

HE FORGIVES SIN

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 7:37-39,41-50

CONTEXT

Though Jesus was known popularly as a prophet who taught and performed miracles with authority, He had some very powerful and influential opponents. Those who rejected Jesus's mission sought to discredit Him by labeling Him "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34). The former labels were unfounded, as they describe a sinful lifestyle, but the latter accusation was unquestionably true. The Pharisees bristled at the thought of such friendships, but Jesus embraced them so that sinners might be forgiven.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus forgives sinners who come to Him in adoring faith.

As you examine Luke 7:37-39,41-50:

- Note that the woman abandoned all propriety to show Jesus love and reverence.
- Reflect upon the fact that when we are graciously forgiven, we love more.



TIMELINE

Jesus Teaches About and Heals on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son
from the Dead (Luke 7:11-17)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Forgives
a Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-50)

Jesus Teaches About Worry (Luke 12:12-34)

Jesus Delivers His Sermon
on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49)

John the Baptist Seeks Confirmation
That Jesus Is the Messiah (Luke 7:18-35)

Jesus Teaches About Prayer
(Luke 11:1-13)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: Luke 7:31-35 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 7:44-48 |
| ☐ Day 2: Luke 7:36-39 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 7:47-50 |
| ☐ Day 3: Luke 7:40-43 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 3 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

WE SHOW FAITH BY ABANDONING ALL FOR CHRIST (LUKE 7:37-39).

Circle the action words detailing what the woman did for Jesus, and underline the response of the Pharisee.

37 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 **38** 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. **39** 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!"

The Pharisee and the woman are contrasting figures in this story, and their actions and heart posture should be compared throughout this passage. First, the two are contrasted by the reason for their presence at this meal. The Pharisee was the host who extended the invitation to Jesus as his guest. The woman arrived as an uninvited and unwelcome intruder to the Pharisee.

One similarity between the Pharisee and the woman was that they both wanted to spend time with Jesus, though for different reasons. Recall that not long before this event, crowds who witnessed Jesus raise the widow's dead son to life declared across the land that He was a prophet. The woman most likely heard this declaration, so she arrived with a humble heart to anoint Jesus with her tears and expensive perfume. A prophet might be able to offer her the forgiveness she desired.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

STEWARDSHIP: God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

LEADER NOTE: The cultural implications of the woman's actions are important in understanding the full picture Luke gives in this passage. A woman letting her hair down in public was considered a shameful act, an intimacy reserved only for a woman's husband. Likewise, a woman was not permitted to touch a man who wasn't her husband, yet this woman did both. On top of these cultural restrictions, she also was a known sinner, which meant she should have been treated like an outcast.

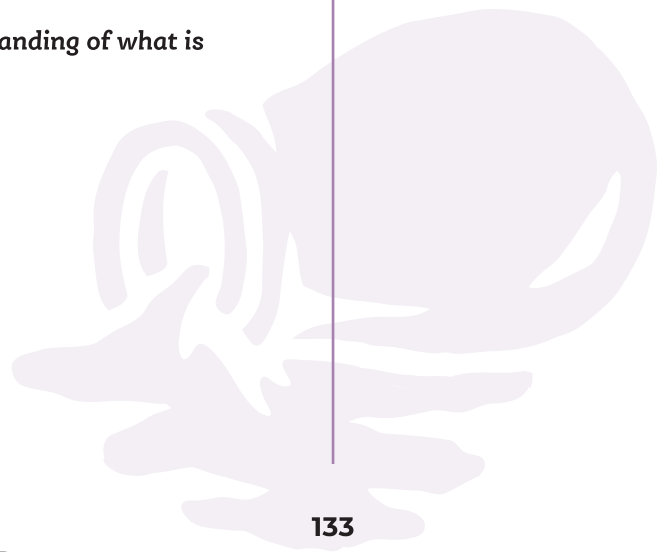
What might the woman's actions have revealed about her understanding of who Jesus is?

The woman humbled herself without even speaking a word to Jesus. In contrast, the Pharisee's inner dialogue in verse 39 revealed the state of his heart. He was not interested in forgiveness because he did not see himself as a sinner like the woman.

