



For the Week of May 13, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:
caught

Life Notes for Missional Communities

for your personal growth

This week, we're studying a very personal, life changing encounter Jesus had with a woman. Early manuscripts do not have this story, but Pastor Mark shared his belief that this story accurately reflects the character and teachings of Jesus. Let's learn from this together.

Remember that the questions are here to help you move Scripture into your heart and life - to help you hear from the Holy Spirit. And journaling is a great way to gain insight, express perspectives and generally see God at work in your life. You don't have to journal pages - it can just be a word.

the Word: John 7:53-8:11

Then each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and then spoke to Jesus.

Teachers of the Law and Pharisees: *"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*

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. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and spoke to them.

Jesus: *"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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.

Jesus straightened up and questioned the woman.

Jesus: *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

Woman: *"No one, sir."*

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

a unique moment in God's Word

As the story opens, we see people return to their homes while Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives. He often went there to pray, but we can only speculate. What we do know is that by dawn the next morning, Jesus is at work again, teaching those who are hungry to hear. Something about him drew the crowd, and they listened. But those who were accustomed to the leadership role weren't among the hearers or appreciators; instead, the teachers and Pharisees had something else in mind.

As you settle in to study, let's try something a little different. Let's try intentionally asking God to speak to us from his Word. (I know, that sounds obvious, but stick with me.) Settle in. Get a comfortable spot. Grab your Bible, a notebook or journal and a pencil or pen. Let's open our hearts to what God might offer. **(Hint:** If you're doing this together in your Missional Community, it will be a great experience.)

Complete the following sentences as your mind gradually tunes in to hear from God.

Holy Spirit, the last time I heard from you...

What I sense I need to hear from you today...

I want to hear, but these things keep coming into my mind...

Now simply settle in to those answers for a moment and invite God to speak. **(Hint:** If you're doing this in your MC, read each of the above questions one at a time and then invite everyone to simply complete their sentences - no commentary or further discussion is needed.) Clear your mind, one thing at a time, of all that is competing for your thoughts, your attention, your time. **(Hint:** MC leaders, simply guide this process...it's a silent time of people releasing their concerns.) Imagine God placing each competing idea, task or worry into a jar to safely keep until you want them again. Simply allow yourself to *"be still and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10) as we read the passage three times.

First Reading: Read John 7:53-8:11 out loud and listen, as if God were telling the story to you. Imagine the setting. Jesus was there. It is his story to tell. Create the scene in your mind as the story is told. When you're done, close your eyes and respond out loud, if possible, with the first response that comes to your mind.

Then still your thoughts again, handing back to Jesus any fears, tasks or concerns that managed to find their way back into your time with God (remember, he's holding these for as long as you want his help).

Second Reading: Read the passage a second time. As a sage in the 4th century once wrote, *"the more familiar the Scriptures become, the more they reveal their hidden treasures"* (John Chrysostom). This time, pray your way through the story as it unfolds. We're asking God for the grace to allow his word to change our hearts and our lives. This is God's true message, so we want, as Jeremiah said, to "eat" the words and let them inform or direct our very lives. Be in a constant state of inviting God to change you as you read this passage a second time. Note any awareness that arises for you as you read.

Third Reading: Read the passage out loud, making note of any particular word or phrases that God seems to be underlining for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you clarity - a fresh, personal understanding of the meaning of this passage in your life today.

You've just done a "lectio divina" (divine reading) - congratulations. We often speak for God in our rush to know, to accomplish, but his voice is most powerful in the whisper.

caught...the harsh glare of judgment

In our culture, we find a great deal of pleasure in “catching” people in their wrongs. Sometimes we “catch” them in a specific sin, other times we “catch” them doing something we imagine we would never do in their position. We like the scandal. We like having the attention drawn to someone else - even someone we do not know and will likely never meet. We shake our heads and talk about the scandal and walk away, leaving the person in the context of their shame. In group conversation, talk about the “caught” stories that have been in the news recently.

Why do we get wrapped up in other people's sin or failures?

What is it about other people's shame that intrigues and draws us in?

After a candid discussion, what do you learn?

Assign different people in the group to read the various parts as you look, again, at John 7:53-8:11. You'll need a Narrator, teachers of the Law and Pharisees (you might ask several to read this part together in unison), Jesus and the woman. (The first page of **LN** is already formatted in dialogue.)

Pastor Mark spoke candidly with us about the motivation of the Jewish leaders when he said,

“The religious leaders were trying to set a public trap for Jesus. If he ordered the stoning of the woman he could be in jeopardy of breaking Roman law, which didn't allow for the death penalty in cases of adultery. If he didn't order the stoning he would be seen as not upholding Jewish law that called for death in such cases. Either way, they'd have some dirt on Jesus.”

In other words, the religious leaders, tasked by God with being a blessing to all nations, did not care about this woman. At all. It is, after all, so easy to judge. We are more comfortable when the finger is pointed elsewhere, yes? When the attention is drawn away from our sin, we internally relax a bit. When someone else is “caught,” all eyes are off you or me...for now. If truth be told, “catching” someone in their sin plays into our self-righteousness, and that feels better than living alone with our secret shame.

