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DESERVING GOD'S FAVOUR?

Luke 7:3-6 *The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Most people think that good people deserve good things, and bad people deserve bad things. The Jewish leaders thought this centurion deserved Jesus' attention to heal his servant. Even though they could not speak a good word about Jesus, they were prepared to patronise His 'healing powers' to keep a friendly influential officer of the occupation 'on-side'. The Roman had certainly been respectful of the Jewish way of life and their religious practices - even to the point of arranging for a new synagogue to be built in Capernaum. But did he deserve a favour from Jesus?

No! This soldier knew he did not deserve anything special from Jesus, and even sent a message to stop Him coming. Whatever Jesus could offer, this man knew he was not worthy of receiving it. Paradoxically, he was putting himself into the only position where he could receive 'grace' - God's amazing kindness directed to meet our real need. Grace is always undeserved, yet given freely to those who know they could never earn God's favour. It does not depend on anything other than God's willingness to give and our willingness to receive, so that He might get the glory.

Yet many people think that is too simple, or simplistic. They struggle to be good enough and always end up disappointed. By contrast, Jesus declared that the corrupt civil servant who said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner", was accepted by God; whereas the self-righteous religious leader was not ([Luke 18:9-14](#)). If, like the centurion, you have reached the point of thinking that God could not possibly be kind to you and that you deserve punishment, help is already on its way: you just need to receive it! If that applies to a friend or colleague, encourage them to go to Jesus.

Prayer: *Gracious God. You are so very kind, especially to those who do not deserve Your favour. Thank You for Your grace to me, but forgive me when I have been so slow to accept the kindness as from Your hand. I have been proud, thinking that I could manage without Your power; but the truth is that I am so unworthy yet I need Your loving kindness so much. Please help me to come to You with an empty hand and a willingness to receive, not because I am worth it, but because Jesus is the Worthy One. In His Name. Amen.*

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FAITH TO WAIT

Luke 7:6b-7 *He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The Roman centurion's personal servant was going to die. Despairing, he had asked the Jewish elders to see if Jesus would help; but then he changed his mind at the last minute. He quickly sent his friends with another message, to stop Jesus coming; saying that he was unworthy of Jesus coming to his house. The powerful soldier was in awe of Jesus, because when the Lord spoke, things happened: demons were cast out and the sick were healed. It was clear that Jesus had a superior authority to him.

Faith is all about trusting somebody's word. It is not primarily about comforting thoughts or peaceful feelings (they are the consequence of obedience). Faith is the confidence to take action because we believe that the promised result will be fulfilled. That is the essence of trusting Jesus. Sometimes, the action required is to do nothing, and wait for God to act. That is how it was for the centurion. He demonstrated his faith by pulling back from asking Jesus to visit, because he believed that one word of command from Jesus (without any physical demonstration or touch) would be enough.

The proof of faith is obedience, and sometimes that means actively restraining ourselves from taking our own action, and allowing God to be seen to act. It is hard to be still and know that one word from God and the job is done. Sometimes, an inner evil urge convinces us that 'something must be done', and we confuse activity for obedience. An action is only obedience if the Lord has given the command to do it. Perhaps the Lord is taking us through times when we should do nothing, except to wait for His powerful word to be fulfilled. If, today, He is calling you to stand still while He works, any activity is disobedience! Wait for the Lord to show His powerful hand.

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that all authority comes from You, and that whenever You speak, things happen. Please forgive me for doubting that You are at work when I cannot see how You will achieve Your purposes. Forgive me too when I insist on making up my own active solutions when You intend that I should be still and trust You, to speak and act by Your own power. So, please help me to believe that Your power is far greater than mine, and that it is safe to trust You to act. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TRUSTING AUTHORITY

Luke 7:8-10 *For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The Roman centurion, whose servant was dying, understood the link between authority and power. Emperor Caesar's authority cascaded through the military structure so that every officer would command in a way that was legitimate, powerful and effective; even though potentially ruthlessly. Orders were always obeyed because the punishments for disobedience were severe. The soldier was frightened of Jesus. Perhaps he thought that the Lord would find fault with him instead of healing his servant. But despite his fear, he also knew that Jesus was the only hope to save the servant. He believed that if Jesus commanded healing, the servant would get well; and so his friends conveyed the message, "Say the word and my servant will be healed!" And the servant recovered immediately!

