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Scripture Reference: Luke 7:36 – 50

## **The Unexpected Guest**

You may laugh at me, but I can clearly remember the first time I said a swear word. I grew up in a small, rural community in southern Idaho and we had to ride the bus to school. I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Big Valley Elementary School and every day after school we formed a line out by the curb to wait for our specific bus. Once you had your place in line, it was normal to leave your backpack behind and go play until the bus came. So, one afternoon in particular, I was hanging out with my friend Shawn Robinson, a true trouble maker and I don't remember why exactly, but I said a swear word. I immediately stopped what I was doing, ran back to the bus line and dropped to my knees using my backpack as an altar. I bowed my head and began asking God for forgiveness. I suppose I thought that if I didn't immediately pray, I would have been struck down with lightning! Can you imagine the sight? An overly dramatic 11 year old girl, making an altar in the bus line. Again, you may think I am crazy, but that memory is forever stuck in my mind. It is a constant reminder that no matter where I am, I can come to feet of Jesus.

Now, fast-forward a decade. It is my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, my roommates planned a fun surprise party for me and the group that gathered all knew that later that night I had an appointment to get my nose pierced. Yes, that is right, I said I was about to get my nose pierced. There was much that happened leading up to this night. From my previous story, it is probably a little obvious that I was a relatively decent kid. Until this point, I had never done drugs, smoked a cigarette, drank alcohol, I had done my best to obey my parents and please them and God. But, I wanted a nose ring! I had asked my parents about it, mostly because they were still financially supporting me and technically still "under their roof". They, of course, said no, and I tried to talk them into it. They didn't budge. So, I came up with a plan. I made some phone calls to find out about nose piercings. I found out that if I left it in for 3 months straight, I could take it out for 24 hours and the hole wouldn't close. My birthday is in March and my cousin was getting married in June and I had a plane ticket that left me in Boise for about 24 hours. SOOOO, if I pierced it for my birthday, and took it out on the airplane, went to the wedding, and put it in as soon as I got back to the airport, I would be good. No one would know! Ha! If only!

Well, on March 22, 2000, I pierced my nose. I didn't quite make it to my three month mark before going home. My parents bought me a plane ticket to go home for Easter. The moment I stepped off of that airplane, my mom saw it. Oh boy, that was a fun 2 ½ hour car ride from the airport to their house. I explained, "Hey, if this is the worst thing I do to rebel, then you should thank God." Oh, bad phrase to say, very bad phrase. You see, for the next year, life was good. I finished my junior year of college and began my senior year. I continued to seek God for my future, but every time I came to Him in prayer or worship, something was off. I couldn't quite figure it out. I asked Him to show me and He did, every night when I washed my

face. I just wasn't paying attention. Completely confused now? Every time I washed my face with a towel, it got caught on my nose ring. Yes, very painful. There was one night I finally listened. God showed me that yes, in fact I was hitting a ceiling. My prayers only went so far, my worship only went so far. Why? That dumb nose ring and what it represented in my life. Yes, it looked cute, people loved it, I loved it. And please, hear my heart on this. I had my nose pierced out of complete rebellion. The nose ring itself wasn't bad, but the spirit in which I got it in was. I thought that I had the right to rebel in some way. Wrong! About one month before my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I had a coworker cut my nose ring. My ceiling was lifted, I could finally come to God in right standing again. I was able to cross a big barrier that was keeping me from truly coming before Jesus.

You may be asking yourself, "where is she going with this?" Stick with me....

There was a woman in the Bible whom I believe also wanted to do something so that she too could be in right standing with Jesus. Her story is found in Luke 7.

*36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

*39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."*

*40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."  
"Tell me, teacher," he said.*

*41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,[d] and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"*

*43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."  
"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.*

*44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."*

*48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

*49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"*

*50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Let me set the stage for you. Here Jesus is invited to dine with Simon the Pharisee at his home. Commentators describe the scene as the dinner being an open event, not a private meal behind closed doors. Not everyone was invited to recline at the table, but the door was left open and anyone could come, sit on the outskirts, against the wall, listening to the conversation and perhaps collect a few scraps of food. If you visualize things like I do, you probably wondered if the woman crawled under the table and anointed Jesus' feet under the table. Well, it wasn't like that. At family dinners people SAT at the table, most likely on the ground, but this wasn't a family dinner. At this type of dinner, the guests literally reclined. They laid on their side, their feet laid out away from the table, perhaps propped up by their arm as they ate and visited. So, she wasn't in a place where she could hide what she was doing.

I always used to read this passage and focus on how beautiful this woman's worship was and how expensive her bottle of perfume must have been. But, that is not what I want us to focus on today. I want us to see how intimate, how personal this woman's act was. I want us to step into her shoes this morning. She didn't come to Synagogue or church like we have today, she didn't come with fanfare, the text doesn't note that she says anything, she simply came, prepared, to kneel at Jesus' feet and let her actions speak to Him. It is like she is in the zone, focused in on Jesus, the rest of the dinner party is probably blocked from her mind at the point of anointing. It is simply her and Jesus.