“Their problem was pride that flows from self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is poison... it blinds us to our own sin, and sets our sight on the sin of others. These guys had become blind to their own sin, and were ready to kill another person over her sin. That's what self-righteousness does. When that happens, we start to think more highly of ourselves than we should, and lower of others than we should. These guys, threw this woman into public shame and labeled her a sinner, as if they belonged in a different category. When self-righteousness sets in, we start categorizing others as lower than us, and lose compassion for them. The religious leaders didn't care a bit about the pain this woman was suffering. They didn't care at all about restoration. They didn't care if she lived or died, to them she was just bait to catch Jesus. Self-righteousness causes us to lose our compassion for struggling sinners.” (Pastor Mark)

Share around the following questions in your group.

When have you judged another? When have you been the accused? How did you feel during each experience?

Are you a self-accuser? If so, when are you likely to accuse yourself?

When have you personally experienced or witnessed extreme grace?

caught...drop the stones

While the accusers were standing there, waiting for Jesus' next move, the woman was alone in her shame. At least it felt that way to her, before Jesus bent and began to write in the sand.

Do you carry shame? Is feeling ashamed of your past or a current situation or sin part of your regular spiritual climate? Do you feel afraid of the judgment of others? Do you feel afraid of the God's judgment? Is grace a difficult spiritual gift for you to receive?

(We recognize these are yes/no questions and, therefore, difficult to discuss, but let the conversation flow for awhile around personal shame.)

What do you think Jesus wrote in the dust?

As a group, read Psalm 51 out loud.

What is the main theme of this psalm?

What does God desire?

How can we respond to God, on a regular basis, with both a longing for a fresh start and the pure joy of forgiveness and grace received?

Pastor Mark shared,

"Jesus completely changed this woman's life. He rescued her from death, drove off her accusers, showed her mercy, lifted her guilt, and called her into freedom. And he does the same for all who draw near to him today. Whatever brokenness, moral failure, sin struggle you carry into this place, Jesus wants to set you free from all that. If you'll come to him in faith, he'll show you perfect mercy. Jesus will say to you, I do not condemn you. In fact scripture says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Jesus will lift that burden of shame from you. Then Jesus will call you to live in the freedom he's given you. He'll call you to repent of the sin that enslaved you. This woman got caught up in adultery because she thought it would give her what she was looking for, and I bet it did for a while, but in the end she was enslaved to that sin. Jesus called her, and he calls us to repent and live freely in him. My hope is that, instead of carrying around that burden of shame, you will leave it with Jesus."

It is difficult for us not to judge others, and it is difficult for us not to judge ourselves. The good news: judgment isn't our job. We are not asked to judge each other. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts, not you or me. It is our job to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourself. It is our job to deeply care for each other. (see Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 14; John 16:5-11)

Specifically, how can we be people of forgiveness and grace?

How can we "drop the stones?"

How can we live freely and extend grace to others?

for missional communities not doing life notes

Spend a few moments at the beginning or ending of your time responding to the following question:

*How can we specifically be people of grace rather than people of condemnation?
How can we drop the stones - against others and against ourselves?*

next week

To prepare for next week's sermon, read John 8:12-59 and pages 116-122 in Metzger's *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*.

Don't forget to email questions you might have on these passages in John to Pastor Mark at markc@mission68.org.

see next page for facilitator suggestions

As a group, practice the “Lectio Divina” outlined on the second page of **Life Notes**. Allow yourselves to read the word together and truly hear from God as a community. There isn’t any formality to this - so you don’t have to worry if you’ve never tried to hear from God together, as a community, before. This is simply an opportunity to listen, as a community, to the Holy Spirit.

What did you experience together?

What did you personally hear from God?

What did your community hear from God?

Talk together about the two sides of the coin - judging and being judged, stoning and being stoned, accusing and being accused. Talk about what it feels like to be on both sides of that situation and why you think it’s so easy for us to fall into the judgmental behaviors.

Depending on the closeness of your group and the safety of sharing within your group, lead a discussion about when we personally find ourselves as judge and when we personally experience condemnation. Here are some examen questions to help. Remember, you don’t need to address all of these - they are merely suggestions for sharing with each other and for learning, together, from the Holy Spirit.

When is it easiest for you to judge another?

When is it most difficult for you to judge another?

When is it easiest for you to accept responsibility?

When is it most difficult for you to accept responsibility?

When is it easiest to condemn someone else?

When is it most difficult to condemn someone else?

When do you find you condemn yourself - feel self-blame?

What do you want Jesus to be writing in the sand during those moments?

When is it easiest to extend forgiveness?

When is it most difficult to extend forgiveness?

What is easiest about extending grace?

What is most difficult about extending grace?

How can we specifically be people of grace rather than people of condemnation?

How can we drop the stones?