True faith must start with the confidence that God has legitimate authority to act powerfully and effectively. Faith must follow facts (good feelings may follow after we obey the facts). And the principal fact is that God has all authority to do whatever He chooses. But He has not left us in the dark because He has revealed (in the Bible) what He will reward and punish, and how He will save those who trust in Him (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more).

So, following Jesus is much more straight-forward than trying to connect with mystical feelings; it is a simple matter of believing the Gospel and obeying what God says in the Bible! The centurion understood the principle and Jesus set him as an example for all of us. So as you follow Jesus at work today, accept His supreme authority over everything, rely on His grace to cover your failings and obey His Word. Keeping that in the front of your mind will make the working day much more straight-forward!

Prayer: *Sovereign God. I accept that You have the right to decide what is right and wrong, and to command my path through life. Please forgive me for pretending to follow You when I am really obeying myself and disobeying You. Help me to submit to Your Word and to know that Your ultimate authority extends over everything in my workplace, so that I should not be frightened of difficulties and simply trust You by being obedient. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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NEVER TOO LATE

Luke 7:11-13 *Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out - the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus was on time for His next Divine appointment: the first of three occasions when He raised the dead. After a day's walk south-west from Capernaum, He approached Nain in a joyful procession with His disciples and many others. Just then, another large procession was coming out of the town. The unmistakable sound of wailing announced the funeral. Was this a rather embarrassing accident of timing - what would Jesus do? Surely He was too late to help.

The sense of tragedy unfolded as it became clear that the woman next to the coffin was a widow, accompanying the body of her only son to the burial site. She had lost everything, and now had nobody to support her or provide for her old age. But Jesus was full of compassion; He felt her hurt and was visibly grieved by the woman's hopelessness, even though He had arrived specifically to meet her need. By saying, "Don't cry", the Master was not offering a meaningless platitude to crush the cultural habit of loud weeping: He wanted her eyes to be dry so that she could see what He was about to do - bringing her son back to life.

We are often so consumed with our own lives, that we cannot see how the Lord wants to work in our circumstances. Hopelessness easily overtakes us as our little worlds implode. But that is because we are not expecting the Lord to be there, be concerned, be powerful or be on time. We may know comforting Scriptures but fail to believe that God is in control. We allow Satan to hook us onto misery as he pulls us into despair. But the truth is that Jesus is here, He does care, He is powerful and He knows just the right time to express His authority. His comfort is real because it announces the release of His power and joy in the future. Those who trust in Him have no need to be limited by the little horizons of failure and disaster. Family crises, workplace nightmares, relationship disasters, financial impossibilities and even death all find their answer in Christ. The Jesus who said, "Don't cry", has the power to bring His answer in His time.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for understanding my circumstances and for being compassionate towards me. Thank You for Your astonishing timing as You come alongside in the trials of life. Please forgive me for being so focussed on what I see and feel, that I am not looking for what You are doing. Help me to trust that You really do care and that You know the right time to show Your powerful hand. Help me also to be aware of the needs of others, showing them Your love and encouraging them to express their need to You. I do believe that You have authority over everything and the power to act. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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LIVING COMPASSION

Luke 7:14-17 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus is amazingly kind and personally compassionate. His encounter with the funeral procession showed how much God loved a grieving mother, who was already a widow; and taught the disciples that He had the answer to the biggest problem of all, death. By touching the coffin, He stopped the burial; and by commanding the young man to get up, He raised the dead to life!

You can imagine the mother's joy of embracing her son who was now alive and talking. Of course, the paid mourners ceased their wailing, and start to praise God; so did Jesus' followers. Clearly God had been at work. But all that raised the question, "Who was Jesus"? The Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha, had raised the dead: so the crowds at least understood that Jesus' power came from God. And they realised that God had come to help His people, although they still had to learn that His best help was far greater than raising a young man from the dead - Jesus would give eternal life to all who believed in Him (see www.crosscheck.org.uk).

