

Parable of the Forgiven Debt

How God's Love Becomes Personal

WEEK 9

OVERVIEW

1. Choose connection instead of criticism
2. Try to be grateful, not good
3. Let God teach you to love

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Who is someone in your life who genuinely loves you? What are some kind, selfless things they do (or have done) for you?

INTRODUCTION

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

– 1 Thessalonians 4:9 NIV

When God's love becomes personal to us, it teaches us to love him and others.

The Forgiven Woman and the Parable of the Forgiven Debt help us understand God's love and forgiveness.

In this devotional, we'll look at a few key ways we can make God's love personal, like the Forgiven Woman in Luke 7 did.

More resources at deepspirituality.com/parables

1. CHOOSE CONNECTION INSTEAD OF CRITICISM

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him. Jesus went into the Pharisee's house and took a place at the table. There was a sinful woman in that town. She knew that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So the woman brought some expensive perfume in an alabaster jar. She stood at Jesus' feet, crying. Then she began to wash his feet with her tears. She dried his feet with her hair. She kissed his feet many times and rubbed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who asked Jesus to come to his house saw this, he thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know that the woman who is touching him is a sinner!"

– Luke 7:36-39 ERV

- **God is interested in connection.** Jesus accepted an invitation to enjoy a meal in someone's home.
- **God is not fault-finding or critical.** Jesus didn't look at the woman or the Pharisee with disapproval.
- **The religious criticize instead of connecting.** The Pharisee in this story was more focused on criticizing Jesus and the woman than connecting with or caring about them.
- **Criticism is self-focused.** It's often a way to feel better about ourselves by putting others down.
- **The woman spent her energy connecting with Jesus, not criticizing.**
- **Connection with God frees us from fear and selfishness.** The woman was so grateful for Jesus' love and forgiveness that she was bold, kind, and selfless. She wanted to connect with God more than she wanted to please people or protect herself from criticism.

Pause and reflect

- Which do I tend to do more—connect or criticize? Why?
- What does my level of selflessness, boldness, and kindness say about my relationship with God?

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1. CHOOSE CONNECTION INSTEAD OF CRITICISM

Take action

- **Connect with God** by letting down about your own insecurities, desires, and sins in prayer.
 - Find verses of the Bible that help you see the truth about how God really feels about you.
- **Learn to see criticism as a sign** that you need to spend more time with someone. When we spend time with people, we understand and appreciate them better instead of finding fault with them.
- **Pray about the things you appreciate** about people around you.
- Everyone has unique gifts, and we are meant to rely on each other (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

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2. TRY TO BE GRATEFUL, NOT GOOD

When the Pharisee who asked Jesus to come to his house saw this, he thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know that the woman who is touching him is a sinner!" In response, Jesus said to the Pharisee, "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon said, "Let me hear it, Teacher." Jesus said, "There were two men. Both men owed money to the same banker. One man owed him 500 silver coins. The other man owed him 50 silver coins. The men had no money, so they could not pay their debt. But the banker told the men that they did not have to pay him. Which one of those two men will love him more?" Simon answered, "I think it would be the one who owed him the most money." Jesus said to him, "You are right."

– Luke 7:39-43 ERV

- **Our sins can be compared to debt**, and becoming aware of our specific sins helps us to be more grateful for the forgiveness that Jesus offers.
- **The Pharisee spent his time and energy trying to be "good"** (separating himself from sinful people, looking down on the woman, and hiding his doubtful thoughts about whether Jesus was really a prophet), but he wasn't grateful or loving. He was not as aware of his sins as the woman was.
- **Because he wasn't grateful, he grumbled** about Jesus and his mercy toward the sinful woman, and he grumbled about the woman's love for Jesus.
- **How does this relate to me?**
 - When we are not aware of and grateful for the specific ways God is merciful to us, we will grumble.
 - When we are aware of God's great forgiveness and how undeserving we are of it, we will be grateful and loving.
 - **When we try to earn God's approval with rule-following and perfect behavior**, we'll become **critical, unbelieving, and unloving**.

Pause and reflect

- What are some excuses I make when I don't want to do what God asks?
- Do I recognize any entitlement in my life? How does it affect my desire to respond to God?

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2. TRY TO BE GRATEFUL, NOT GOOD

Take action

- Choose one of these practical things to do this week to be grateful for God instead of trying to be good:
 - **Read the book of Romans** to understand how God's kindness to us through Jesus is completely undeserved.
 - **Pray about forgiveness.** Tell God the sins in your life that you are most grateful to be forgiven for. If you need help identifying them, read through Galatians 5:19-20 or Romans 1:18-32.
 - **Pray about gratitude.** Spend time each day praying only about the things you are grateful for. What good gifts has God given you (James 1:17)? What are some things about him you are grateful for?

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3. LET GOD TEACH YOU TO LOVE

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my feet. But she washed my feet with her tears and dried my feet with her hair. You did not greet me with a kiss, but she has been kissing my feet since I came in. You did not honor me with oil for my head, but she rubbed my feet with her sweet-smelling oil. [47] I tell you that her many sins are forgiven. This is clear, because she showed great love. People who are forgiven only a little will love only a little." [48] Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." [49] The people sitting at the table began to think to themselves, "Who does this man think he is? How can he forgive sins?" [50] Jesus said to the woman, "Because you believed, you are saved from your sins. Go in peace."

– Luke 7:44-50 ERV

- **Forgiven much, love much:** The woman's acts of love came from her awareness that she had been forgiven for a lot of sins, so she had a lot of gratitude for Jesus.
- **Knowing what we need to be forgiven for helps us to be humble,** seeing that we need God to forgive us, love us, and help us change.
- **It also helps us understand God's incredible, unlimited mercy.** The woman believed Jesus loved her enough to wipe away even her "many" sins, and her gratitude for this made her incredibly loving.

Wrapping up

Jesus wanted to be connected to the host of this party and to the guests. He was willing to sacrifice his life so that he could have a close relationship with them and also with us. The woman in the story shows us how God's love can become personal to us, changing our lives and flowing over into the way we treat people.

We can experience God's love in this personal and powerful way too, by choosing to connect instead of criticizing, being grateful instead of trying to be good, and letting God teach us how to love.