

Great Canadian Bible Study 2026

SEEING & BEING SEEN



Luke 7:36-50

WRITTEN BY: REV. DR. DOROTHY HUNSE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rev. Dr. Dorothy Hunse

Dorothy joyfully calls the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia home. She has served in church ministry, hospice chaplaincy and has had the privilege of serving as the assistant professor of Pastoral Care at Acadia Divinity College from 2017-2022. She has recently embarked on a new ministry journey, caring for others as a Counselling Therapist. She loves sharing time with family and friends, talking with others about life and faith, growing vegetables, tending chickens, hiking in the woods, and generally spending as much time outside as possible.

WELCOME

Over the last few years, I have come to appreciate the significance of the word "see" in the Gospels.

We are invited, along with two of John's disciples, to "come and see" where Jesus is staying (Jn 1:38-39).

We are invited, along with the blind men, to have our vision and especially our vision of Jesus healed
(See for example, Mk 8:22-28; 10:46-52).

We are challenged, along with the crowd, to consider whether our eyes are full of light or full of darkness (Mt 6:22-23).

These passages hint at what we know to be true.
Seeing is not just a biological activity, it is an interpretive activity.
We don't just see what we see. Our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives all impact what we see and how we respond.

For this reason, I have chosen to focus on another encounter with Jesus that emphasizes the importance of seeing and being seen-- the encounter between Jesus, Simon and the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-50.

-Rev. Dr. Dorothy Hunse

Suggestions to the Leader

- We recommend doing this study in small groups of 4-6 people.
- Opportunity for large group sharing can also be provided if desired.

REFLECTION 1: Seeing the Woman



Part 1—Personal Imaginative Reflection

Read: Luke 7:36-38 (2 or 3 times)

Read it individually, or choose a group member(s) to read it out loud.

Imagine:

Imagine this scene and what it would be like to experience it as if you were there. Don't analyze it. Don't rush. Simply try to experience what is happening, focusing particularly on the woman. Take it in with all your senses. What do you see, hear, smell, feel, and maybe even taste as you imagine it?

Part 2—Personal Reflection

Individually reflect on the following questions. Don't look for a "right" answer. Don't evaluate your responses. Instead pay attention to your honest responses, even if you feel uncomfortable with them.

1. What stood out to you as you imagined this scene?
2. What feelings did the woman's behaviour evoke in you?
3. What thoughts did you find yourself thinking in response to the woman?
4. Are you drawn to the woman, repelled by her, something else? Why do you think you responded to her the way you did?

Part 3—Group Sharing and Discussion

1. In your small groups, take turns sharing your personal reflections with one another. Share only what you feel comfortable sharing!

As you listen to one another, refrain from getting into a discussion about your responses. Instead try to simply listen to and appreciate each other's reflections.

2. It is unclear as to whether the woman's actions are an expression of repentance and a petition for forgiveness, or whether they are an expression of gratitude for forgiveness already received in a previous encounter with Jesus. Both interpretations can be supported by the text. In either case, the woman's response to Jesus is extravagant and passionate, pointing to the profound nature of her experience of Jesus.

Discuss:

Have you ever found yourself responding to Jesus in an extravagant and passionate way?

We can sometimes be reserved in our response to Jesus. *Would you like to ask Jesus for a more profound experience of his love and forgiveness?*



REFLECTION 2: Seeing the Pharisee



Part 1—Personal Reflection

Read: Luke 7:39 (2 or 3 times)

Read it individually, or choose a group member(s) to read it out loud.

Individually Reflect:

1. What feelings did the pharisee's response evoke in you?
2. What thoughts did you find yourself thinking about the pharisee?
3. Did you find yourself judging him for his response to the woman and to Jesus?

Part 2—Small Group Discussion

Discuss:

1. It is easy to judge the Pharisee for his judgment of this woman and Jesus. But in reality, he was simply responding as any Pharisee would. As a Pharisee, it was his responsibility to respect and protect the ritual purity of his guests (and the people of Judah). The woman's appearance threatened this purity.

Does this explanation of the pharisee's perspective influence your response to him?

2. The Pharisee's perspective of this woman was reductionistic. All he could see was her sin. He didn't see her life circumstances. He didn't see her struggles and obstacles. He didn't see her capacity to love.

Reflect on those times when you may have thought about another person in this way—reducing your perspective of them to one or two negative qualities?

3. According to his interpretation of the law, the pharisee believed that to be holy meant separating himself from those who were sinners. This is in contrast to Jesus who was criticized for being a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34), and who expressed the holiness of God by moving towards sinners.

Reflect on those times when you may have separated yourself from those who you judge to be sinners thinking that this is what you needed to do to please God?