We all need help. None of us can fight the great enemies of life and win by ourselves; and the greatest enemy is death. That is why Jesus came to earth, so that by His death He might destroy death's power-holder, the devil ([Hebrews 2:14](#)). But do you think He is only interested in our welfare in heaven? No! [Romans 8:32](#) says, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" So, the Jesus who died for our eternal salvation is the same Jesus who helps us in our time of need ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#)). That being so, we should also rejoice; knowing that He is ready to provide just the right sort of powerful assistance as we cry out to Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord. I am so grateful that Your nature is to be compassionate towards frail people like me. Please forgive me for being frightened instead of trusting You; and for despairing instead of praying. Help me to expect Your solutions to my problems, even though I may have no idea how You will work in power. And may I respond to every act of kindness by praising You - and so have a lightness in my heart at home and at work. In Jesus Name. Amen.

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DEALING WITH DOUBT

Luke 7:18-20 *John's disciples told him [John the Baptist] about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

John the Baptist was in prison because he told the truth about King Herod's affair with his brother's wife ([Matthew 14:3-4](#)). Although many people were glad when John announced that God's Saviour was coming, Herod was not willing to repent of his sin. John's courageous truth-telling cost him his liberty and later his life. But at the time of this account, he was wondering if his suffering was worth it. His key question was, "Is Jesus the promised Messiah"?

That sounds as though John doubted Jesus' identity - but surely he was a man of faith! Yes he was, but nobody is immune to the doubts which challenge our faith in Jesus. Such thoughts may stem from the devil's lies, people's comments, difficult circumstances or our own inner uncertainties. For John, the distress of prison and the fear of death would be intolerable if Jesus was not Messiah after all. So that is why John sent two of his followers to Jesus with the question, "Who are you?"

That is still the key question of faith. If Jesus really is the 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' of [Isaiah 9:6](#), then whatever happens, we can be confident that our trust in Him will never be disappointed. But, as in any relationship, we cannot trust Jesus unless we get to know who He is. God has provided all the information we need in the Bible: and as people read with an open heart, God's Holy Spirit convinces them that Jesus is fully trustworthy as Saviour, King, Comforter and Friend. Read one of the Gospels with your friends and colleagues - they will discover that their search for God is satisfied in Jesus!

Prayer: *Faithful God. Thank You for providing me with so much evidence that Jesus is Lord of all. Please forgive me when I allow doubts to invade my peace and wreck my relationship with You because I have moved away from wholly trusting Jesus. Thank You for freshly alerting me to the truth that I need to keep my mind focussed on the Jesus of the Bible so that I may recognise His voice through the Holy Spirit. May I trust Jesus today; knowing that His love surrounds me, His cross provides forgiveness and His resurrection assures me that He is alive. As the circumstances of life flood in, may I be anchored securely by faith in Jesus; believing that He will never let me go and that serving Him is never futile. In His Name. Amen.*

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DIVINE EVIDENCE

Luke 7:21-23 *At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."* (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and many other languages*

John the Baptist was wondering if he had got it right about Jesus: was He really the Messiah promised by God throughout the Old Testament? John's gloomy prison cell spoke of despair, but he knew that Jesus would tell him the truth. So the Master told John's disciples to report about what Jesus had been doing, providing key evidence to reassure the evangelist.

Multiple healings and exorcisms were clearly acts of God; and Jesus' care to teach the poor (contrasting the religious leaders who flattered the wealthy) was another sign of God's compassion, freely giving truth to the oppressed. But was this the work of an inspired prophet or of the Son of God? John knew that God always speaks in advance of His actions, so the true Messiah would fulfil prophecy. And that was the final proof: Isaiah [61:1-2](#) says, *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn ..."*

God's Word always confirms the truth about Jesus to those who seek the truth. That is why it is far more important to let God speak through His Word than to rely on what your feelings say. It may be hard to live as a Christian, but do not let your reactions to circumstances entangle your heart and take you away from your only Hope. Only God's Spirit (who always agrees with the written Word) can assure you of your security, whatever may be happening to you. That will then give you confidence to face your community and your colleagues in the knowledge that Jesus is in charge; and serving Him is always worth it!

