

*Session 2*



# Making Others a Priority

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## THE POINT

*We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus.*

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In March 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. People were advised to distance themselves by six feet or more to avoid exposure to the virus. When a positive diagnosis was made, the sick individual was quarantined initially for fourteen days; later the quarantine period was reduced to five days. The aim of all of this was to isolate the virus and those infected by it. The unintended consequence was that it isolated people.

Unfortunately, believers can import that same mindset into relationships with unbelievers, keeping so much distance that there's no meaningful contact. This was not the way Jesus related to others. In this study's passage, we see Jesus teaching a masterclass in making others a priority in our lives, even those who are different or spiritually sick. Let's watch the Teacher and learn from Him.

### QUESTION 1:

***How did your shopping habits change during the COVID epidemic?***

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## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

### LUKE 7:36-39

<sup>36</sup> Then one of the Pharisees invited him to eat with him. He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume <sup>38</sup> and stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears. She wiped his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume. <sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she's a sinner!"

Before Jesus began His public ministry, He likely practiced the rhythms of Judaism—attending synagogue and celebrating the feasts. Through these events, He had contact with the religious leaders, which included the scribes and Pharisees. We can logically conclude that by the time He began His earthly ministry, Jesus already knew the Pharisees would oppose His words and actions.

Regardless, it didn't take long for Jesus to get the attention of the Pharisees. In Luke 6, the Pharisees accused Jesus and His followers of not honoring the Sabbath, and their rage toward Jesus was so intense that they began discussing how they might bring a charge against Him.

We might be surprised that Jesus accepted a Pharisee's invitation to come to his house and eat with him. I don't know about you, but I have a tendency of avoiding those who might be described as "hard to love." Yet, Jesus accepted the invitation; he "entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table" (v. 36).

This Pharisee was probably known as one of the religious elites of that day. Pharisees were not only the watchdogs for individual and societal purity, but they diligently practiced the law, sometimes going to great extremes in their obedience. If anyone had the assurance of God's favor, it was the Pharisees (a view commonly held by the people). Unfortunately, Pharisees obviously believed this about themselves, which led to spiritual arrogance.

We also get a glimpse of the inward condition of the Pharisee's heart. It was common back then for such meals not only to have invited guests, but also local people who would come and sit at the edge of the room, listening to the discussions. One attendee was a woman "who was a sinner" (v. 37). We're not told the sin, but we are told of her reputation. What happened next captured everyone's attention.

The woman, using an expensive perfume and her own tears of gratitude, washed Jesus's feet. Simon didn't voice his disapproval, but

he spoke to himself inwardly. This Pharisee's zealous pursuit of purity produced a negative result: separation from those he considered to be unclean. Jesus knew all this, yet He had a different view of the Pharisee. Despite the Pharisee's training, his fanatical yet empty attention to ritual, and his obvious disapproval of Jesus and the woman, Jesus saw the only thing that really mattered—a man who was far from God.

Jesus's example is a convicting one. This Pharisee was so unlike Jesus, yet Jesus made it a priority to interact with him. This is convicting to me because it illuminates my own personal failures in my relationships with others. Sometimes I find myself being guilty of:

- **Spiritual unawareness:** When I'm at the hardware store, I'm focused on finding the right size screws—not on noticing the presence or condition of those around me.
- **Loving only the lovable:** Honestly, it's easier to love the lovable; loving the unlovable

## LUKE 7:40-43

<sup>40</sup> Jesus replied to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." He said, "Say it, teacher."  
<sup>41</sup> "A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more." "You have judged correctly," he told him.

We're not told about the interaction Jesus had previously with this woman that led to her sense of forgiveness, but we did see the result of it. Having received Jesus's gracious offer of forgiveness, her gratitude was expressed in an extravagant way. Scholars say the alabaster jar hints at a valuable perfume, perhaps having the value of a year's worth of wages (Mark 14:3–9;

takes work and it shames me to say that I sometimes refuse to do so.

- **Trying to be right but for the wrong reason:** My interaction with someone different from me can quickly become an argument aimed to prove I'm right instead of demonstrating the love of Christ.

If we follow Jesus's example, we won't let a person's behavior, political allegiance, or reputation keep us from seeing who they really are—a person who desperately needs Jesus.

### QUESTION 2:

*What can make it difficult to reach out to prideful people?*

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John 12:1-8). Her actions spoke loudly of her humility and trust in Jesus to cleanse her of her sin, and consequently, her reputation.

Jesus accepted the woman and her actions, but Simon did not. His disapproval may have been hidden behind a mask of hospitality, but Jesus was aware of it. This prompted Him to tell a

story to help Simon grasp the importance of the woman's response.

