

Me? Forgive?



*John 8:7b & 11b:
He that is without
sin among you, let
him first cast a stone
at her...Neither do I
condemn thee: go,
and sin no more.*

Forgiveness is an area of life in which we all struggle. We have been wronged, or think we have. We see inequities in life and wonder why or when it will end. Scripture reminds us we have been forgiven much and thus we need to forgive. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts to help us as these situations arise, but it is up to us to avail ourselves of His very present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1). Let's review four situations in Jesus' ministry and glean truths to help us be more like Him.



Woman Caught in Adultery John 8:2-11

The Feast of Tabernacles ended the day before, and Jesus had spent time on the Mount of Olives praying. He was now sitting in the Temple teaching. Many visitors still would have been in Jerusalem and would have been attracted to a noble rabbi. According to John, "all the people came to him," which seems to indicate a crowd had gathered. Teachers in biblical times sat, so Jesus assumed this position of an authoritative teacher.

Imagine the disruption as the scribes and Pharisees brought (dragged) a woman "taken in adultery, in the very act" (verse 4). She must have been humiliated knowing the law required death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18). The obvious question is where was the man? Adultery requires two people, yet only one was brought to Jesus. Was there a double standard? How did they "catch" her unless they set a trap?

Verse 5 reveals the true motive for this disruption. "Moses commanded...but what sayest thou?" If Jesus said not to stone the woman, He would have contradicted Jewish law and seemingly condoned adultery. If He said to stone her, He would have contradicted the Roman law, which did not allow Jews to carry out executions. His preaching had contained messages of compassion, forgiveness, love, and grace. What would He say?

Notice that Jesus did not challenge nor confront this hypocrisy—only silence, "as though he heard them not" (verse 6). Neither does He condemn the woman. He merely stooped to the ground and

began writing. We don't know what He wrote and can only guess. Some have suggested the Ten Commandments, while others suggest the names and personal sins of the accusers. The scribes and Pharisees continued questioning Jesus until He stood.

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (verse 7). Jesus stooped again and continues to write. Can you imagine the tension among these religious leaders? If one picked up a stone, the others knew differently. Conviction dictated no accuser could meet this standard. So, they

"went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last" (verse 9).

Jesus, left alone with the woman in the midst of the gathered crowd asked about her accusers, "Hath no man condemned thee?" (verse 10) Simply she answers, "No man, Lord."

Then Jesus spoke words that challenged and admonished her and have resonated through the centuries, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (verse 11). Jesus came to save, not condemn, so when a person experiences His salvation, deep gratitude should make us want to go and sin no more.

Do we have double standards?

Do we believe some sins are worse than others? Do we practice this?



Woman With an Alabaster Box Luke 7:36-50

This woman discovered Jesus is having a meal with the Pharisees at the home of Simon. She was overwhelmed to be close

enough to touch the man who meant so much to her. She knew there would be criticism. Can you even imagine a woman of ill repute in this room full of Pharisees? Because she had received forgiveness of sins, deep gratitude and love propelled her forward.

She quietly entered the room, knelt, and began to weep, washing His feet. She wiped them with the hairs of her head. Because women did not uncover their hair except at home, this would have been taboo and required great courage. She went one step further by breaking her alabaster box and anointing Jesus' feet with oil.

Simon had invited Jesus to this meal. As an invited guest with religious stature, He sat at the main table. Other guests sat along the outside walls enabling them to listen to the conversation. Do you wonder how she even gained entrance into the house?

Did you notice this woman did not say a word? Her actions spoke volumes about her contrite heart. Simon's mental wheels were turning as he questions Jesus' motives. Read verse 39. As a Pharisee, he would have little contact with such a woman. In his mind, a true prophet would not allow

this sinful woman to touch him.

Contrast Jesus' reaction. He was not embarrassed though He knew she was a woman of the world, a sinner with a bad reputation. He accepted her demonstration of love and gratitude. He didn't address the woman but directed His comments to Simon. He told a parable of two debtors. One owed 500 pence and the other 50. Neither could pay, and the creditor forgave both debts. Jesus then posed a question to Simon, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" (verse 42) Simon answered the one forgiven most.

Jesus directly connects the dots for Simon. He did not provide water for Jesus to wash His feet when He entered the house. Simon did not greet Jesus with a kiss of hospitality yet this woman kissed his feet. Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with oil but the woman...His feet. Verse 47 further addresses verse 43. How must Simon, the Pharisee, have felt? This woman was very aware of her sinfulness, while it seems Simon did not see himself as a sinner.

Jesus then turned to the woman and said, "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee" (verse 48b and 50b). Imagine the impact of these words to those present. Jesus

demonstrated His deity by declaring her visible actions confirmed her love for the Savior resulting from His forgiveness.

If we walk closely with Jesus each day, we will be very aware of our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness. "O to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee" ("Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing", Robert Robinson).