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. Thank You for Your great kindness in allowing Your truth to come directly to me through Your Word and Spirit. Thank You for Your servants who have explained it to me. I do not deserve such favour, but it proves how much You love me - not leaving me in the dark. Please forgive me when I let circumstances affect my feelings towards You, so that I start to slip away from You. Please help me to keep Your Word as my primary source of truth about Jesus, and the security I have in Him. In His Name. Amen.*

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CHALLENGING MOTIVES

Luke 7:24-28 *After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you, among those born of women there is no-one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Although Jesus replaced the imprisoned John the Baptist as the focus of Israel's popular interest, John was not forgotten. So Jesus challenged the crowd about their motives for going to hear John's preaching on the banks of the River Jordan. There was something very special about that man to have attracted so many. But what did he offer them? Despite his unconventional dress, John was not an unstable crank, nor was there any promise of wealth to draw the crowds. It was his message, preached with unshakable conviction that fascinated them - the prophecy that God's Messiah was about to arrive.

Although the arrival and work of Jesus was prophesied as far back as [Genesis 3:15](#), many Jews were looking for the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecies 400 years earlier, "*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,*" says the LORD Almighty." ([Malachi 3:1](#)). Jesus reminded them that John was the messenger and that He was the Lord. They could not just honour John as a prophet without worshipping Jesus as the Lord.

Today, it is easy to get caught up in religious excitement; admiring a fine pastor, thrilling over great music or flocking to hear a wonderful speaker. But all that is useless unless we understand that the messages are leading us to put our trust in Jesus alone. But sometimes, even the gospel messengers, like John the Baptist, get so caught up with their circumstances that it is necessary for Jesus to bring them back on track too. Likewise, great music may sway the emotions, but unless we use it to worship the Lord, it will be a spiritual waste of time. Yes, God's Word has a compelling appeal: but preacher and people alike must continue to respond to what He is saying, and worship with an undiluted heart.

Prayer: *Faithful God. How I praise You for the truth of Your Word, the love of Jesus and the joy of worship. But, alas, I often miss the point. Please forgive me for hearing Your truth and yet failing to take action, for enjoying the music of worship and not giving all my love to Jesus. Please help me to avoid the mistake of admiring the packaging of truth but ignoring the message itself; so that my life will have gospel integrity, which will be a real attraction for all those who are seeking after truth where I live and work. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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IDENTIFYING TRUTH

Luke 7:29-30 *(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptised by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptised by John.) (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

How do you know what is right or wrong? Some say 'if I feel it is right', others refer to tradition or simply 'what everybody else thinks'. But the Bible says that truth is revealed by God ([Deuteronomy 29:29](#)) so that we may obey Him and receive His blessing. Those who welcome God's truth are 'in the light', others remain 'in the dark' ([John 3:18-21](#)). But how can people move from the dark to the light?

Repentance is the first step. John would only baptise those who admitted they were sinfully rebellious towards God, and wanted to change. Those who refused John's message had no interest in baptism because it was the external mark of their willingness to confess their sin. However, rejecting the truth about themselves also made them incapable of receiving truth from Jesus. So while the formerly corrupt tax collectors knew that Jesus was telling the truth, and welcomed it, the self-important religious experts blinded themselves against seeing God's purpose in Christ.

Many people seek guidance but feel they are in a fog. A good question to ask them is, "The last time God spoke to you, did you obey what He said?" (for a rebellious spirit cannot receive truth). If the answer is "No!", then tell them that the first step in going forwards is to repent of going backwards, against God's will. Repentance always produces an openness to truth; it is the door to a godly future, a peaceful heart and a sound mind. People with those qualities stop complaining and arguing, as they live confidently trusting the Lord. They are like *'stars in the universe as they live out the Word of life'* ([Philippians 2:14-16](#)). Engineers or artists, transport or farm workers, construction or manufacturing workers, teachers or bankers - can you think of any work-group which would not be greatly blessed by such people?

