



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Luke 7:36 - 8:3

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house & reclined at the table. **37** When a woman of the city, who was a sinner, learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. **38** As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them & poured perfume on them. **39** When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him & what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner." **40** Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. **41** "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, & the other fifty. **42** Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" **43** Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." Jesus said, "You have judged correctly." **44** Then he turned toward the woman & said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears & wiped them with her hair. **45** You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. **46** You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. **47** Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." **48** Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." **49** The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" **50** Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town & village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, **2** & also some women who had been cured of evil spirits & diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; **3** Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; & many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. (Luke 7:36-8:3)

1. The Setting (Lk. 7:36-37)

“The introduction to the story sets the scene of Jesus’ interaction with a Pharisee & a sinner , following references to both groups in the immediately preceding verses [7:30, 34]. We will not be surprised that the Pharisee takes offense to Jesus while Jesus vindicates the sinner.” (Alan Culpepper, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: Luke , p. 140)

a. A Pharisee invited Jesus to eat at his home (11:37-54; 14:1-24)

a. *“The host is a Pharisee who was presumably **not completely opposed to Jesus** – at least, not to start with. There were several different positions within the Pharisee movement. The majority were what we call hard-line right-wingers, but several, including perhaps this Simon, **may have been prepared to give Jesus a fair hearing** . **He has heard the rumors that maybe Jesus is a prophet (7:16), & he is keen to see for himself.** ” (N. T. Wright, *Luke For Everyone* , pp. 67-8)*

b. Jesus entered the Pharisee’s home & reclined at the table

c. A sinful woman found out Jesus was there & entered the home with an alabaster jar

a. *“The woman says nothing in this narrative, but her actions produce a wide range of discussion. **Her sin is not identified** . Perhaps she is a **prostitute** or has engaged in some other **promiscuity to gain her reputation** . But she boldly enters into the room...with a jar of expensive perfume.” (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke* , p. 218)*

2. The Woman in Luke 7 Is Not Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Bethany: A Unique Account

a. Mary Magdalene Maligned: Three Women Conflated & Confused in Christian History

a. *The maligning of “**Mary Magdalene’s** status among the disciples is... **her characterization as a penitent sinner & eventually even as a prostitute** – a claim that, unfortunately, prevails to this day...Luke introduces **Mary Magdalene** [in Lk. 8:2 after the ‘sinful woman’ (Lk. 7:36-50) which] facilitates her later **conflation with several other figures** , including Mary of Bethany, who anoints Jesus (Jn. 11:2; 12:3), the unnamed woman who anoints his head ... (Mk. 14:3-9; Mt. 26:6-13) & , finally, the unnamed penitent sinner in Luke (7:37-50)... Luke first introduces [Mary Magdalene]...as a new character in 8:1-3; but he also refers to an unnamed woman in the city as a ‘sinner’...in the passage immediately preceding (7:37-39). Because the unnamed sinner of the city anoints Jesus’ feet, & because a certain Mary in...John (this time Mary of Bethany) also anoints Jesus , **all three characters eventually became conflated into one ‘Mary’ in parts of Western Christianity** . The juxtaposition of ‘Marys’ thereby **transforms Mary Magdalene into a prostitute who anoints Jesus’ feet** in her repentance & consequent gratitude. Many **trace this misconception** of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute ...as far back... as a sermon that **Pope Gregory the Great (540-604 CE)** delivered when he conflated Mary Magdalene with the ‘sinner of the city.’ His depiction...made the conflation official & widespread, but the seeds for the conflation occurred much earlier.” (Ann G. Brock, “*Mary Magdalene* ,” in BH. Dunning (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of the NT Gender & Sexuality* , pp. 437-8)*

b. *Pope “Gregory [540-604 CE]...presents a **conflation of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, & the repentant woman of Luke 7** . Gregory assumes this conflation in his Easter sermon on Jn. 20:11-18, opening it with a reference to ‘Mary Magdalene who had been a sinner in the city’ which clearly alludes to Lk. 7:37. Later in this sermon he also identifies the conflated Mary Magdalene/Luke 7 woman with Mary of Bethany...by stating that she sat at Jesus’ feet & heard his word [Lk. 10:38-42]. This conflation is the basis for an **additional portrait of Magdalene as a contemplative** [disciple] that became widespread in the Middle Ages.” (Jennifer V. Pietz, *Mary Magdalene, La Malinche, & the Ethics of Interpretation* , p. 41)*

