

In ? You Trust

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[0 : 00] And let's pray as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, speak to us now from your word in the Bible, we pray. Open our hearts and minds not only to understand, but to act upon your word, that we may, at the final day, be found righteous in your presence.

We pray this for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen. In order for the admissions staff of our college here at New York University to get to know you, the applicant, better, we ask you now to answer this final and following question, having already made your other application questions for entry to our college.

Are there any significant experiences that you have had or accomplishments that you have realised that have helped to define you as a person? And this is a true story, and this is what Hugh Gallagher wrote in his application for New York University.

I am a dynamic figure, often seen scaling walls and crushing ice. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention.

I translate ethnic slurs for Cuban refugees. I write award-winning operas. I manage time efficiently. Occasionally, I tread water for three days in a row.

[1 : 36] I woo women with my sensuous and godlike trombone playing. I can pilot bicycles up severe inclines with unflagging speed, and I cook 30-minute brownies in 20 minutes.

Using only a hoe and a large glass of water, I once single-handedly defended a small village in the Amazon basin from a horde of ferocious army ants.

I play bluegrass cello. I was scouted by the Mets. I am the subject of numerous documentaries. When I'm bored, I build suspension bridges in my yard.

I enjoy urban hang gliding. On Wednesdays after school, I repair electrical appliances free of charge. I'm an abstract artist, a concrete analyst, and a ruthless bookie.

Critics worldwide swoon over my original line of corduroy evening wear. I don't perspire. I am a private citizen, yet I have fan mail.

[2 : 47] Last summer, I toured New Jersey with a travelling centrifugal force demonstration. I bat .400. My deft floral arrangements have earned me fame in international botany circles, and children trust me.

I can hurl tennis rackets at small, moving objects with deadly accuracy. I once read Paradise Lost, Moby Dick and David Copperfield in one day, and still had enough time to refurbish an entire dining room that evening.

I know the exact location of every food item in the supermarket. I've performed several covert operations with the CIA. I sleep once a week, usually in a chair.

While on vacation in Canada, I successfully negotiated with a group of terrorists who had seized a small bakery. The laws of physics do not apply to me.

I balance, I weave, I dodge, I frolic, and my bills are all paid. On weekends to let off steam, I participate in full contact origami.

[3 : 54] Years ago, I discovered the meaning of life, but forgot to write it down. I've made extraordinary four-course meals using only a mouly and a toaster oven.

I breed prize-winning clams. I've won bullfights in San Juan, cliff-diving competitions in Sri Lanka, and spelling bees at the Kremlin.

I have played Hamlet. I've performed open-heart surgery. I have spoken with Elvis. But I have not yet gone to college.

Now, that's some CV for an application for New York University. It's truly what he wrote. Though, if you're like me, you might have elements of doubt about some aspects of the veracity of his claims.

It's certainly a good ploy to draw attention to yourself if you're writing a CV, applying for university or whatever. Apparently, Hugh Gallagher got admitted to New York University, maybe on the grounds of that CV.

[5 : 00] I'm not sure what course he did, and I don't know whether he passed it, although he may well have been channelled into creative writing. Life's competitive. You've got to put forward your claims and your stakes to draw attention to yourself, to win entries and win prizes and jobs and so on.

Imagine that you were applying and writing out your CV to enter not New York University, but to enter heaven. Stakes are high.

It's an eternal entry. What would you put in your claim on your CV? What sort of CV would you submit for application?

I often hear people drop lines of the sorts of CV-type issues that they might actually write. They probably don't actually write it, but I often hear people just with little giveaway expressions, so to speak.

Sometimes it's people who I meet in the course of preparing for a baptism of a child, or I meet in the street, or I meet at some other function, a wedding, a funeral, often about a person who's died as people speak about them.

[6 : 18] And usually there is, in this CV, a moral claim. That is, what a good bloke this person was. Or she always had time for others.

She was always helping others. She never did anyone any harm. He was an upright citizen. He was a member of various social and philanthropic groups in society.

That's the sort of person that we would all go to ask for for advice or for help. An all-round good bloke or lovely lady.

That's the sort of moral claim that you often hear give away lines about the sort of person that they're talking about, or even sometimes in their own claims about themselves.

Sometimes these CVs also have a spiritual claim as well. Oh yes, I've been to church, I think it was about 1940.

[7 : 18] Oh, 1870. No, some time ago. A long time ago. I mean, I've heard people say to me, oh yes, I've been to your church not all that long ago, not realising that we've built a church extension.

And by that I mean, not this one, but that one, which was built in 1970. Sometimes people say things like, oh yes, my resume, my CV in a sense is, I taught Sunday school.

