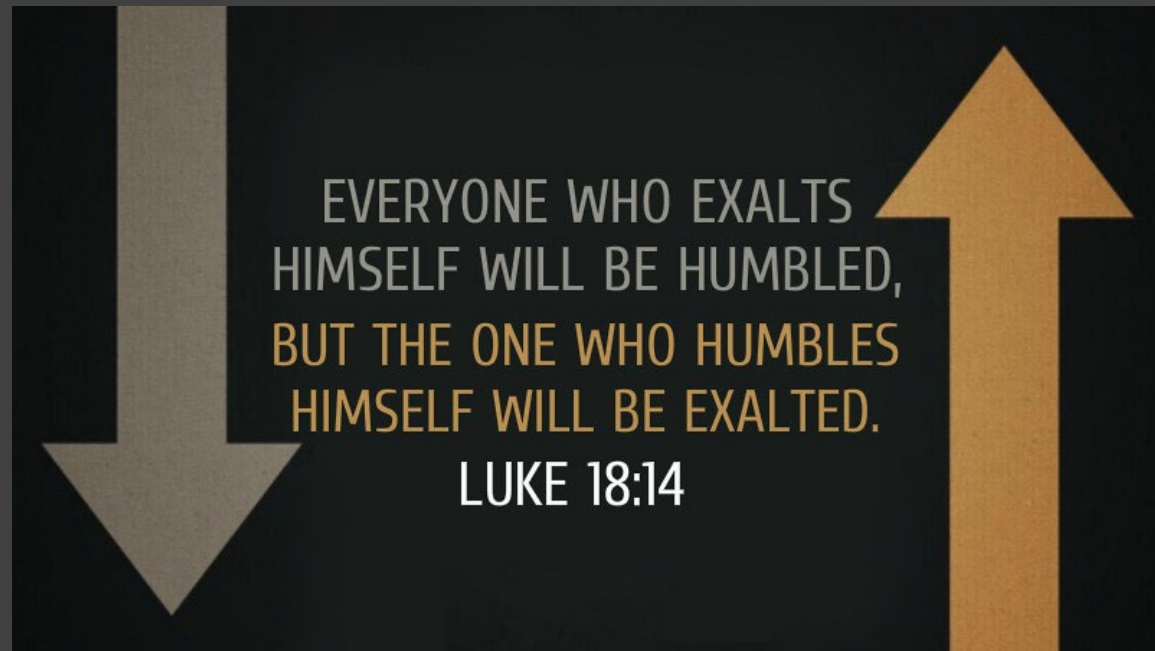


When we
pray with the
humble spirit of
the blind beggar,
the prodigal son,
or the sinful tax
collector,

God hears our prayers.



1. God hears desperate, humble people who cry out to him for mercy.
 - The point of the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is that *God answers people who have finally gotten over themselves.*



Psalm 138:6

⁶ For though the LORD is high, **he regards the lowly**, but the haughty he knows from afar.

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also **with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit**, to **revive** the spirit of the **lowly**, and to **revive** the heart of the **contrite**.”





The *blind beggars*
Jesus healed in
Jericho simply
cried out:

“**Lord, have mercy
on us!**”

(Matthew 20:30).

Jesus pictured God's concern for sinners who turn to him with the story of the *Prodigal Son*.

Luke 15:21–24

²¹ “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’”



Mercy is
that part
of God's
love that is
expressed
toward
those who
are in
need.

