

The Great Canadian Bible Study for 2020

The Woman who was Known

by Faye Reynolds

Who knows you the best – really knows you inside and out? It is not the easiest question to answer. My husband knows me well, but I am sometimes amazed at the things he thinks I might enjoy – or how he has mistaken the meaning of my words and I’m astounded he could think that of me. But then I wonder if I know myself – that I think I am better than I am, or perhaps worse. I may think I know the motive behind my actions or words, but how often do I deceive myself until I dig deeper into my heart.

Part of being created in the image of God is to be created in and with mystery. We are a puzzle to ourselves and one another. We cannot know the mind, the thoughts and feelings of another person, let alone know the mind and heart of God. We cannot see through another’s eyes or feel their pain. As much as we might try to walk a mile in another’s shoes, their feet are not our feet and we can never fully enter their unique experience. We all want to be known and loved, but “knowing” is an elusive goal not easily attained.

What I love about this story is the theme of who knows whom and who knows what. The woman is only *known* to the reader of this text as a sinner. We assume that she is a prostitute and that she has *known* many men, though the text does not say. As we explore this text together, consider the One who truly does know you and loves you beyond all human comprehension. Enter this study with that peace of heart and mind and rest in his knowing.

Reflect upon Psalm 139: 1 – 6 and offer prayers of thanksgiving for the message contained in those verses of God’s knowing.

READ Her story: Luke 7: 36 – 50

Background¹: It was common practice for a visiting rabbi to be invited to the home of another rabbi so that they could further discuss the content of his teaching. These meals were held in open court yards so that others could stand around the periphery and listen to the conversations. Beggars were later allowed to eat whatever was left over once the guests had departed. The invited guest would be greeted with a kiss on each cheek, their feet washed from the dusty journey and a drop of perfumed oil placed on the guest’s head in welcome. They would recline at a low table upon their left side and eat with their left hand, leaving their right hand free for animated dialogue and their feet extended away from the table.

¹ This information is gleaned from a variety of sources. <https://dashhouse.com/200185why-i-came-to-jesus-forgiveness-luke-736-50.html/> is one example.

Simon, the Pharisee invited Jesus as the visiting teacher into his home for such a meal and conversation. In this act, he recognizes Jesus as some kind of rabbi in whom he is curious. The invitation is meant as a sign of mutual respect, but Simon's failed actions reveal something else.

1. What did Simon fail to do for Jesus? (verses 44 – 46) What does this reveal about his true feelings toward Jesus?
2. Why is this woman a 'sinner'? What has given her this label and is it a fair label?
3. Her actions and her demeanor do reveal some clues. First of all, she is carrying a vial or jar of perfume, which was a tool for women of the sex trade to mask unpleasant bodily odors. Secondly, she let down her hair in public, another societal no-no for respectable women would keep their hair up and covered in all public settings.
4. Simon mutters to himself, "If this man (Jesus) were a prophet, he would have *known* who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him." What does Simon think he knows about 1) the woman 2) Jesus 3) himself and what is the source of his knowledge?
5. Compare this with the words and actions of Jesus: What does Jesus know about 1) Simon 2) the woman 3) himself?
6. Note the question Jesus asks of Simon: "Do you *see* this woman"? What does it mean to truly see another person? What are some things we judge people upon, according to our first impressions of their appearance? How do these impede us from actually seeing the person as God might see them? (It isn't always the negative things, but we can also be overly impressed with another by their appearance, stature or education!)
7. What do the woman's actions reveal about what she knows about 1) Simon 2) Jesus 3) herself?

We see themes of self-deception and self-awareness throughout this story. Simon believes himself to be a righteous man who is a good judge of character and can identify true religious teachers. He does the appropriate thing to invite this Jesus into his home for a conversation, anticipating that he will show Jesus up as the false teacher he is. Since he has no respect for Jesus, he refuses him the basic common courtesies of hospitality. His actions reveal his true motives, not as one wanting to learn from a learned rabbi, but rather to hopefully humiliate and cast out the false teacher. When this sinful woman dares to touch Jesus, everything Simon believes about Jesus is confirmed. Jesus has no moral boundaries when he allows any woman, let alone this woman to touch him. Jesus is no prophet – he is an imposter.

In contrast, the woman has no such notions of her own goodness. She is broken and has lost any sense of shame, as she publicly humiliates herself at the feet of Jesus. She knows that Simon will not approve of her presence and that she is crossing the boundary line to enter the room to get to Jesus. Simon could have stopped her and had her thrown out, but he allows the woman through as a way of testing Jesus. In this act, the woman reveals no respect for Simon, and Simon no respect

for Jesus. Jesus sees something completely different. What he sees is revealed through sharing a parable with them – the two debtors.

8. When you read this parable, do you initially identify with the one who owes much or the one who owes little? Would your background/upbringing have more in common with Simon or the woman?
9. Look at the concept of love and of forgiveness. The words seem to be used interchangeably in this passage. What can you learn about each from this?
10. What is the connection between gratitude and love? The woman's acts were an act of worship. What are examples of true acts of worship borne out of love and gratitude?
11. How would the gift of peace be realized in her life? What would have changed in her situation? Would she still be a prostitute?
12. Even though one has a spiritual encounter with the risen Christ, the situations of their lives are often still the same. A chaplain has shared how difficult it is for convicted felons to escape the negative influences of their former lives once leaving prison. It is not so easy to start over. How might the Christian community better assist new believers to find new and healthier friendships and environments?

Deeper Reflection

1. Are there any ways that you have felt 'unclean' – labeled by yourself or by society. Example: someone might have a weight problem and feel like it is their fault thus branded by that physical challenge.
2. What are ways you have labeled someone because of something you thought you knew about them – or assumed about them that was unfair? Did you work to change your attitude? How can we better see with the eyes of Jesus?
3. Why is gratitude so important in understanding our own salvation story and how does gratitude give us a better understanding of ourselves and others?

We must celebrate the love and forgiveness that we have received from the One who knows the very number of hairs on our head, who formed us in the womb and hears every thought. There is NO ONE I want to hear my every thought but Jesus! Only there do I find forgiveness, understanding, acceptance, love AND with gratitude the desire to be transformed daily by the renewing of my mind. Whatever I have received from my God, I must offer to another with the same love and gratitude I give back to my Redeemer. I can do no less.

Great Canadian Bible Study Mission Project: "Vulnerable Children in Bolivia"

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