Prayer: *Holy God. Thank You for being the source of all truth; and for sending Jesus so that I might be set free from my fog, as I repent and receive Him. Please forgive me for resisting Your Word and ignoring Your clear instructions. Forgive me too when I have complained about lack of guidance, the consequence of my disobedience making me blind to truth. Please help me to review my relationship with You; to repent and return to Your Word with an open heart. Then help me to learn to live under Your authority, for my good, the blessing of others and Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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PLAYING RELIGIOUS GAMES

Luke 7:31-35 *"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other: " 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners". ' But wisdom is proved right by all her children." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus did not play games, unlike many of the religious people who crowded around Him. Asking the question, "What do I think that this generation is like?" Jesus got their attention. The answer was not flattering! He said that they were just like children playing games. It looked to Him as if they were playing 'weddings and funerals' and trying to get others to join in. However, neither John nor Jesus would be sucked into their world of make-believe. John was too serious for them and Jesus was too joyful. Their criticism was like the childish habit of excluding those who are different, from their game.

John and Jesus were very different. The herald and the King had no need to play games or make themselves popular. Their value did not lie in what people thought of them, but in God's approval ... and they knew it. The only people to lose out were those who refused to accept the messages of repentance and salvation - freely given by God's grace. It was not the popular vote which would determine the legacy of John and of Jesus; that would be clearly seen in the changed lives of those who believed John's message of repentance and trusted Jesus for salvation.

It is the same today. The wonderful news is that there is no game to play, when it comes to Jesus. He is not looking for people who can keep an elaborate set of rules (because nobody can!), but for sinners to confess their guilty secrets and receive forgiveness and love. This message is not tied to any culture or point in history; it is timeless and world-wide. Those who know it is for real are the people who have accepted the message and received the Saviour. They are the proof of the truth ([Psalm 34:8](#)). So do not be distracted from Jesus by the criticism of others who think it is all a game; when you know Jesus, you know it is love for life.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me in the Gospel, through Your servants and by Your Holy Spirit. Thank You that the Gospel is not complicated and that Your love is real and available to all who will trust You. Please forgive me for sometimes making Jesus difficult for others to get to know, or when I hide Him behind religious talk or ceremonies. May my life be the proof of Your truth, as I keep changing so that I am more like Jesus every day. In His Name. Amen.*

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OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Luke 7:36-38 *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. 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, 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. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The woman was known for her grubby reputation. 'Nice religious' people did not want to know her; but she believed that Jesus was different. So when she arrived at a smart dinner party, without an invitation, it caused quite a stir. Jesus and the other guests would have been reclining on low couches with their legs stretched out away from the central table. Standing behind Jesus, this weeping woman's tears splashed onto His feet, which she dried with her un-braided hair before breaking open a vial of expensive perfume and pouring it on Jesus' feet.

The questions everybody was asking were, "Why did she come, why was she weeping, why did she get so close to Jesus, why the perfume and why did Jesus not reject her?" The rest of the narrative will unfold over the next few days, but by this stage in the story all we know is that she came because she wanted to come, she wept because she could not help it; and we know that Jesus did not reject her at all.

Jesus never rejects anybody who comes honestly grieving over their sin. Those who really hope that Jesus will be merciful to them will find mercy and grace and love in abundance. Often the first step is the most difficult, wondering if our catalogue of sin will repel the Saviour of the world, wondering if the religious authorities will resent a social outcast and prevent access to Jesus. The answer is simple: Jesus welcomes sinners because He came to accept their punishment, as though He was the sinner instead of us. See www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more. That is why you can confidently tell your family, friends and colleagues that Jesus is waiting for everybody who know they cannot escape from their own mess.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father. It is wonderful to think that Jesus did not turn this woman away, or even shrug off her physical touch, but He accepted her tears and her offering of worship in the poured out perfume. Thank You that You never reject anybody who is honest about their mess and guilt, because Jesus is the friend of sinners and the Saviour of the lost. Please help me to know how precious I am to Him, and to be joyful to tell others that He will save them too. When people come to share their woes with me, may I be bold to offer them hope through Jesus Christ who will never send them away. In His Name. Amen.*

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WHO KNOWS?

Luke 7:39-40 *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." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had been touched by a prostitute and He did not reject her. His host, who kept strict moral and religious rules to ensure that he was 'whiter than white', was confused by Jesus' reaction to the crying woman. Surely, he thought, if Jesus really was from God, He would know her character and refuse to have anything to do with her. In his mind there were only two possibilities: either Jesus did not know all about her, and therefore was not God's 'prophet'; or He did know, but did not think that her moral condition mattered.

