



For the Week of May 13, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:
caught

Daily Life Notes for Individuals & Couples

Introductions

Welcome to **Life Notes**. This week, we'll be looking at John 8, focusing on our struggle with judgement and with shame.

The passages selected by Pastor Mark this week are copied below in their entirety, but it's best to use your own Bible so you can make note of things that interest you or speak to you in some way. It's always good to read a passage at least twice, so that your mind begins to get involved with what the Holy Spirit is saying. You can view various Bible versions online at sites like www.biblegateway.com

Note: Saturday is used as a "sabbath" or "rest from our every day work responsibilities" experience, but you might work on Saturday and be off some other time during the week that would be more appropriate to celebrating rest. Please feel free to adjust the **Life Notes** schedule to fit your own.

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 her.

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."*

Monday: a closer look at the Word

This week, Pastor Mark taught us from the very heart of Jesus. You might note in your Bible that the earliest manuscripts do not include the verses we are studying this week, but Pastor Mark shared his conviction that this story reveals the heart of Jesus and is consistent with the rest of what we know in the Bible. And so we find illustrated the very attitude that Jesus himself lived and calls us to follow.

As you begin this week, begin with the text alone today and invite God to speak to you very personally as you read. Here's the plan. Settle in with Bible, pen and journal and anything else that helps you feel physically, mentally or emotionally comfortable and prepared for God to speak. Some people like to be outside, some in...some people like lots of light, some prefer a darker atmosphere...some enjoy music playing, others prefer quiet...some like wide open spaces, some prefer nooks and crannies...some prefer comfortable chairs, others like the floor. Create a place to hear from God.

As you begin, complete the following statements in writing or out loud:

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

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

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. Clear your mind, one thing at a time, of all that is competing for your thoughts, your attention, your time. 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). We'll be reading 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 only holding them 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 (Jer. 15:16). Be in a constant state of inviting God to change you as you read this passage a second time. Note any awareness that arises 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.

Now think of one thing you can perceive or do differently in light of what you have just experienced.

What is one thing you can do/pray/change/think differently to live what you have heard God say to you?

Tuesday: caught in our own agenda

As you begin your time today, re-read John 7:53-8:11 and find yourself in the story.

Did anything new stand out for you in today's reading?

The story opens with everyone in their homes except Jesus. He spent time on the Mount of Olives and was up early, teaching in the temple. Imagine what he might have been saying and to whom.

Next thing Jesus knew, religious leaders presented him with a woman. She was thrust into his presence, in front of everyone he had been teaching, and she was publicly accused in an attempt to trap Jesus. The Pharisees and religious leaders didn't care about her - they cared about themselves and their own agenda.

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. Think 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 us and draws us in?

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. In talking about the teachers and Pharisees, Pastor Mark said:

"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."

Journal or talk with your **Life Notes** partner (if you're going through **Life Notes** with someone else) about one or two people who have shown you compassion and mercy in your lifetime rather than judgment. Include the details in your story. Paint a picture of how it felt to you to receive such mercy.

Now journal or discuss a time when you've been in the justice-dispensing crowd.

Who do you have a difficult time loving? Who is it easy for you to judge? Where do you think the judgments come from?

As you close this time today, remember that you are learning from God. This isn't a time to feel more shame or more judgment. This is a team to hear from God and let your heart be rearranged in whatever way God is working. You might end in reading Romans 14:4 until it becomes real for you.

Wednesday: caught - drop the stones

Though judgment is a difficult topic to address, we have to see it raise its ugly head in order to see ourselves and our Lord more clearly. When we judge someone, we are stepping into the role of the Holy Spirit, and we become something for each other that we were never intended to be.

As you prepare for your time today, pray for God's love to abound - to you and through you. Pray for the ability to learn from the Holy Spirit, not leave more burdened. One of the struggles we face when learning about judgment is guilt. We might be tempted to step in to our own guilt and shame or we might be tempted to revive some judgmental feelings we've had about someone else. If these kinds of thoughts come up for you, simply hand them to Jesus. This is a time for you to refresh your soul, to learn more about the character of Jesus, to step into a deeper understanding of the role that judgment and shame play in our world, even the world of the Jesus-follower.

Refresh your mind with this week's story, reading it once through. Then read Romans 14, coming back to 14:4 several times at the end of your reading. This is a passage that discusses judgment in a less emotional context, so you can review your heart and allow God to show you any judgments you bear.

Now read Matthew 7:1-6.

Pastor Mark had this to share about us when we bear judgments against another.

"Some of you can relate to the accusers in this story. You hate the sin of others (masked as defender of truth), but your insensitive to your own sin. You've slipped into self-righteousness. Rather than being compassionate with some struggling sinners, you've got rocks in your hands. You won't forgive, you won't make peace, you've lost compassion and you stand ready to condemn. I believe Jesus would speak to you today and say, 'look at your own life. Hate your own sin. Put down the rocks. It's not your place to judge and condemn. Forgive as you've been forgiven.'"