c. *“In his Easter sermon on John 20:11-18, Gregory’s interpretation of Magdalene as the repentant sinner of Lk. 7:36-50 helps explain the ardent love with which she seeks Jesus at the tomb on John, since the Lukan text explains that receiving great forgiveness is linked to loving greatly (Lk. 7:47).” (J. V. Pietz, *Op. cit.*, p. 43)*

b. This Woman is Not Mary of Bethany (Mt. 26; Mk. 14; John 12)

a. *“The story of Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha & Lazarus in Mark 14:3-9] is also reported in Matt. 26:6-13 & in John 12:1-8, where the woman is identified as ‘Mary,’ the sister of Martha & Lazarus. The story in Luke 7:36-50 [of an anonymous ‘woman of the city, who was a sinner’ (Lk. 7:37)] is a **different event** , occurring at a **different time** in Jesus’ ministry, with a **different woman** , **different actions** , **different critics** , & a **different response** from Jesus.” (ESV Study Bible (Mk. 14:3-4))*

3. The Sinful Woman’s Extravagant Love (Lk. 7:38)

a. *“The sinful woman illustrates some basic truths about faith & love. In terms of faith, **she demonstrates an ability to overcome barriers** , such as the popular perceptions about her. As a woman, even to contemplate publicly drawing near to Jesus was a risk, because women did not do such things in that culture. The fact that she was a sinner only heightened the risk, such a religious figure like Jesus might reject her. Yet **her gratitude & humility** was so great that drawing near to Jesus was all she cared about. She counted the cost & reckoned that Jesus would respond to her humble approach towards him. Her faith was honored. One*

wonders how many of us today would be so bold as to come forward & identify with Jesus in the face of known public rejection of our approaching him.” (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 224)

- b. “The woman is an uninvited guest. What we think of as ‘private life’ in the modern West was largely unknown in Jesus’ world: doors would often remain open, allowing beggars, extra friends, or simply curious passers-by to wander in. **The woman intends, it seems, to anoint Jesus** ...When she finds herself before him, **she is overcome, & his feet are wet with her tears** before she can get the ointment jar open...She lets down her hair, something no decent woman would do in public, & wipes his feet, kissing them & finally doing what she came for, to anoint them.” (N. T. Wright, *Op Cit* , p. 68)
 - a. She stood behind Jesus at his feet
 - a. “At such a banquet, the guests would have been **reclining on pillows** , supported by their left arms and eating with the right hands, **with their feet away from the mat** on which the food would have been spread before them. Thus, the woman could easily approach Jesus’ feet.” (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 140)
 - b. She wept & washed Jesus’ feet with her tears
 - a. “ **The woman’s act expresses love & gratitude** , but it also violated social conventions. Touching or caressing a man’s feet could have sexual overtones, as did letting down her hair, so a woman never let down her hair in public.” (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 140)
 - c. She wiped Jesus’ wet feet with her hair
 - d. She anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume
 - a. “ **The woman expressed herself not by a loud voice but by quiet action** . She speaks no words in this story, yet her actions of devotion to Jesus speak volume. Her testimony stands on its own merit. Some perhaps misunderstood & even doubted it, but **God sees her heart & declares her clean** . The church needs less noise in its testimony & more heartfelt devotion & service.” (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 224)
 - b. “The sinner has created a scene at the Pharisee’s dinner, & **he is scandalized. But how will he respond?** ” (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 140)
4. The Pharisee Judges Jesus in His Heart (Lk. 7:39)
- a. Said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he’d know who was touching him – a sinner. ” –
 - a. “When the Pharisee reasons that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know the character of the woman who was touching him, **Jesus’ response shows that he knows both Simon’s thoughts & the character of the woman. His response, therefore, confirms that he is a prophet.** ” (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 139)
 - b. religious separationism (Lk. 5:27-32)
 - a. “ **The Pharisee, in his desire for purity, separates himself from fellowship with sinners** . He keeps a woman like the one who approaches Jesus at great distance, thereby making it clear that her lifestyle is not endorsed.” (D. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 220)
5. Jesus Responds to the Pharisee with a Parable (Lk. 7:40-43)
- a. Simon gives Jesus permission to speak (v. 40)
 - b. The parable of forgiveness & gratitude (vv. 41-42)
 - c. Simon understands the parable (v. 43)
6. The Pharisees’ Rudeness Exposed (Lk. 7:44-47)
- a. His rudeness; his poor hospitality
 - a. “Common hospitality included providing water for the feet...Oil for the dry skin on one’s head would also be a thoughtful act. A kiss was an affectionate or respectful form of greeting, commonly shown to respected teachers & others.” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* , pp. 199-200)
 - b. “We learn that when Jesus arrived the Pharisee gave him no water with which to wash his feet, no kiss, no oil for anointing his head. None of these was required, but **they were gracious gestures of hospitality** attested throughout Scripture.” (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 141)
 - a. He gave Jesus no water for his feet
 - b. He gave Jesus no kiss of greeting
 - c. He gave Jesus no oil for his hair
 - b. Recognizing the extent of our sin versus the quantity of our sin causes us to love more (v. 47)
 - a. “When we look closer at the details of the story, one of the things we notice is the way in which **Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisee** . **He is the one who is guilty of poor hospitality** – almost as much of a social blunder as the woman’s letting down of her hair. The Pharisee has never come to terms with the depths of his own heart, & so doesn’t appreciate God’s generous love when it sits in person at his own table. **For Luke, true faith is what**