Seeing the interaction between Jesus and the sinful woman, The Pharisee developed an argument in his head that discredited Jesus, and his argument was based on the word "if." He thought, "If Jesus were a prophet, then He would stop this woman immediately because no real prophet would let a sinner touch Him." The Pharisee concluded that since Jesus allowed the sinful woman to anoint Him, Jesus was immediately disqualified from the title of "prophet."

LEADER NOTE: Luke moved from outward appearances to inward dialogue and heart posture. The woman looked like a sinner in her appearance and even in her actions as she disregarded cultural norms. The Pharisee, on the other hand, had status and outward respect as a religious leader and the resources to provide a meal for Jesus. Yet the hearts of these two people could not be more different from how they appeared on the outside. The woman was humble and had a true understanding of who Jesus is, whereas the Pharisee was prideful and did not understand Jesus or His purpose.

How does this woman's boldness challenge our understanding of what is required to come before Jesus?



JESUS'S MISSION IS TO FORGIVE SINNERS, AND IN RESPONSE, WE LOVE HIM MORE (LUKE 7:41-50).

Circle each time Jesus uses the words “sins” and “forgiven/forgave.”

41 “A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?” **43** Simon answered, “I suppose the one he forgave more.” “You have judged correctly,” he told him. **44** 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. **45** You gave me no kiss, but she hasn’t stopped kissing my feet since I came in. **46** You didn’t anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. **47** 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.” **48** Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” **49** Those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?” **50** And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Jesus knew Simon, the Pharisee, was appalled by this woman; Simon’s silent comment within his heart was not a secret to the Son of God. Instead of shaming or rebuking Simon directly, Jesus wanted to tell him something. While Simon respected Jesus enough to call Him “teacher” and allowed Jesus to speak (v. 40), the next words out of Jesus’s mouth showed Simon that he did not respect Jesus to the degree that He deserved.

Jesus told a parable about two debtors, with one debtor being forgiven of a larger debt, to illustrate the point He wanted to make with Simon. Jesus then asked Simon which debtor would love the forgiver more. Not realizing he was about to see himself in the parable, Simon said the one with the greater debt would love the forgiver more. Simon’s answer was correct, but his understanding and application of this truth was not as clear.

What are some ways you struggle to apply Scripture personally?

Jesus then revealed the true lesson of the parable: The actions of the woman were honorable, kind, and most of all loving, while Simon did not treat Jesus with the honor and love He deserved. Simon was self-righteous and ignorant regarding his own sinful shortcomings. The woman, on the other hand, knew how sinful she was, so she humbly put herself at Jesus’s feet so that He would be lifted up and honored.

Key Concept: Jesus forgives sinners who come to Him in adoring faith.

Notes

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“If our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and if He casts none out that come to Him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but His mercies are more: our sins are great, but His righteousness is greater: we are weak, but He is power.”¹

—John Newton (1725–1807)

LEADER NOTE: In first-century Jewish culture, it was an ordinary custom to honor guests by offering water for their feet and greeting them with a kiss, courtesies Simon ignored for Jesus. Anointing with oil was an act of honor for special guests. In neglecting basic courtesy, Simon revealed he did not love Jesus. In contrast, the woman kissed Jesus’s feet, not His face, and poured out expensive oil to honor Him, demonstrating her humility and her love.

Because of her bold outpouring of love, Jesus acknowledged the woman’s faith and humility and told her she was forgiven. As the parable illustrated, because her debt was so great, she loved Jesus more. But in reality, the difference between her and the Pharisee was she acknowledged her sin, whereas Simon ignored his. The woman understood that only Jesus was worthy of her worship, and because of her loving faith, Jesus forgave her of her sins.

LEADER NOTE: In the parable Jesus told, the debtors loved the forgiver after their debts were canceled. It is obvious here, however, that the woman loved Jesus before He forgave her sins. Her actions were fueled by love and faith in Jesus (v. 50). These actions were not the cause of her forgiveness but the evidence of her faith in Jesus that forgiveness would be offered to her.

Why do you think an awareness of our own sin makes us more grateful and more loving toward Jesus?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus came to forgive sinners, and He did so through His death and resurrection, saving those who love and trust Him.