As your time comes to an end today,

*What do you hear the Holy Spirit telling you about judgment?
What stones do you need to release?*

Thursday: caught - in the trap of self shame

As you begin your time, read Psalm 51 at least two times, walking beside David as he wrestled with his own guilt and shame with Bathsheba. Also read Genesis 3:1-13 and John 16:5-16.

Make note of what you learn from these passages.

When we are in sin, God brings us to repentance. That is one of the roles the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. We see David drawing close to God as he recognizes the extent of his sin and grieves with God over his pain. What David doesn't do is stay in this place forever. He draws close to God, deals with his sin, allows himself to grieve and then moves on to both honor God and struggle again. This is a pattern we go through in life as we journey with Father, Son and Spirit through this life of faith.

There is a difference between responding in repentance and carrying shame. Shame debilitates, burdens, steals our joy and gets our attention focused on ourselves rather than on loving God and others. Some feel shame as a result of past experiences and relationships, some carry shame as if they cannot be restored. There is a difference between allowing ourselves to repent and carrying shame.

If shame is ever your companion, journal about when...why...how it feels...how you generally respond...

Pastor Mark told us this about the woman and us.

"Maybe you can relate more to the woman caught in adultery (other vantage point). Maybe your sin isn't adultery, maybe it's something else, and you've been exposed, and you feel this incredible weight of shame. Maybe that load is so great there've been times when you've thought it would just be easier to end your life. This woman's shame was great...ostracized by her community, marked for life, hated by her religious leaders...she probably wanted to die. But listen to how Jesus sets her free. 'Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin (John 8:10,11).'"

Reflect on any areas of shame you are carrying. Maybe they come up from time to time, perhaps more often. Maybe you know right where these feelings come from, maybe you do not. Maybe your own shame is the root of the judgments you feel about others.

As you close your time today, read Psalm 51 one more time and ask God to reveal and to heal - to give you whatever you need to be able to lay your burdens at his feet and leave them there.

Friday: caught - to be set free

We've been looking at judgment and shame this week - two very difficult conversations for us to have internally and with others. And yet these conversations are so important for us as we seek to love God, ourselves and others well. Living with the burdens of shame and judgment won't take us where we need or long to go.

Begin your time of reading today with our story - John 7:53-8:11, focusing your attention on Jesus' role between the religious leaders and the woman and between the woman and her sin. It's interesting that the leaders, as Jesus writes in the sand, all walk away and leave the one who can free them from their sin. The woman remains.

How do you deal with your sin?

Do you bring your sin to Jesus and stay while he forgives?

Do you experience shame and walk away?

What does Jesus bend to the sand and write about you?

Pastor Mark told us this about Jesus' interaction with the woman.

"First...Jesus personally frees her from condemnation. He lifts that burden from her. Then he calls her to live in the freedom she's now received in Christ, to not go back to the sin that enslaved, but to repent and live in freedom."

It's stunning that the religious leaders left with their sin. They'd been convicted enough to abandon their need to trap Jesus, but they did not understand the forgiveness and freedom Jesus offered them. The woman alone was left to receive life.

What sin(s) do you find yourself returning to?

What void does the sin fill in your life?

What needs does the sin meet?

In what ways does your sin impact the key relationships in your life?

Spend quiet moments in prayer and walk your way through a guided imagery. Imagine it is you the religious leaders have brought to Jesus to expose. Imagine your sins are on display. Imagine Jesus bending in the dirt and writing with his finger. Imagine all accusers slowly walking away. And imagine Jesus offering you freedom...transformation...the strength to rely on him for love enough to change.

What freedom is Jesus offering you right now?

Go and leave this sin. It doesn't offer anything but pain, deception, distance, judgment, shame. Jesus offers life and springs of living water...for eternity.

Pastor Mark closed his sermon with these words.

"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 you would leave here, free in Christ. Instead of carrying around that burden of shame, you would leave it with Jesus. Instead of returning to the vomit of sin that's enslaving you, you would live in the freedom Christ has given you."

Saturday: Sabbath

We encourage you to let Saturdays be a "mini Sabbath" moment. If Saturday is a work day for you, simply exchange this day in Life Notes for the day you have off. It's really important to learn to simply "be" with Jesus, with yourself, with those you love, without an "agenda." Sabbath simply means "cease" and "rest." So, today, spend moments truly resting with God the Father, Son and Spirit. "Cease" all of the detailed work and worries that creep into your life everyday.

Couples, if possible, spend some Sabbath moments together reading, taking a walk, drinking coffee outside, sharing a song you both like, inviting friends over and cooking for them, taking a drive or a bike ride, exercising, watching a movie. Whatever you might like to do to truly rest, do it together. You might laugh or cry with God about things that have happened in your life together this week. Just let the time unfold. Sense God's love for you; seek his peace and pursue it.

Families, spend a Sabbath day together. Let different members of the family choose what to do each week. Simply enjoy God's company together. Or maybe serve somewhere as a family or invite neighbors over, simply because you care.

Discover Jesus in all you do. He'll delight and amaze you.