Or sometimes people say, yes, they always say their prayers at night. It might be at the level of, well, I didn't really go to church much, but of course I believed.

Or I've donated cakes and jams to the fair. I've heard people make that claim. Which is very nice. Played sport on the church premises.

I think that's beginning to sort of get a little desperate in my opinion, but nonetheless, it's the sort of thing that I've heard. Or I'm there on Christmas Eve. Now not always do these CVs impress me.

[8 : 21] I'm probably a touch cynical sometimes. I must confess. The moral claim, or the spiritual claim, or both of them put together. But sometimes you do hear very impressive CVs at the moral or the spiritual level.

I'm not a thief, a rogue, or an adulterer, for example. Not a bad claim in modern Australia. Or I fast twice a week and give away a tenth of all my income.

It's a fairly impressive spiritual claim, actually. Well, such was the claim of a Pharisee in the days of Jesus, at least in the story that he told in the reading we heard from Luke's Gospel.

Pharisees were good people. They were pillars of Jewish society. They were looked up to and highly respected. They were well taught in the Old Testament, in the Jewish law.

They not only knew it, but on the whole they were assiduous in putting it into practice. And they wanted to go beyond the Old Testament law, so they sought to keep and sought others to keep not only what the laws of the Old Testament were, but a whole range of other 600-plus laws that they regarded as an oral tradition, not written in the Bible, but additional to it.

[9 : 37] And they were careful, meticulous observers of the law. They had an impressive spiritual claim and therefore an impressive moral claim as well about being good, upright sorts of people.

Such was the Pharisee that Jesus uses in his story, who in his prayer to God said, I am thankful to God that I'm not a thief, a rogue, an adulterer.

I fast twice a week. I give away a tenth of all my income. Meticulously obedient and devoutly pious. And even more, he expresses thanks to God for that.

So he says in his prayer that we overhear, God, I thank you that I'm not like a thief, a rogue, an adulterer. I thank you that I fast twice a week and give away 10% of all my income as well.

So it's not simply a, totally a boast about my achievement, but it's couched in the language of, God, I thank you for these things as well.

[10:49] He gives credit to God for his standing and stature. Well, here is a religious star, a Pharisee parading his CV by way of his prayer to God.

Of all the people that you could imagine in society, surely this man is righteous in God's sight. The moral claim and the spiritual claim.

And we assume that he truly did the things that he claimed to do. That is, it's not, oh, I give away a tenth of all my income, but he doesn't do it. But actually it's backed up by, it's an honest claim.

He truly is not a thief, a rogue, an adulterer. He truly does fast twice a week, which is beyond the Old Testament law, and gives away a tenth of all his income, which is part of the Old Testament law.

Surely of all people, this man is righteous. Over a way, in the other part of the temple courts, another man was praying, a tax collector.

[11:58] Tax collectors were scum in those days. They were regarded as collaborators with the Romans, to whom the taxes were by and large paid. And therefore, because they collaborated with the Roman occupying forces, they were despised by the Jews, by and large, even though they might have been Jewish themselves.

And moreover, not only that, the tax collectors had a pretty bad name for corruption as well. And whilst no doubt there were individual exceptions to that, they were typically people who would bribe and seek corruption and payments on the side, by way of feathering their own nest and filling their own pockets to supplement their income as official tax collectors.

So by and large, these were people who were looked down on, who were hated and despised. Let's eavesdrop on his prayer, as he prays in the temple court, to God.

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. In English, seven words, seven simple words.

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. No impressive CV, no moral claims, not to be a thief, rogue or adulterer.

[13:14] No religious claims, fasting twice a week and giving away 10%. In fact, he doesn't even look up towards heaven, but keeps his head down, beats his chest as an act of shame and humility and contrition.

He seems rather a pitiful and pathetic character. His only claim about himself, sinner. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Well, sorry, mate, heaven's not for people like you. Heaven's for good people. Heaven's for righteous people. Heaven's for those who keep the Old Testament law, for those who fast and tithe, those who are not adulterers, those who are not rogues or thieves.

See that man over there. See that Pharisee over there. That's what you should be like, mate. He's a righteous man. He's a good man. He's got an impressive moral CV and religious devotion that far exceeds yours.

Look to him and model your life on him and then come back and then pray to me. But no, that's not God's answer. It's not Jesus answer.

[14:32] Jesus, as so often is the case, has, has the knack of upsetting people, of turning, turning things on, on their end, saying the opposite of what we might expect.

And so he does here as well. I mean, no wonder he offends the establishment. He is just another case of where he seems to say the odd surprising thing that has, has a sense of a sting in the tail at those who carry the stature and respect of his society.

But it's surprising because this same Jesus is the one who upholds and teaches God's law, who encourages people to not just keep the law in a sense externally by actions, but from their heart.