Hopefully you have a mental picture of where this scene takes place. I love how, in most versions of this text, the woman's sin is not named. It makes her story a lot more relatable. We can easily take our name or our sin and place it into her story. But, there are parts of her story that if you look deeper, make her story very similar to our stories. I believe there are some common barriers that this woman faced that we all face in our day to day lives that keep us from coming to Jesus. Here is a woman, obviously known throughout the community to be a sinner, most likely ashamed to show her face at such an event, and probably questioning in her mind, should I do it, should I not do it?

The first, most obvious barrier is her sinful life, but there are two others that I if I put myself in her position, find she was facing, feelings of rejection and complacency.

**1. The most obvious one is sin.** How many times have we kept ourselves from coming before God because we know the sin in our lives and we think, “there’s no way that I can come before God because He’ll call me out.” Or I’m too ashamed to stand before Him today because I just did \_\_\_\_\_.

This woman knew that feeling, I am sure. She was coming to see a man that she knew was different. But, I imagine that in the back of her mind she was thinking, “He knows what I’ve done and so do all the people in town.” But she didn’t let it stop her. Do you know how much courage she had to have to go to the place she went to uninvited and do something that was not the norm? She didn’t let her sin and fear keep her from coming to the feet of Jesus. And neither should we. Christ came to offer life and salvation to all people, no matter what their sin is.

I love what 1 Timothy 2:4-6 says:

“He wants not only us but everyone saved, you know, everyone to get to know the truth we’ve learned: that there’s one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free.”

Christ didn’t die just for people who break one or two commandments. No, He came so that we could all experience forgiveness. He just asks that we come to Him with a repentant heart.

**2. The second barrier I believe this woman is dealing with may be some feelings of rejection.** On one hand she had (in a round about way) been rejected because she wasn’t invited as a guest to dinner. For multiple reasons, I am sure. On the other hand, I would think that she was probably dealing with some fear of rejection. That probably due in large part to her sin. See how they go hand-in-hand? Thoughts of “What if I come to His feet and He turns me away. Or worse yet, He doesn’t even acknowledge my presence?” Or “will I even make it that far into the dinner party?” I am sure that she had all of these thoughts and many more running through her head. And how similar are these to our own thoughts?

There are two passages I want you to write down that will be great reminders to you when your own mind begins to be filled with fear or feelings of rejection. James 4:8 says “Come near to God and he will come near to you...” That statement isn’t a conditional statement. Meaning, it doesn’t say if you are pure and holy, come to God and He will come near to you. No, it is a instruction for all to hear and all to act on.

The other is Psalm 139. This a great chapter to read when some of these same thoughts come to you. It speaks of God creating us, forming us, and trying to escape His presence, but finding there is no where to hide from Him. He won’t reject us because He created us, He won’t keep His presence from us. However, that doesn’t

mean that He will like your sin. He despises that, but He wants us to come to Him to still be with Him and learn from Him.

**3. The more unspoken barrier that I see this woman overcoming is the barrier of complacency.** Back to verse 37, it says when she learned...she acted upon her new knowledge. I think too often we learn either for the first time about Jesus, or gain new knowledge or revelation about how He is and we don't act on it. This woman was so desperate to be rid of her sin that she acted when she LEARNED that Jesus was in town! Going back to my two stories I shared, I hate that in the course of ten years I grew complacent. At 11, I guess you could say I wasn't desensitized yet to the Holy Spirit. I knew immediately that I had something that I needed to repent of. Whereas at age 21, it took me almost a year to finally truly listen to the Holy Spirit. I had been content to stay in my nose-pierced, oblivious state instead of taking some concentrated time to seek Jesus.

The other aspect of this woman overcoming complacency is the object she brought with her. She wasn't content to bring just anything, a few coins, or something small in value, no she brought the thing that was probably the most expensive thing she owned. Commentaries say that the alabaster box and perfume she brought was probably worth a year's wages. Her out-of-the-ordinary gift reminds me another story. The classic story of Mary and Martha just a few chapters down in Luke 10. Let's read their short story:

*38As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*41"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42but only one thing is needed.[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Martha opened her home to Jesus, she knew who was coming to dinner, let's not kid ourselves! I can imagine the buzz that was going on that house at that time of preparation. And, I have no doubt that Mary spent time helping her prepare. But, Mary wasn't about to be caught in the kitchen when the Messiah was in the living room sharing stories! She came to give Jesus something that was better than the finest pita and hummus, the most shiny kitchen sink, and clean linens. She gave Him her undivided attention. Now, men, you are probably feeling a little left out, so let me make this next comparison for you. I believe that Jesus is waiting for some of you to put down the hammer, put away the books or household mail, put down the remote control and spend some time in His presence. For others, it may be time to stop sitting on the sidelines and start coming to Him through an act of service either here in the church or in the community. The point is He doesn't want us to stay the same. He doesn't want us stuck in the same rut or way of worshipping Him. Or maybe be in the rut of not worshipping Him at all. And I hope you see by now that I

don't mean coming to Him in corporate worship like we have today. Our corporate worship is beautiful and there is no doubt that Jesus loves it, but He longs to spend time with us one-on-one. No distractions, no interruptions, no ulterior motives, just time to focus on Him.