The parable featured two debtors who both owed a creditor. One owed the equivalent of two months' wages, the other twenty months' wages. Neither could pay, so the creditor forgave them both. Then came the big question: "So, which of them will love him more?" (v. 42).

Simon answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more" (v. 43). It sounds like Simon knew the right answer, but he didn't want to admit it. There's an important reason why his answer sounded hesitant. The Pharisees in Jesus's day were legalistic. Their legalism distorted their view of God and His faithful love for His people. Legalism today will produce the same results.

Let's make sure we understand the detrimental effects of legalism.

- Legalism believes you can earn or achieve righteousness through certain practices or works rather than faith and God's grace.
- Legalism focuses on outward appearances instead of a genuine inner commitment of faith toward God.

- Legalism quickly develops a judgmental attitude, basing opinions of others on their mistakes rather than their walk with the Lord.
- Legalism empties faith of the relationship dimension and substitutes rules in its place.

More could be said about legalism, but the point is that Simon demonstrated all of these characteristics in his response to the woman. Grace and forgiveness were lacking in his view of the woman—and that's perhaps one reason why Jesus told the parable. The parable pointed to God's gracious forgiveness. Grace is the opposite of legalism. Grace is also the way Jesus interacted with the woman. Shouldn't believers today do the same?

### QUESTION 3:

***When have you seen people minimizing their own sin while highlighting the sins of others?***

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## LUKE 7:44-48

<sup>44</sup> Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she, with her tears, has washed my feet and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. <sup>46</sup> You didn't anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

# Engage

## LOVING OTHERS THE JESUS WAY

Circle at least three traits you admire and enjoy in people you are close to. Underline at least three traits in people you find more difficult to appreciate. Then write a prayer, asking God to help you truly love.

**Ambitious**

**Creative**

**Conscientious**

**Dramatic**

**Agreeable**

**Adventurous**

**Honest**

**Affectionate**

**Scatter-brained**

**Silly**

**Self-reliant**

**Spontaneous**

**Intelligent**

**Helpful**

**Organized**

**Competitive**

**Reserved**

**Firm**

**Messy**

**Disciplined**

**Sensitive**

**My Prayer:**

The meaning of the parable couldn't be more clear. The woman was like the man in the parable that owed twenty months of wages, but the debt was forgiven. She had been forgiven her debt of sin, and the result was her extravagant display of love, all because Jesus was willing to interact with those who are looked down upon.

On the other hand, Simon's judgmental attitude and total disregard for both Jesus and the woman were on full display. Jesus exposed Simon's revulsion toward the woman by knowing Simon's thoughts and then speaking the parable. The parable's main point was to explain the woman's actions, but it also focused on Simon's isolationism toward sinners. Simon wanted nothing to do with that woman and was shocked that Jesus allowed her to touch Him.

In addition, we must remember that the Pharisees, as a group, had already accused Jesus of breaking the law—specifically for actions like picking grain to eat and healing a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11). In their eyes, this made Jesus a sinner. Simon the Pharisee was aware of these accusations, and his treatment of Jesus reflected that perception.

To drive home the point and confront Simon with his condemning attitude to those he might classify as sinners, Jesus compared the treatment He received from Simon with the treatment He received from the woman.

It's hard to believe Simon's refusal to honor Jesus in the customary ways was an oversight. It's even harder to believe that the town folk sitting on the edge of the dining room didn't notice. Simon's actions, or lack thereof, made it clear: he did not want to associate with the woman or Jesus.

This passage forces us to ask ourselves if we're following Jesus's model of engaging with sinners or Simon's model of disassociating ourselves from sinners.

- **Lost people will act like lost people.** Grace toward them may mean patience and not expecting them to act as if they're saved.
- **We were just like them.** Before we were saved, we were far from God too, yet someone told us about Jesus.
- **Having friends who aren't saved doesn't mean we condone their sinful behavior.** Sometimes we can worry more about our reputation than the spiritual wellbeing of others. We can politely refuse their invitation to sinful activity and still keep the lines of communication open.

Let's follow Jesus's example and reach out to those who are sinful. After all, someone did that for you and me.

**QUESTION 4:**

***What concerns might prevent us from reaching out to those who are far from God?***

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**QUESTION 5:**

***How can our group reach out to those who are deemed unworthy by society?***

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## LIVE IT OUT

Choose one of the activities below that can enable you to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

- **Confess.** Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, pinpoint any attitudes toward others that might lead you to avoid them. Look for attitudes like disapproval or legalism. Confess them to God in prayer. Ask Him to replace these attitudes with patience and grace.
- **Assess.** Identify those you tend to avoid because of their spiritual lostness. Pray for God to show you how you can relate to them with grace and patience.
- **Express.** Invite an unbeliever to join you for a meal. Build the relationship by showing genuine interest and when God leads you to do so, share your faith.



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