happens when someone looks at Jesus & discovers God's forgiveness; & the sign & proof of this faith is love ." (N. T. Wright, *Op Cit* , pp. 68-9)

- c. Discovering forgiveness in Jesus results in faith & is expressed in love
 - a. **"The woman's preparation in bringing the alabaster flask in the first place suggests that she has experienced acceptance & forgiveness prior to this event .** Something more fundamental is implicit here, however. It is not that the Pharisee had less for which to be forgiven than the [woman]. Rather, because he did not **recognize his need for forgiveness** he received less. And she, because **she recognized her need & received forgiveness joyfully** , received more." (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 141)
 - b. **"One of the greatest fears of the Christian is religious complacency .** The man who believes he has **arrived** will not go any farther; from his standpoint it would be foolish to do so. **The snare is to believe we have arrived when we have not ."** (A.W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* , p. 66)
7. Jesus Addresses the Forgiven Woman (Lk. 7:48-50)
- a. Jesus said, **"Your sins are forgiven."**
 - a. **"God's fundamental way of transforming people is through his offer of grace & forgiveness. Without the opportunity to restore a broken relationship, the way back to God is blocked...Jesus shows through the example of the notorious sinner that no hole is too deep for the reach of God's delivering, compassionate hand .** This means that as we meet people whose lives are radically out of touch with God, we must be patient, realizing that without God we should not expect anything different from them. **The gospel offers them not only what they need but also supplies what is lacking .** We sometimes want to put the cart before the horse & make the clean-up of life take place first, whereas **God promises that by his grace he will establish the relationship that cleans up a person's life ."** (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 221)
 - b. The other Pharisees in attendance are puzzled, **"Who is this who even forgives sins?"**
 - a. **"Although the priest could pronounce God's forgiveness after a sin offering, Jesus pronounces forgiveness without the clear restitution of a sacrifice to God in the temple. This pronouncement contradicted Pharisaic ethics, & most of early Judaism would have seen it at best as marginal behavior."** (Craig S. Keener, *Op Cit* , p. 200)
 - c. Jesus said to the woman, **"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."**
8. Jesus' Female Disciples Served with Extravagant Love (Lk. 8:1-3)
- a. **"The fundamental pattern of ministry in response to grace is the prominent theme of 8:1-3. Those who enter the community are not spectators ... Rather, they use their gifts & resources in service to Jesus .** Whether delivered from the power of demons or sent from the courts of the kings, these women give to make effective ministry possible. Part of their ministry is to minister to others who minister, a key role in any community. **Texts like this, affirming the role of women in a first century culture where they were either seen as property or relegated to an almost invisible role, are significant in showing that women play a major role in contributing to the ministry of the church. "** (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 221)
 - b. **"Because of the centuries that have passed since Jesus walked the earth, it is hard for us to appreciate how revolutionary Luke's picture of Jesus' ministry is. Women's involvement in supporting Jesus' ministry is an example. Though some wealthy women supported religious figures in ancient times (Josephus Antiquities 17.2.4), it was unusual for them to be as involved as the women in this passage are with Jesus. In fact, this passage is one of several unique to Luke that focus on women (1:5-39; 2:36-38; 7:36-50; 10:38-42; 13:10-17; Lk 15:8-10; Lk 18:1-8). Many men of the time believed that women were not even to be seen, much less heard .** In a later Jewish text, one leader rejoiced that he was not a pagan, a woman or unlearned (Fitzmyer 1981:696). In contrast, **Luke & the New Testament declare that women have equal access to the blessings of grace & salvation .** Whatever distinctions the Bible makes between male & female roles, there is no distinction when it comes to being coheirs in grace (Gal 3:28-29; 1 Pet 3:7) ... **Their hearts were sensitive to God's work, & they expressed this sensitivity through their generosity .** (Darrell Bock, *Luke 7:1-8:3 Movements to Faith*)
 - a. Jesus traveled around proclaiming the kingdom of God (4:43; 9:2, 11, 60; 10:11; 11:20; 12:31-32)
 - b. Jesus formed an inclusive community to be his disciples (Lk. 5:1-11, 27-28; 6:12-16; 8:1-3)
 - a. **"Jesus...creates an inclusive community for outsiders...within the overarching quality of kinship".** (E. Van Eck , "Mission, Identity & Ethics..." HTS, Vol. 69(1), p.)
 - b. **Among Jesus' followers (men & women) "the unifier is Jesus Christ & the unifying principle is the Gospel. This clearly states what is written in...Luke 8:1-3. In Jesus' community, those who follow him are people who come from different backgrounds .** They experience the work of Jesus' ministry in their personal or their family life which makes them believe & follow him. Some of the followers of Jesus are women who also come from different backgrounds. But they work together & support each other in following Jesus on his mission... **In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' community is a special community , which contains people who come from different backgrounds, but that community works together."** (Helen G. Masambe, "Women Who Followed Jesus According to Luke 8:1-3," *Educatio Christi*, V. 6(1) (2025) pp. 21-22)