REFLECTION 2 *cont'd*



Part 3—Further Reflection

Read the following from spiritual writer Henri Nouwen[i]

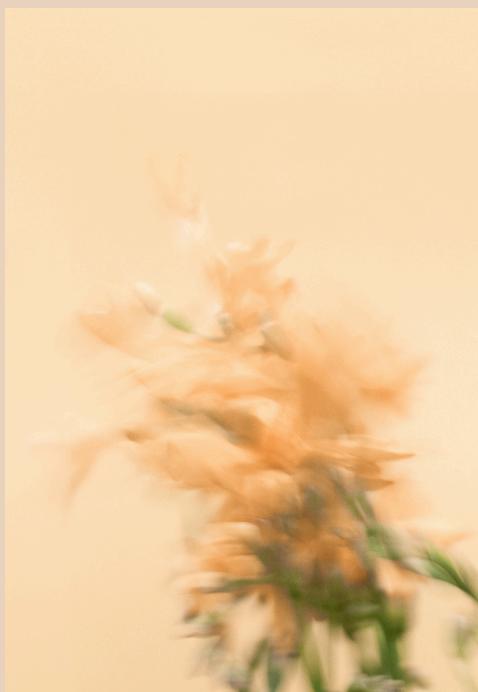
"Imagine your having no need at all to judge anybody. Imagine your having no desire to decide whether someone is a good or bad person. Imagine your being completely free from the feeling that you have to make up your mind about the morality of someone's behavior. . .Imagine—wouldn't that be true inner freedom? The desert fathers from the fourth century said: 'Judging others is a heavy burden.' I have had a few moments in my life during which I felt free from all judgments about others. . .At those moments I experienced an immense love for everyone. . .and a deep desire to love them broke down all my inner walls and made my heart as wide as the universe."

Discuss

1. *Have you ever thought about "judging others" as being a heavy burden?*
2. *Have you experienced moment(s) of being filled with love like what Nouwen described? What was it like to be free of the inclination to judge others, even if for a short time?*
3. *Why do you think we are so inclined to judge others and the morality of their behaviour?*

[i] Nouwen, Henri J. M., *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*. New York: Crossroad, 1994, p. 60-61.

REFLECTION 3: Seeing Jesus



Part 1—Initial Reflection

Consider

We need to see Jesus' response to Simon and the woman in light of his teaching on loving enemies, not judging and forgiving.

Read Luke 6:27-38

Read New Testament scholar N.T. Wright's reflections on these verses. "The kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity. Think of the best thing you can do for the worst person, and go ahead and do it. Think of what you'd really like someone to do for you, and do it for them. . . These instructions have a fresh, spring-like quality. . . you are to be like this because that's what God is like. God is generous to all people. . . he provides good things for all to enjoy, the undeserving as well as the deserving. He is astonishingly merciful. . . how can we, his forgiven children, be any less?"[i]

Discuss

1. *What are your thoughts about this reading?*

[i] Wright, N. T., *Luke for Everyone: 20th Anniversary Edition with Study Guide*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023 p. 93-94 Kindle ed.



Part 2—Jesus' response to the Woman and Simon

Read Luke 7:40-47

Consider

Jesus freely, exuberantly, and joyously forgave the woman. And the woman was able to receive his forgiveness because she saw herself and Jesus rightly. She knew her need, and she saw Jesus rightly, as one with the authority and desire to forgive.

Discuss

1. *Have you ever been deeply aware of the reality of your sin and then also experienced the exuberant gift of Jesus' forgiveness? What was it like to experience this?*

Did your experience of forgiveness impact your capacity to lovingly relate to others?

Consider

Jesus also wanted Simon to experience his forgiveness and so tried to help Simon see the reality of his sin. Simon had strictly adhered to the "do's and don'ts" of the law, but had failed to love his neighbour as himself (Luke 10:27). Unfortunately, he didn't see the reality of his need, and so wasn't able to receive Jesus' forgiveness.

Discuss

1. *In what ways have you tried to be good enough for God by what you do and don't do?*
2. *In what ways have you found it difficult to trust in the reality of Jesus' forgiveness for you?*

REFLECTION 4: *Being Seen by Jesus*



Read Luke 7:48-50 (2 or 3 times)

Read it individually, or choose a group member(s) to read it out loud.

Imagine

Imagine Jesus turning to you, looking at you, knowing the reality of your need and saying to you "Your sins are forgiven." Spend some time with Jesus imagining this.

Discuss

1. *What was it like to imagine this?*
2. *Did you find it easy to receive Jesus' forgiveness? Did you find it difficult?*
3. *What would you like to ask Jesus for in response to this?*

Pray

Take some time to pray for one another.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and God of all comfort, who comforts [forgives] us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort [forgive] those in any trouble with the comfort [forgiveness] we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4 adapted)

BENEDICTION

As you go from this place,
may your eyes be opened to see Jesus more clearly,
others more compassionately,
and yourself more truthfully.

May you go in the grace of the One who sees you fully,
knows you deeply,
and loves you completely.

Amen.

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