Both Mary and the woman from Luke 7 remind me of several things.

1. We all overcome something in order to come to Jesus. We've spent time looking at that.
2. We all have the right to come to see Jesus. John 1:12-13 says "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent,[c] nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." As children of the Living God we have the right to come before Him. In Ephesians 3, Paul tells us that in Jesus and through faith in Jesus, we can come before God with confidence. It doesn't say, well, only if you haven't sinned today or in this lifetime, you can come. No, we can all come. And we come through our faith in Jesus Christ. A faith that reminds us that He hears us and is attentive to us.
3. The last thing both women remind me is there are real and life-changing benefits that come from sitting at the feet of Jesus. The obvious one for the woman in Luke 7 was that her sins were forgiven. The other though, I inferred because I am a woman and I tried to put myself in her shoes and Mary's shoes.

Back in chapter 7, Simon the Pharisee is thinking to himself, wondering who this woman thinks she is and how could Jesus let her be doing this? Ha and Jesus reads his thoughts. He turns it into a teaching moment and then does and says something so powerful. He turns toward her and affirms her.

*44Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."*

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And Jesus does all this without even touching her, according to the text! Think about that. She had probably been touched enough. Although her sin isn't named, most people assume she was a promiscuous woman. She didn't need touch, she needed verbal affirmation.

She wouldn't have received Jesus' saving grace, healing words, or freedom if she hadn't overcome her barriers and knelt at His feet.

I'd like to tell you one more personal story. About a year and a half ago, my friend Jason Ramirez and I took some students from the college group we were leading to a worship concert in Manteca. It was a great night of worship, a time where you could go off in a corner of the room and just worship. The kind of worship, for me, that takes place behind closed doors. The worship leader was singing a beautiful song about God's love. Still one of my favorites. So, I'm standing, somewhat hunched over, mostly because I have bad posture, not because I was feeling down or anything. I had a jacket on and had my hands in my pockets. As I'm singing, quiet in worship, I hear the Holy Spirit speak.

"Stand up, Cassie."

"Uh, I am standing."

"No, STAND UP, Cassie."

Immediately I straightened up and took my hands out of my pockets. He had my full attention now.

"Cassie, I expect you to stand and walk as the woman I created you to be. A woman of strength. A woman of character. A woman of destiny. A woman who walks in grace. A woman who is loved. A woman of value and worth. A woman of purpose. A woman who knows who she is. A woman whom I created and formed. A woman who is beautiful. A woman of God."

Whoa, right? Talk about the verbal affirmation of a lifetime! Now, let me clarify a few things. In case you haven't figured out yet. I am not married yet. I hope to be one day, but I'll leave that up to my Creator. Also, I have a wonderful father and mother who affirmed me, loved me, and taught me that God loves me no matter what. And yes, I do have bad days. Nobody's self-esteem is perfect. I have bad hair days, I found a few white ones a few weeks ago! But, I hope that I know who I am and who I am not.

But, really, the beautiful thing about that night during worship was that I was just affirmed by the Creator of life and I wasn't even seeking affirmation. Like I said, I have wonderful parents and good friends that remind me of who I am. And, I am sorry men, but I don't need a man to tell me many wonderful things because I just

had Almighty God speak to me! Now, don't get me wrong, when I am married, I will expect my husband to say wonderful things about me, buy me flowers occasionally, and woo me. And, yes, compliments are nice. But, I don't need to be a woman who searches out affirmation from a man or any other person when my confidence is in God. Ladies, do you hear this? This woman in Luke 7 had probably had plenty of men whisper sweet nothings to her, she may have been pursued for a minute, but all of that paled in comparison to the freedom God's saving grace had for her.

Now men, let me speak to you for a quick minute. Your wives, sisters, mothers, daughters, and friends need to hear that they are valuable. Just because God can affirm someone and does so in His word doesn't mean that your wives and daughters don't need to hear it from you. Ephesians 5 says that men are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Christ DIED for the church! Men, I was fortunate to grow up in a home with a wonderful father who so wonderfully modeled God for me, and I hope you are being the same example to the women in your life. Your words and actions are powerful. Not only to your families, but to a whole generation of young people that are growing up fatherless. We are the church and we are family. I am sure that there are young women in this room, children currently in Children's Ministry that have never heard they are beautiful, they are loved. If they are not hearing it at home, I hope and pray they are hearing it here at church.

Now, that may have been the longest bird-walk you've ever been on, but I wanted you to see that even if we are not physically in the presence of Jesus, there are still real benefits that you and I receive from simply coming to Him. From affirmation as I just told you about, to forgiveness and freedom that can only be given by one. And, all He asks is that we come. Come, spend time with Him. And I don't just mean here. I mean in your homes. In your cars. Anywhere. There are no limits, we can come to Jesus at any time.