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 110 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Debt and Devotion.” Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s responses. Make sure you write down Scripture references as your group works through the activity.

Debt and Devotion

Read Luke 7:37-39, 41-50. Record ways we minimize our sin ("Little Debt"), and record insights about the seriousness of sin ("Great Debt").

LITTLE DEBT	GREAT DEBT

READ: Invite two volunteers to read Luke 7:37-39 and 41-50 aloud.

EXPLAIN: Note that a denarius was equal to one day's wages for an average laborer. So in Jesus's parable, while both debtors owed a good deal of money, five hundred days' wages was a far greater debt than fifty days' wages. Ask: "Why did Jesus connect the size of the debt to the depth of love shown?"

IDENTIFY: Direct your group to the “Little Debt” column on the chart. Call for the group to identify ways we might minimize our sin. (*it’s not that big of a deal; I didn’t really hurt anyone else; everyone else does it; I’m a good person in other aspects of my life*) Record responses under the “Little Debt” column.

SAY: It is very important to note in reading this passage that nowhere in this interaction did Jesus minimize, condone, explain away, or lessen sin—the woman’s sin or the Pharisee’s. All sin is serious to God, and according to Scripture, all sin—apart from Christ’s forgiveness—separates us from God.

Notes

Notes

DISCUSS: Call for some volunteers to read the following passages: Isaiah 59:1-4; Romans 3:10-18; James 1:14-15; 2:9-11. Lead the group to discuss what these passages have to say about the seriousness of sin. Record the group's insights, along with the related Scripture references, under the "Great Debt" column.

ASK: How did the woman show she understood her "great debt"? How did the Pharisee's indifference to Jesus reveal the inner workings of his heart?

DEBRIEF

What happens to our love for Jesus when we forget the depth of our sin and our forgiveness?

What practices can help us remember the "great debt" Jesus paid to reconcile us to God?

SUMMARIZE

The Pharisee offered Jesus little because he saw little need for forgiveness. The woman offered Jesus everything because she knew her debt was great. In Christ, our sin-debt is fully forgiven, and our response should be joyful, sacrificial devotion to Him.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 111). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Luke 7:37-39,41-50 shows that forgiveness flows from Christ's authority and not from our own merit. Simon the Pharisee assumed holiness meant Jesus ought to separate Himself from sinners. But Jesus embodied true holiness in forgiving sin based on faith. This passage teaches that understanding our debt before God rightly leads to a deep appreciation and understanding of God's grace.

How do you need to reevaluate your perspective on and interaction with sinners in light of Jesus's example?



HEART: The Pharisee and the woman demonstrated the contrast between a skeptical, indifferent heart toward God and a faith-filled, warm devotion to Him. The woman risked rejection and humiliation because of her love for Jesus. Our affections and actions are shaped by magnifying the grace of God. Forgiveness produces love, and love produces worship, but first, we must acknowledge and confess our sin.

What sins do you need to confess so you can be forgiven and love the Lord with your whole heart?



HANDS: True faith overflows into action. The woman's love for Jesus was costly. Our devotion to Jesus today still requires sacrifice. When we receive forgiveness, we ought to live as forgiven people like the woman, with humility and love. The woman in Luke 7 is an example to us of what it looks like to show tangible, loving service to Jesus. Faith in Christ not only saves us but should transform our actions.

How should your forgiveness in Christ shape your interactions at home, church, and work?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Each morning this week, thank God specifically for paying your sin debt and giving you life in Christ. Pray through 1 John 1:5–2:2.
- Give generously of your time, resources, or encouragement this week as a tangible expression of gratitude for Christ's forgiveness.
- Like the woman in Luke 7, take a step of faith to express devotion to Christ in a way that others can see His transforming grace at work in you.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 111 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 3:1-4 with your group, thanking God that He is our Savior and the One who lifts up our head when others condemn us for past sins. Thank Him for giving us mercy, love, and salvation.

References

1. John Newton, *The Works of the Reverend John Newton . . . With a Life of the Author by the Rev. Richard Cecil* (London: George Virtue, 1839), 236.

Notes