Are we eager to point out the "mote" in other's eyes while ignoring the "beam" in our own? (Matthew 7:4-5)

Is our love for Christ evident in the "daily-ness" of our lives? Explain.



The Paralytic Man Luke 5:17-26

After healing the leper and those who came because of his testimony, Jesus withdrew to the wilderness to pray. He then returned to Capernaum, His home base during His earthly ministry. Matthew 8:14-15 seems to indicate He could have been at Peter's home. Some commentators think there may have been close to 50 in the house. We know there were "Pharisees and doctors of the law" present (verse 17). Mark tells us there was "no more room in the house" (Mark 2:2). Were others able to hear through windows?

While Jesus was teaching, the roof began coming apart. (Imagine the falling debris.) Then a bed was slowly lowered into the room before Jesus. The paralytic could not have removed the roof nor lowered himself. He had friends who cared deeply for him and wanted Jesus to heal him. A blocked door did not stop them. A flat

roof gave access, so they got busy.

When Jesus saw the faith of the four friends and the paralytic, He responded, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee,” implying this man trusted in Jesus as Messiah. Thus, “their faith” includes the four friends *and* the paralytic. The scribes and Pharisees began equating Jesus’ words with blasphemy. Their thought was “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (verse 21) Jesus knew their thoughts and addressed them as though they had been uttered. Read carefully verses 22-24. Jesus addressed the paralytic again, “Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house” (verse 24). Through this directive, Jesus was declaring His deity. He referred to Himself as the “Son of Man,” a title from Daniel 7:13-14, that reveals God’s heart of compassion. The visible evidence of Jesus’ authority was when the man arose and went home. These religious leaders might deny His deity or ability to forgive sins, but the outward physical healing could not be denied! He arose and went home glorifying God. Matthew adds an interesting detail, “When the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God” (9:8).

Whose life is challenged because we have been forgiven?

Do we readily sense others’ needs and discover ways to show them Jesus?



The Unforgiving Servant Matthew 18:21-35

The backdrop for this parable is Peter’s question, “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” In Judaism, three times was considered sufficient to demonstrate a forgiving spirit (Amos 1:3 and 2:6). Jesus’ response of 70 times seven must have blown Peter’s mind. Jesus then shared a parable

to further illustrate the need for forgiveness:

Two men owed debts to a certain king. The first owed a huge, almost incalculable amount...10,000 talents. One talent was worth 600,000 denarii. One denarius was equal to a day's wage, so he owed about 20 years of wages. Commentators "guesstimate" this man owed up to \$6 billion—more than was in circulation in Palestine at that time. He would not live long enough to pay such a debt. The king commanded him, his wife, and children be sold so payment could be made, a common practice in the ancient world. This servant pleaded for mercy and it was granted (verse 26-27).

The second servant owed the first servant 100 pence...about \$16-18. This manageable debt could likely be earned in 100 days. After he left the king's presence, the first servant saw the second servant. Servant #1 grabbed servant #2 by the throat and demanded full payment. Servant #2 begged for mercy but received a much different outcome. He was thrown into prison until he could pay

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the debt. (How can you work while in prison?)

Interestingly, fellowservants observed this exchange and were astonished. They had witnessed the king's display of mercy and grace toward the first servant, and that he was not willing to extend the same to the second servant. They reported to the king what they had seen and heard (verse 31).

The king called the first servant back and asked a pointed question. "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (verse 33). At this point, the king was angry and delivered servant #1 to the tormentors until he could pay his debt. This was a life sentence.

I imagine Peter was not quite so overwhelmed by 70 times seven. What do you think? Jesus' point was that forgiveness should be *unlimited* when true repentance is present.

Jesus clearly stated His message (verse 35). Sinners owe a hopeless debt to God. Yet, out of His abundant mercy and grace He for-

gives us. The sins of others against us should pale in comparison to the enormity of our own sins against God. God's mercy withholds the righteous judgment we deserve. He graciously allowed Jesus to die for our sins to pay the debt we owed and to break the power of sin. A transformed heart must result in a changed life willing to offer the same mercy and forgiveness we have received from God.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His followers how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13). We are to forgive our debtors as our debts have been forgiven. Verses 14-15 go further stating that if we forgive men their trespasses against us, God will also forgive us. If we don't, neither will He forgive our trespasses. We must be like Jesus. He can mold and make our hearts to respond as He would. Oh that we will be clay in the Potter's hands!

When you've been hurt, how quickly should you forgive?

How many times should you be willing to forgive the same person for the same thing?

How often does God forgive us for the same sin? 

About the Writer: Elizabeth Hodges serves as executive director of WNAC, overseeing all ministries and office operations. Elizabeth's wealth of experience as a pastor's wife, mother, grandmother, WAC leader, educator, and school principal assists her in this administrative role. She and Eddie have three children and eight grandchildren.