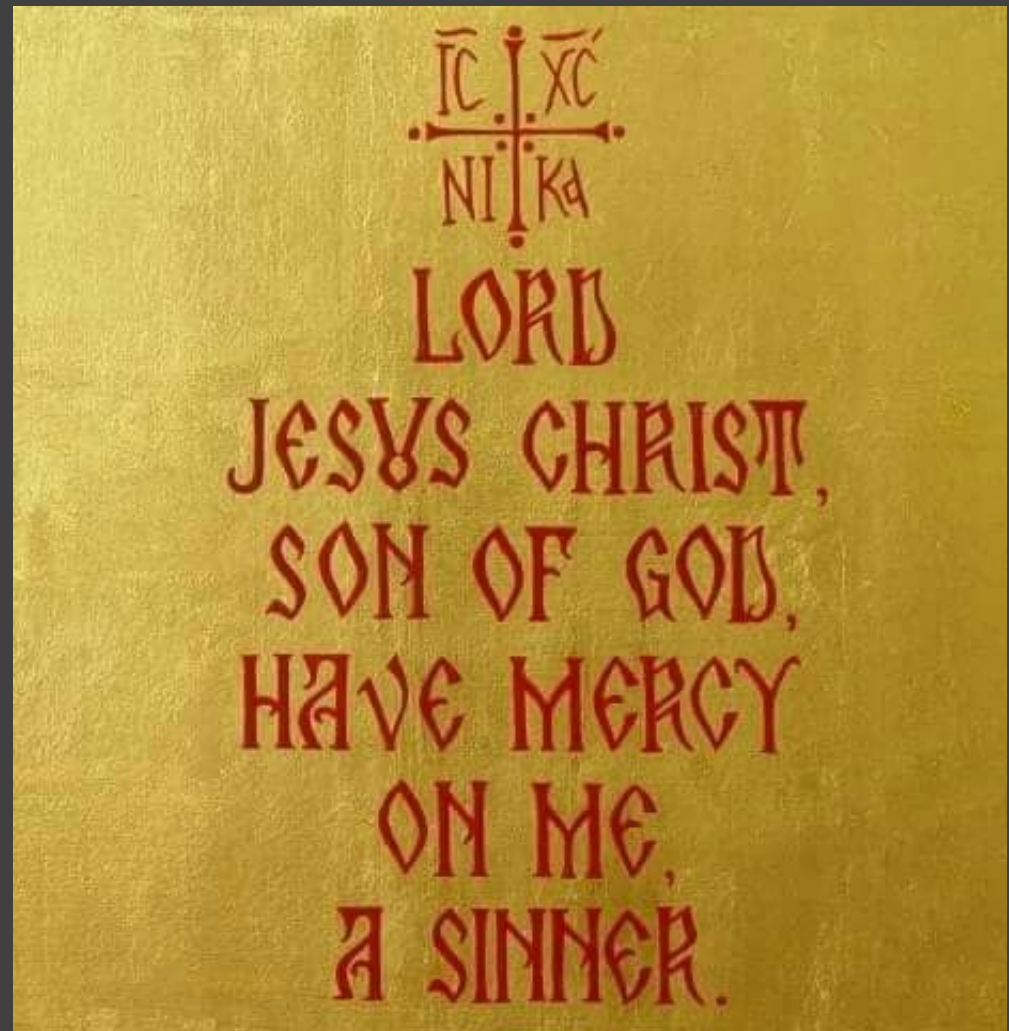


There's good reason why one of the oldest, simplest prayers of Judaism and of Christendom is the simple "Lord, have mercy."



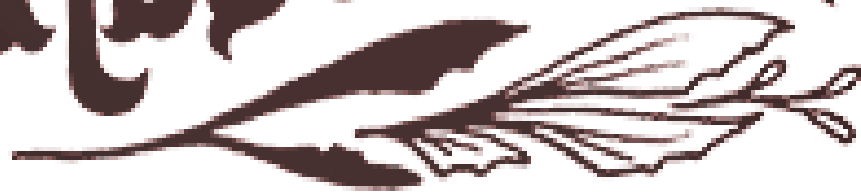
***“Lord Jesus
Christ, Son of
God, have mercy
on me, a sinner.”***

—The *Jesus
Prayer* of the
Desert Fathers by
way of the
Eastern Orthodox
Church.





LORDYMERCY





When we humbly cry out for mercy, God hears our prayers.

2. That God hears humble cries for mercy is **good news for desperate, humble people.**

- The tax collector would *not even lift up his eyes* to heaven because he was *ashamed of his sins*, but beat his breast—a sign of sorrow and contrition.



- He depended on God's mercy and prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."
- Jesus said that God answered the prayers of that man, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee who tried to justify himself.





- If you are in *trouble* or *distress*, if you're *out of answers*, if you've *run out of your own resources*, and you've *hit rock bottom*, . . . *rejoice*.
- God is waiting to hear and answer your prayer.

Matthew 5:3

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

πενιχρός (*penichros*)

- What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?
- The New Testament uses two words for poor. The first is the word for the *working poor* who earn just enough to get by—*day laborers*.
- The poor widow in Luke 21 gave the “*widow’s mite*” (KJV). “Two small copper coins” (ESV).
- These were two *lepta*. The *lepton* was the smallest denomination of Jewish money.
1/8 of a cent.
- Jesus commended her for giving it because “it was all she had to live on.”
- A quarter of a cent!
- The word Jesus uses to describe this poor widow was *penichros*.