- c. Female disciples who'd been cured of evils spirits & diseases traveled with Jesus
 - a. "Women sometimes served as patrons, or supporters, of religious teachers or associations in the ancient Mediterranean. (Men outnumbered them more than ten to one, however, because men had more of the economic resources.) But for these women to travel with the group would have been viewed as scandalous. Adult coeducation was unheard of, & that these women are learning Jesus' teaching as closely as his male disciples would surely bother some outsiders as well." (Craig S. Keener, *Op Cit*, p. 200)
 - b. "The women in Lk. 8:1-3 play the role of...female disciples. The indicator...is...they are described as travelling 'with' Jesus...which Luke cites as a requirement for discipleship." (Kimberly Penner, *Work of Wealthy Women*, p. 115)
 - c. On "a preaching tour of Galilee...Jesus took 'with him' the Twelve &...women... (Lk. 8:1-3) who were contributing to [their] support.... The wording indicates... these women were themselves disciples of Jesus...'With him' [(Lk. 8:1) Gk.: sun auto] expresses discipleship in Luke's Gospel." (Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master*: pp. 207-208, #3)
 - a. Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast out of her
 - a. "Mark & Matthew describe the women...as 'following' him from Galilee...Both add that they ministered to (diakoneo) Jesus...[implying] these women were active, serving followers of Jesus." (Sylvia Collinson, *Making Disciples*, p. 59)
 - b. Joanna, wife of Chuza, manager of Herod Antipas' (Ruler of Galilee) household (Lk. 24:10)
 - a. Joanna "leaves her position of power & privilege...to travel with Jesus & support his ministry...She takes a double risk: [1.] To those she leaves behind she risks being identified with Jesus & losing status & honor. [2.] To those she joins in Jesus' community she risks being identified as the wife of Herod's steward...Joanna took a remarkable step in associating...with Jesus' disciples, who were, in...her social circle...despicably inferior, while...in [the disciples'] eyes she deserved...the contempt given...[the] ruling elite by ordinary Galileans." (R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, p. 161)
 - b. "Among [Jesus' followers], Joanna's status brought her no honor, not even her substantial donations to the common fund gave her a place above others...Instead she found a place in...Jesus'...new family of those...practicing the will of God...who were therefore also sisters & brothers... to each other." (Richard Bauckham, *Op Cit*, p. 196)
 - c. Susanna
 - d. Many other women
 - e. Supported financially the ministry of Jesus
 - a. "We should not take the expression [ministered] to mean that the women merely performed traditional roles of cooking, washing, etc." (Greg W. Forbes, Scott D. Harrower, *Raised from Obscurity...Women in Luke-Acts*, p. 88)
 - b. "The clause, '[ministering] out of their possessions' renders the role [of] the women, most certainly Joanna, that of a benefactor/patron, rather than the traditional role of hospitality & service women filled within the household... These women act as economic providers for Jesus & the Twelve," (Kimberly Penner, *Op Cit*, pp. 98-99)
 - c. "Luke 8:1-3 appeals to Luke's audience of wealthy men & women because it defends the presence of women of means within the new [Jesus] community of faith...Luke 8:3 is an example for the wealthy people in Luke's community of how they should distribute their funds & how the Church should receive both funds and founders [funders?]." (Kimberly Penner, *Op Cit*, (2011) p. 112)
 - d. These women supported Jesus financially
 - a. "There is something for the twelve to do, & there is something for the holy women to do, & we cannot do without either of them, & in that last great day when the rewards are distributed, there will be as much for Joanna as for John, & as much for Mary Magdalene as for Simon Peter. Did they not each, according to their utility, serve the Lord Jesus Christ? (Amen!)" (Charles Spurgeon, *Exposition on Luke 8*)