That is, he actually upholds and lifts and respects and venerates Old Testament law and urges its fulfillment, not only in in action, but also in attitude of the heart.

So this is the same Jesus who says, yes, in the Old Testament, it says, do not be an adulterer. But I tell you, if you think lustfully in your heart, then you're committing adultery. So he's actually increasing and expanding the scope of Old Testament law.

[15 : 38] This is a Jesus who upholds it and doesn't dismiss it. This is the Jesus that we would expect to say to the Pharisee, you're doing exactly what you should be doing in upholding Old Testament law. This is the same Jesus who always is wanting to uphold and promote and encourage and exhort to obey moral standards that come out of God's Old Testament law.

The same Jesus who preaches the Sermon on the Mount. The same Jesus who commands generosity and giving. Surely this is the same Jesus who's going to commend and pat on the back the Pharisee and say, well done, good and faithful Pharisee.

But no. Rather, he says, at the conclusion of this story, I tell you, this man, this tax collector man, who's cowering here in his prayer and beating his chest, this man, rather than the other, rather than the Pharisee, with his impressive moral and religious CV, it is this man, the tax collector, who will go down to his home justified rather than the other.

There is no doubt that the Pharisee is a good man. We're not meant to think his boast isn't backed up by action.

It is. He was morally upright, religiously devout, faultless in the eyes of his society, and in a scale of relative righteousness, better than most, at the top of the pile, looking down on this unrighteous tax collector in the temple courts.

[17 : 15] But actions are not all that God looks for. God looks to our hearts, to the attitudes of our hearts.

God searches our hearts. And this Pharisee's big, fatal failing was his heart.

In what did he trust? Why does Jesus tell this story? We're told at its beginning. Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.

Notice Jesus didn't tell this parable about those people, but actually boldly and provocatively he told this parable to those who trusted in themselves.

We can imagine Jesus telling this parable to the Pharisees who behaved exactly like the Pharisee in the story. Jesus isn't over telling tax collectors, well, this is what Pharisees are like.

[18 : 27] He actually tells it to those who trust in themselves that they are righteous. That's the issue. That's the mistake of the Pharisee.

Trust in himself. Yet those things are good and he's performed them. He has a moral integrity. He has a religious zeal and devotion.

But he trusts that and that's fatal. Jesus expresses it a different way at the end of the story. All those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

But those who humble themselves will be exalted. To trust in yourself, to exalt yourself is what is called self-righteousness.

It's very common. Most of us are guilty and infected by it from time to time. To be self-righteous is to be proud of your achievement. To rely upon it, to boast in it maybe, whether it's a moral achievement or a religious achievement.

[19 : 38] Oh yes, I've done this and I've taught Sunday school and I've always helped people. I've never harmed anyone. Those of us who are self-righteous find excuses for failure.

Oh, I was provoked into that by somebody else. I blame the government or my parents or my upbringing or my schooling or somebody else, something else. Self-righteousness works on a relative scale.

I've got an A in righteousness, you've only got a B. I've got a high distinction, you've just passed. That is, it considers the relative scale and it looks down on those who at least externally aren't as righteous.

And so it shows some despising and contempt for others. As the Pharisees said, because he thanks God not only that he's not a rogue, a thief or an adulterer, but thank God that I'm not like that tax collector over there.

I'm not as bad as him. I'm not as bad as the people you read about in the paper. I'm not as bad as the gangsters who keep shooting themselves in the center of the city. I'm not as bad as people who live in other suburbs or other countries.

[20 : 48] I'm not as bad as the drug smugglers that are in Bali and so on. That's self-righteousness. It's working on the relative scale that I'm better than you are.

And it's looking down with contempt. And most of us are infected by that, at least from time to time. And even those who are religious can fall into the same trap.

I've given lots of money. I go to church very regularly, more than just Christmas Eve. I've attended youth group or I help this or I donate jams to the fair. I come on Christmas Eve.

Oh, I was baptized. I was taught at Sunday school. I went to a church school. That's self-righteousness. It's religious self-righteousness. And it always parades an impressive CV. It always focuses on the good things and completely ignores and dismisses the weaknesses and the failures. It may not be quite as impressive as Hugh Gallagher, but even if your CV was an honest one and boasted in what you really had done, it's still self-righteousness.

[22 : 00] It's trusting in yourself, exalting yourself. And it's that that is fatal and it is that that Jesus condemns here.

It is not what God looks for. You see, God's scale of righteousness is not relative. It's not me being better than somebody else. You can always find people who are worse than us if we look hard enough.

