

How deep is your love?

Luke 7:36-50 – Leader's version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

30 minutes

Read Luke 7:36-39

1. Why do you think a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner?

His motives may genuinely be to learn from Jesus, or to debate theology. He may want to raise his own profile by inviting a popular teacher to his house. He may be planning a trap – 6:11.

2. What happens next (v37-38)?

Knowing the geography of the dinner is important to understanding how this woman got in in the first place! Jesus is 'reclining at the table' v36. The table was in a courtyard and the meal is meant to be open to spectators. People lay on their left side, eating with their right hand, with their heads towards the table and feet away from it. Because it's in a central courtyard the public can mingle around, as well as the Pharisee's servants (all the better if you want people to see your high profile dinner guests), so the woman can get to Jesus' feet to anoint them without interrupting the meal, or being thrown out if she's quick / determined enough.

Don't explore the situation any more than the bare details at the moment.

This is not the same incident as that in Matthew / Mark or John. We know this because:

1. Timing – Matthew / Mark: the week before Jesus' death, in preparation for burial. Luke: seems early in Jesus' ministry. John: 6 days before Passover i.e. the week before Jesus died.
2. Location – Matthew / Mark: Simon the Leper's house in Bethany. Luke: a Pharisee's house. John: a house in Bethany, maybe Lazarus' house?
3. Anointing – Matthew / Mark: Jesus' head. Luke: Jesus' feet. John: Jesus' feet.
4. The woman – Matthew / Mark: a woman. Luke: a sinful woman. John: Mary, sister of Lazarus.
5. Reason – Matthew / Mark: 'to prepare me for burial. Luke: we'll find out later! John: preparation for burial.

The woman is not Mary Magdalene, she's 'a sinful woman'. Somehow she's become associated with Mary Magdalene and Mary has gained the reputation of being a prostitute. There is no Biblical evidence for this.

3. How do you think Jesus feels about this?

Don't read ahead, just brainstorm from what you've read in v39.

4. What does the Pharisee think of the woman and her behaviour (v39)? Is this the right attitude?

This woman is not invited to the meal. He knows who she is and what her reputation is.

He disapproves of her, her actions and of Jesus for allowing her to do this.

This may be an understandable attitude – the woman has crashed the Pharisee's dinner party, lowered the tone, distracted the guests, taken the attention away from the host etc. But it's not a right attitude and it's not the way that Jesus treats people.

5. How does Jesus treat the outcast? Think about what you have already learnt as we've studied Luke's gospel. Why do you think he treats people in this way?

Luke has a particular focus on Jesus' treatment of the outcast in his society – women, the poor, the unclean, lepers etc. Consider the healing of the leper 5:12-16, calling a tax collector to join the group of disciples 5:27-31, the healing of the Centurion's servant (the Centurion was a Roman and a Gentile) 7:1-10 and the raising of the widow's son (alone, this widow would have been poor and maybe homeless) 7:11-17.

6. What point is Jesus making in the parable in Luke 7:40-43?

The Pharisee seems to take it literally, as being about money. But Jesus is talking about our awareness of our sinfulness – the more we understand our own sinfulness, the more we understand the depth of God's forgiveness and the more we love him.

7. Read Luke 7:44-50. What does the woman communicate by the way she treats Jesus?

Her love for him, her understanding of the social insult that the host had given Jesus by not kissing Jesus on arrival, washing Jesus' feet and drying them or anointing him with oil.

Cultural details that help us to understand the situation:

- *A host was expected to greet a guest with a kiss, anoint him with oil and offer a bowl of water to wash the guest's feet and a towel to dry them (Israel is a dusty country and everyone wore sandals). Not providing these things was a deliberate insult – "War has been declared and everyone waits to see Jesus' response." The tension in the room is so thick you can cut it with a knife.' (Ortberg 2003, p207)*
- *The woman had 'lived a sinful life in that town' – whatever she's done, everyone else knows about it*
- *Alabaster jar of perfume – the tools of a prostitute's trade. This was expensive and to pour it over Jesus was a great personal sacrifice. Using it all meant she was giving up prostitution.*

- *Women did not show their hair to any man but their husband, in privacy.*
- *All eyes would have been glued on this unfolding drama.*

8. What does the woman's love for Jesus demonstrate to the observers and to us? (v47)

She loves Jesus very much because she knows she has been forgiven very much.

Be careful that this is not misunderstood – she is not forgiven much because she loves much, she loves much because she knows she is forgiven much.

It's not that the Pharisee needs any less forgiveness, it's that he has less insight into the depth of his sin and so less understanding of his need for forgiveness and thus less love for the one who can forgive him.

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How much do you love Jesus? What does that tell you about how much you understand the depth of your sin and of your need for forgiveness?

If you have a copy of *'Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them'* by John Ortberg, why not re-read part of ch11 before you lead this study? (2003, p206 from 'One day Jesus arrives...' to p214 'He needs grace for a heart that is hard.')

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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2. What happens next (v37-38)?
3. How do you think Jesus feels about this?
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