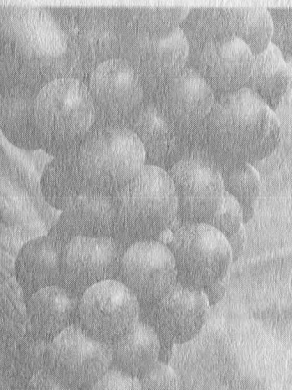


LESSON SIX

A GUILTY WOMAN

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

JOHN 8:7 NKJV



REFLECTION

The longing for love and acceptance that makes us human can also lead us to make shameful and sad choices. Even more shocking are some of the thoughtless and evil acts people commit toward others they deem less worthy of love. Yet each of us desires those marvelous moments when we feel valued and appreciated by someone else. What are some responses or gestures that make you feel loved and accepted by others?

SITUATION

John includes a brief episode in his Gospel to illustrate the lengths some people were willing to go in order to trap and destroy Jesus. Certain leaders had already attempted to undermine his position, and efforts had been made to arrest him. These leaders continued to test Jesus' orthodoxy with a crude confrontation in which a woman, clearly guilty of an offense, was brought before him. They had little interest in justice. They simply asked Jesus, "What do you say?" Neither the opponents nor the woman expected the answer Jesus gave.

OBSERVATION

Read John 8:1-11 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹ But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and

he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone,

and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

EXPLORATION

1. Why did the religious leaders bring the adulterous woman to Jesus? (See Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 for the Old Testament background of their charges.)

2. Why did the religious leaders ask Jesus what they should do with the woman?

3. How was Jesus' attitude toward the woman different from the crowd's attitude?

4. Why do you think the older men were the first to leave the scene?

5. With which group or person in the story do you identify the most?

6. What words would you use to describe the way Jesus treated the guilty woman? How did he address her sin?

INSPIRATION

Sightless and heartless redeemers. Redeemers without power. That's not the Redeemer of the New Testament.

Jesus sits surrounded by a horseshoe of listeners. Some nod their heads in agreement and open their hearts in obedience. They have accepted the teacher as their teacher and are learning to accept him as their Lord.

We don't know his topic that morning. Prayer, perhaps. Or maybe kindness or anxiety. But whatever it was, it was soon interrupted when people burst into the courtyard.

Determined, they erupt out of a narrow street and stomp toward Jesus. The listeners scramble to get out of the way. The mob is made up of religious leaders, the elders and deacons of their day. Respected and important men. And struggling to keep her balance on the crest of this angry wave is a scantily clad woman.

Only moments before she had been in bed with a man who was not her husband. Was this how she made her living? Maybe. Maybe not. We don't know.

But we do know that a door was jerked open and she was yanked from a bed. She barely had time to cover her body before she was dragged into the street by two men the age of her father.

And now, with holy strides, the mob storms toward the teacher. They throw the woman in his direction. She nearly falls.

"We found this woman in bed with a man!" cries the leader. "The law says to stone her. What do you say?"

In her despair she looks at the Teacher. His eyes don't glare. "Don't worry," they whisper, "it's okay." And for the first time that morning she sees kindness.

As Jesus looked at this daughter, did his mind race back? Did he relive the act of forming this child in heaven? Did he see her as he had originally made her?

So, with the tenderness only a father can have, he set out to untie the knots and repair the holes.

He begins by diverting the crowd's attention. He draws on the ground. Everybody looks down. The woman feels relief as the eyes of the men look away from her.

The accusers are persistent. "Tell us, teacher! What do you want us to do with her?"

He just raised his head and offered an invitation, "I guess if you've never made a mistake, then you have a right to stone this woman." He looked back down and began to draw on the earth again.

Someone cleared his throat as if to speak, but no one spoke. Feet shuffled. Eyes dropped. Then thud . . . thud . . . thud . . . rocks fell to the ground.

And they walked away. They came as one, but they left one by one. Jesus told the woman to look up. "Is there no one to condemn you?"

Maybe she expected him to scold her. Perhaps she expected him to walk away from her. I'm not sure, but I do know this: What she got, she never expected. She got a promise and a commission.

The promise: "Then neither do I condemn you." The commission: "Go and sin no more."

The woman turns and walks into anonymity. She's never seen or heard from again. But we can be confident of one thing: On that morning in Jerusalem, she saw Jesus and Jesus saw her. And could we somehow

transport her to Rio de Janeiro and let her stand at the base of the *Cristo Redentor*, I know what her response would be.

"That's not the Jesus I saw," she would say. For the Jesus she saw didn't have a hard heart. And the Jesus that saw her didn't have blind eyes.

However, if we could somehow transport her to Calvary and let her stand at the base of the cross . . . you know what she would say. "That's him."

She would recognize his voice. It's raspier and weaker, but the words are the same, "Father, forgive them . . ." And she would recognize his eyes. How could she ever forget those eyes? Clear and tear-filled. Eyes that saw her not as she was, but as she was intended to be. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. How does Jesus' interaction with this sinful woman encourage you?

8. What was the attitude of the religious leaders toward the woman? Toward Jesus?

9. How can we avoid these same attitudes?

God loves with an informed passion. Jesus didn't look at the woman caught in adultery as a stranger for whom he could practice mercy. In his look, she met someone who knew exactly who she was and what she had done. And yet, despite his awareness, Jesus did not treat her as an object to make a point or a pawn to manipulate. He spoke the truth—and he set her free to go and sin no more. No matter how often we come to Christ, burdened and fallen again, he is willing to say to us, “Go, and sin no more.”

Father, you are compassionate and forgiving. Like the woman in this story, we stand amazed that you would have such mercy on us. We thank you for your unconditional love. We are not what we should be, but we accept your forgiveness and claim your salvation.

For what sinful attitudes or actions do you need to ask God's forgiveness?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of John during this twelve-part study, read John 7:1–8:59. For more Bible passages on God’s forgiveness, read Exodus 34:6–7; Deuteronomy 4:31; Luke 1:50; Acts 10:43; Ephesians 1:7; 2:4–5; and 1 John 1:8–9.