9. Application

- a. Understanding this passage through the perspective of each character
 - a. "The Pharisee reveals how not to approach the question of sinners; Jesus rejects that perspective. The woman pictures a sinner who responds in faith boldly in an exemplary way. She represents the hope that sinners, even notorious ones, can find God." (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit*, p. 221)
- b. The role of women in the church
 - a. "The view of women today differs significantly from the first century. Many women are as educated & qualified for various roles as men, & many serve with distinction in various capacities. In light of the more traditional distinctions the church has made between the role of men & women, [Luke 8:1-3] has produced much questioning about whether women can do everything in the church, including senior pastoring & eldering – offices the New Testament has limited to men. In the midst of the debate about the role of women, we should never lose sight of one thing, that we are all called to serve the Lord by serving one another. One of the great regrets in the current discussion on the role of women is that the discussion is centered on power, fueled more by cultural standards than biblical standards of service. Even those texts that affirm the headship of the male do so as a way to point to service, not to the callous exercise of raw power (Eph. 5:23-33). More attention to these themes might lessen the battles on other matters." (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit*, p. 222)
- c. Beware of overly separating oneself
 - a. "The separation that the Pharisee desired should be rejected out of hand. In fact, a question to ponder is why those outside the faith, like tax collectors & sinners, we're so drawn to Jesus. What did they sense from him that made his message of interest to them? Should not the church, while upholding God's truth & character, be equally open to outsiders?" (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit*, p. 222)
 - b. "You may have found that since you became a Christian, your unbelieving friends have drifted away as you become increasingly involved in the social network of the church. It has been said that within two years of becoming a

Christian, the average person has already lost the significant relationships he once had with people outside the faith . Without frequent heart-to-heart conversations with unchurched people, it's easy to forget how they think." (Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary*).

d. Showing others the way to Jesus' feet

- a. *"It is Jesus, not us, who has the right to forgive sin. He is the one who calls the heart to change. We as believers serve & point to him. Any righteousness we possess comes because he has worked in our lives. We have not earned it, but received it because of his grace. **We are all in the position of the woman at Jesus' feet. We must never forget that truth, so we can show others the way to his feet ."*** (Darrell L. Bock, *Op Cit* , p. 224)

e. Not misusing Jesus' being with the sinful woman

- a. *"We do well to remember our Lord's behavior on this occasion. He carried his 'Father's business' with him to the Pharisee's table. He testified against the Pharisee's besetting sin. He explained to the Pharisee the nature of free forgiveness of sins, & the secret of true love to himself. He declared the saving nature of faith. If Christians who argue in favor of intimacy with unconverted people will visit their homes in the spirit of our lord, & speak & behave as he did, let them by all means continue to practice. But do they speak & behave at the tables of their unconverted acquaintances as Jesus did at Simon's table? This is a question they would do well to answer."* (J. C. Ryle, *St. Luke* , p. 239)

f. Our blind spots

- a. *"Unless we see something of ourselves in the character of Simon the Pharisee, we are so blind to our own need that we have failed to hear the story. The soft underbelly of hypocrisy is always vulnerable to the truth, & we are most vulnerable when we are blind to our own faults. Simon thought he was blameless. He 'knew' the woman was a sinner, & he assumed she had defiled Jesus. Jesus then exposed the contrast between Simon's distant hospitality & the woman's sincere affection. The contrast was clear, & it left Simon doubly exposed & embarrassed."* (Alan Culpepper, *Op Cit* , p. 141)