

## **GOD'S GOT THIS: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

I have to admit, sorting out my thoughts about this Sunday's Gospel lesson, especially as it relates to the concept of stewardship, presented a real challenge. Truthfully, this lesson makes me squirm a little bit. I mean, I try to do what we are "supposed" to do. I show up at church. I turn in my pledge on time and pay it faithfully. I volunteer in numerous ministries. I pray and study. But saying all that, even to myself, makes me like the Pharisee, right? On the other hand, while I see humility as a virtue that I strive to embody, I have to admit, I have often placed more faith in myself and my own efforts than I have in God.

My family has been going through a tough season. My beloved mother-in-law fell ill and died suddenly. Not long after, my father-in-law became ill and my husband was stretched thin as the only child to care for his father, who lived several hours away. My father-in-law too passed, and we were left with the daunting task of dealing with their estate. During that same period of time, I also lost my grandmother, and we graduated and sent two boys off to college. Throughout all of this, as the matriarch, I've felt it was my duty, and my earnest desire, keep it all together for everyone. And just about the time I thought I might have it all under control, my husband, our sole provider and my partner in all things, was diagnosed with a rare and serious cancer requiring significant treatment.

Talk about being brought to your knees, quite literally. Among the many questions I had for God at hearing this troubling news were these: "Why me? Why do I deserve this? Don't I do the things you want me to do?" After much prayer, counsel, and reading of scripture, I was reminded and came to really hear what I needed to hear: I do not "purchase" freedom from life's hardships by good works, but equally I do not have to purchase God's grace. When you really accept that, the magnitude of that gift is overwhelming. While we are not promised an earthly life of ease, I do have God's promise that I can give all of my fear, worry, pain and doubt to God, and He will carry all of that for me.

I stopped trying to manage and control everything for everyone in my home, and instead asked God for guidance, strength and comfort. Though I was worried about mounting medical bills and extra expenses, we raised our pledge last year as step out in faith. And as He has always done, God carried us through the worst time in our lives. Receiving such gifts of mercy and grace, despite my shortcomings, is in a word, humbling.

Submitted with God's help by Bliss Peterson