πτωχός (*ptōchos*)

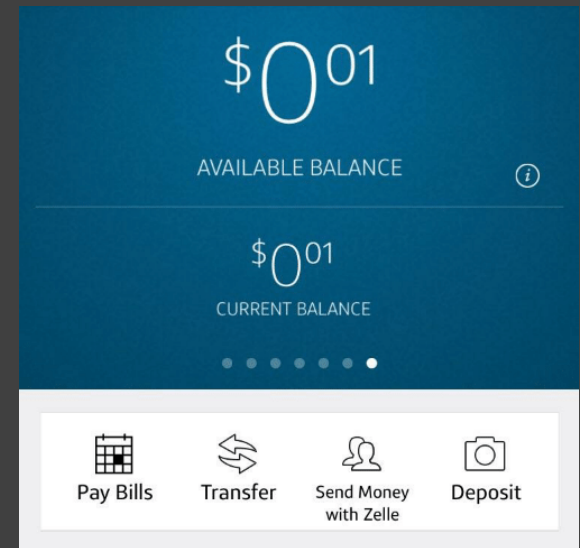
- But that's **not** the word he uses when he says “blessed are the poor in spirit.”
There's **a worse word for poverty:**
Ptochos.
- This is someone who is **completely destitute.**
- The begging poor.

- The verb form means “shrink, cower, or cringe.”
- Picture yourself crouching on a street corner covering your face with one hand for shame and begging with the other.
- Jesus uses the stronger word, *ptochos*, in this beatitude.





- This is difficult for us to understand or to do.
- It doesn't make sense.
- It's like applying for an American Express Card with *no income* or *no assets* while *owing the equivalent of the national debt*.



U.S. NATIONAL DEBT

\$25,142,400,455,245



- When we declare spiritual bankruptcy, **God pays the debt.**
- **We inherit the riches of heaven.**
- And he provides us with an **unlimited stream of grace** to forgive our sins and meet our needs.

- The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the **poor in spirit.**

James 4:6

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

3. That God hears humble cries for mercy is also good news for proud, self-righteous Pharisees!

- When science finally discovers **the center of the universe**, a lot of people will be disappointed to find they are not it.
- At least now you know what the problem is: *self*!
- And know that Jesus' is ready to set you free from yourself!

- Christians who have walked closely with God and have known refreshing seasons of revival and spiritual awakening often spoke about something they called *the surrendered life*, *the exchanged life*, or *the higher Christian life*.



These were various ways of trying to describe the abundant life that flows from a person who fully understands that by faith he has died to sin, has been truly born again, and is now *identified with* and *participates in* the life of Christ.



Colossians 3:1–4.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- When a believer gets to the end of himself, gets over himself, and finally *dies* to self, then Christ comes to live the same perfect life he lived in the flesh in and through that person.
- Jesus *identifies with* and *fastens himself to us* in such a way that he takes us with himself down into death.
- He takes us through the *Cross*, down into the *tomb*, and up *out of the tomb*.
- We then *rise and ascend with him* and are now *seated with him in the heavenly places*.
- *That is our new position* in Christ.
- *That is the great basic fact of the Gospel.*

Ephesians 2:4–6

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and *raised us up with him* and *seated us with him in the heavenly places* in Christ Jesus.



- This has a *profound effect* on your *prayers*.
- When you have died with Christ, been raised with Christ, ascended with Christ, and seated at the right hand of God with Christ, you don't have to **go very far** or **talk very loud** for Christ to hear you.
- Just close your eyes and start talking because *you're sitting right next to him*.

Conclusion

- Are you desperate? Out of answers?
- Rejoice, God is waiting to hear your prayer.

- Tired of living like a Pharisee, trusting in your own righteousness and praying prayers that don't reach any higher than the ceiling?
- *Stop trusting in your own righteousness.*
- None of us is really all that **good**, all that **smart**, or all that **deserving** to start with.
- Get to the end of yourself, get over yourself, and die to yourself.
- Make a daily habit of confessing and forsaking every known sin.

- Take God at his word.
- Start learning and believing what God says about your ***new position*** and ***new identity*** in Christ.
- The Christian life is ***not*** primarily about ***following an example***.
- It isn't an ***imitation*** of Christ; it is a ***participation*** in Christ—a participation in the very life that Jesus Christ the perfect man lived in the flesh.

- *He's still living that life* in the flesh through the daily lives of those who live in him.