Simon the Pharisee needed to be taught that neither of his thoughts was true. Jesus accepted the woman, with all her guilty grieving as she regretted a wasted life, because He had come to earth for people like her. What she needed was forgiveness and a brand new start. She had so thoroughly broken the religious rules that religion could not offer any hope - it would only condemn her. What she needed was to have all her sins taken away. And in coming to Jesus, she came to the only person who could help.

Forgiveness and grace cannot be earned - they are supernatural gifts of God. Because free forgiveness is unthinkable for people who live outside of God's love, they will never know unless somebody tells them. In the same way that Simon would never know unless Jesus told him, many of our friends who are in a mess will stay there until we tell them that Jesus wants to forgive them. It is the best comfort anybody can receive and we should never keep it hidden away from those who need it. Be a real friend today by telling them the good news that Jesus is longing to forgive them because He loves them and died for them.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for the wonder of Your love which reaches out to everybody who is helplessly trapped in the mess of a broken life. Please forgive me for being selfishly careless of how much my friends and colleagues need Your forgiveness that I have not told them, and encouraged them to come to You. Please help me to receive Your cleansing for my own sins every day, and to be bold to tell others of Your power to mend broken lives. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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CANCELLING THE DEBT

Luke 7:41-43 *"Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

What would you most want if you owed a lot of money but had no funds to pay it back? Another loan to pay off the first debt would only delay the moment of crisis; and make it even worse by adding more interest payments. But if the creditor chose to write off the debt, no more payment would be demanded. That is called, 'forgiving the debt'.

When Jesus was teaching the Pharisee about forgiveness, He used the best example: financial debt. His story about two men whose debts were cancelled speaks about the response to forgiveness. With a ten-fold difference in the amount owed, it was easy for Simon to see that when more is forgiven, the more people are grateful.

Sinners certainly find great relief when their guilt is removed because of the blood of Jesus. But there is more. They also find a great joy as a new confident future opens up. That joy is brought by the Holy Spirit who inhabits the people who trust in the sacrifice of Jesus and are forgiven by God. So the difference is very great. Before being forgiven, the person is locked into the grief of a guilty past with no future hope; but afterwards there is a hope, and future and joy to go with it. And the greater the guilt forgiven, the greater the joy! So, paradoxically the worst sinners who have most forgiven, are therefore most grateful and joyful. If you know what it is to be forgiven because of Jesus, please tell others - it will change their lives for ever!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your willingness to forgive all who confess their sins. Thank You that Jesus has already paid for my sins by His sufferings on the cross. Please help me to make this wonderful news known to my friends and all those who I find suffering under a load of sin and guilt. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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WELCOMING JESUS

Luke 7:44-47 *Then he turned towards 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Eastern hospitality demanded the courtesy of making guests feel welcome and comfortable. After a hot and dusty walk, cool water would have refreshed the feet and, after washing face and hands, a little oil would have refreshed the visitor's head. However, although Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his home, he did not go out of his way to welcome the Saviour. Good manners vanished as the religious expert tried to find out what made Jesus 'tick'.

By contrast, the weeping woman loved Jesus because she believed that He could turn her life around, and deal with her sinful past. The difference between her behaviour and Simon's demonstrated that the religious man had no desire to honour Jesus, but the prostitute did. Her loving actions were a spontaneous expression of her faith in Jesus, and the Saviour responded by forgiving her sins. On the other hand Simon was not aware that he needed any forgiveness: his self-righteousness not only blinded him to the reality of his sin, but also to the true identity of his guest.

The same reactions occur today. Those who refuse to recognise and confess their sin have no time for Jesus. But those who know the burden of guilt and want to be released from its grip will find hope in Him. Paradoxically it is the really weak people who can more easily honour Jesus once they realise that He has the power to forgive. On the other hand, religious self-righteousness resents the Saviour; because to welcome Him is to admit that one's religion has not made them perfect. Although it may be tempting to think that good people will make the best disciples, experience shows that the failure, cheat and wilful sinner may give Jesus a real welcome. So, if you know people who are not trying to be good, don't dismiss them - Jesus could be preparing a special future for them after He pours His forgiveness over their guilty past. So take courage and tell them that Jesus lives with you and encourage them to meet Him too.