But God's scale is an absolute scale. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbour as yourself all the time. And by contrast to a relative scale, when we place ourselves under God's absolute scale of religious and moral claims and righteousness, we all fall far short.

Pharisee or tax collector. God's scale is perfection because God is perfect. And no matter how good we are, how morally upright we are, how religiously devout and pious we are, none of us is anywhere near perfection.

You see, ironically, the Pharisee and the tax collector are in the same boat together. The trouble is it's only the tax collector who knows the boat he's in.

[23 : 27] The Pharisee thinks that he's in a completely different standing with God and that his merits of morality and religion make a claim against God that God needs to honour.

But the truth of the matter is that he's in the same boat as the tax collector. He has nothing to parade before God that will impress God. And the tax collector well knows, God, be merciful to me a sinner.

No matter how morally or religiously upright we are, we fall short. You see, self-righteousness is so deceptive, it's so competitive, it looks down on others rather than up to God's perfection.

And therefore, self-righteousness invariably shows contempt to others. the tax collector prays, God, be merciful to me a sinner.

And that is what God is in the business of doing. Being merciful to sinners. When we read the Bible, an event that comes after Jesus spoke these words is the light through which we read the whole of the Bible and understand world history in effect.

[24 : 53] It's the event of Jesus dying on the cross. He died for our sins. He died to bring us mercy. He died to forgive us our failings under God's perfect and absolute standard.

You see, self-righteousness has no place for grace. grace. But sinners need grace and mercy and they find them in the God whose son dies on the cross.

The tax collector trusts in God's mercy, not himself. And that is what Jesus is commending. Jesus is urging us to true humility here.

Not the false modesty of Uriah Heep, that rather obsequious and pathetic proud servant in David Copperfield, but rather real humility.

An acknowledgement that I have nothing to claim against God, nothing to offer God, nothing to compel God to accept me into his heaven.

[26 : 07] my CV is meaningless and in the end empty before God. Nothing in my hand I bring, no merit of my own I claim.

This is my only plea that Jesus died and lives for me. humility. That humility which Jesus commends trusts in God and trusts in Jesus and does not trust in our self.

The metaphorical pearly gates, imagine that you're asked for your CV, why should I let you into my heaven? Most of us could parade a whole number of reasons.

I've been to church, I've read my Bible, I've prayed, I've given to the poor, I've loved other people, I've tried not to harm people, tried to do the right thing, et cetera, et cetera.

And in themselves that could be quite a truthful, noble list of fine achievements and fine aspects of character, loving and pious acts. But don't trust them.

[27 : 21] You see, the answer at the pearly gates, so to speak, if it ever happens, and they are actually pearly, if it's I have done this and I have done that, then that's trusting in oneself, that's

self-righteousness.

But the tax collector's model is not I, I, I, I, me, me, me, me, me, but in you, God. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

not because of me, should I enter heaven or can I, but because of God and his mercy in Jesus' death on the cross.

For that reason and for that reason alone, we can and should have confidence that God accepts us. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

That is, will be lifted up to God's glorious and perfect heaven on the final day and then found to be truly righteous in the presence of God.

[28 : 28] It's a very unfair exchange, but on the cross Jesus takes away our sins, our dirty rags of wrongdoing and failure and clothes us with his righteousness, not self-righteousness, but clothes us with his righteousness that we'll fully realize, on the day of arrival in heaven.

It's an unfair deal, but it's God's astonishing offer of mercy. What good news that is, how liberating that is to know that God accepts us because of his mercy and love in Jesus, that we don't have to keep trying to impress God with a parade of a CV like Hugh Gallagher trying to get into New York University.

We don't have to put on a religious facade, we don't need to store up our lists of good works, how freeing it is to know that God accepts me despite my failings and sin, how wonderful to know that I can trust with confidence in the mercy of God because it's demonstrated so substantially in the death of Jesus for me on a cross 2,000 years ago.

If you were going up to a temple to pray, what would you pray? What's your spiritual CV for heaven?

In what do you trust? It is not too late to realize that you have trusted the wrong thing. Maybe all your life, maybe many, many years and decades.

[30 : 03] It's not too late to realize and make amends. It's not too late to say to God, God, I realize that I've been trying to impress you so that when I die, you'll let me into heaven.

God, I realize that that's a mistake. I realize no matter how hard I try morally and spiritually, I will never be good enough for you. God, I've realized now, the pennies drop perhaps today, that you offer me mercy.

And God, now for the first time, I can say and mean it, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. It is never too late to find the joy of receiving God's mercy, of delighting in the knowledge that Jesus died for my sin, of knowing that nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling, is sufficient in praying to God for mercy.

In what do you trust? God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God, be mother■■■, pick eyes, a sinner, kill a sinner, kill a mother, ke