Prayer: *Holy Father. I know that I am a sinner and that I need to be forgiven by Jesus. Forgive me when, in my pride, I think I can get right with You by my own religious disciplines. Help me to come to You every day to be cleaned up, from the dirt of the day as well as from the habitual sins which have wrongly become a part of my life's routine. Help me also to realise that Your gospel is for everybody, and that those whose sins are more obvious may already be hungry for forgiveness: so help me to tell them how much Jesus loves them. In His Name. Amen.*

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WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

Luke 7:48-50 *Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

If somebody owes you money but cannot pay, you might choose to cancel (forgive) the debt. But it would be wrong to think you can cancel a debt owed to somebody else; because the money belongs to the creditor and not you. Every sin has to be paid for, but what is the price and who has the right to extract the price or to forgive? The penalty for sin is death and eternal separation from God: therefore only God has the right to demand payment. In the same way, only God can forgive (cancel the debt). The amazing thing is that God's forgiveness is not without cost to Himself: Jesus came to earth to be punished for every sin, thus ensuring that justice was done (see www.crosscheck.org.uk).

When Jesus declared that all the prostitute's sins were forgiven, the natural response of the other guests was to ask, "Who is Jesus, that He claims the right to forgive her sins?" The answer should have been obvious: if Jesus forgives sins, He must be God! Jesus knew that when He died on the cross, He would personally be paying for that woman's sins ... so He had every right to forgive. Her peace came because He paid the price.

The woman may not have understood all that, but she did believe that Jesus was her only hope. She put her faith in Jesus to do something to help her, even if she did not know how. It is the same today: all those who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved ([Romans 10:13](#)). So if you are despairing about yourself, go to Jesus trusting Him to do whatever is right for you. If others do not know what to do - tell them to go to Jesus and trust that He knows what to do. When it comes to sin and failure, He certainly knows how to forgive and has already paid the price to discharge the debt - so go to Him in faith and believe that His forgiveness is real, and for you personally.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for being a forgiving God and for taking away my sin when I come in penitence and faith through the blood of Jesus. Forgive me for my proud unwillingness to confess my sin and receive Your forgiveness, when You are ready and willing to cleanse me and give me Your peace. Help me to be more willing to confess my sin, and to tell others how much You can do for them too. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TRAINING ON THE JOB

Luke 8:1-3 *After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus usually worked with an audience of those God had given Him. His ministry prior to the cross was shorter than 3 years; but it has continued right up until now by those who were trained. The Twelve were called to be taught to minister like Jesus, and then teach others to do the same ([2 Timothy 2:2](#)). The training course was like an apprenticeship in which the Bible teaching Jesus gave in the synagogues each Sabbath was followed up with practical ministry examples.

Others were eager to learn too. Luke mentions many believing women, from the demonised Mary Magdalene to the wife of a high-ranking civil servant, who were examples of the variety of grateful people whose lives had been transformed by Jesus. For Joanna, following Jesus was also a potentially dangerous lifestyle because her husband's boss had already executed John the Baptist for speaking the truth. But these women had one thing in common: they all helped to support Jesus and the band of disciples 'out of their own means'.

An essential part of any ministry training is to abandon the idea that it is a job for which others should pay. Christian leaders might be supported; but that is more of a gracious gift to be received with thanksgiving, than a right to expect or demand. Indeed, the starting point of all ministries is to serve because it is in our hearts to do so - not for what we might get out of it. Even on earth Jesus had nowhere He could call 'home' ([Luke 9:58](#)). These women did not seek anything for themselves, except the privilege of being able to learn as they served. Alas, even some who aspire to ministry do not understand this. People who serve the Lord faithfully will do so sacrificially. As with Jesus, the best teaching is often by example.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. I am amazed at your grace - coming into a greedy world and giving Yourself for people who despised Your grace. Thank You for opening my eyes to the value of Your sacrifice. Forgive me if I feel that others 'owe me something' for serving them in Jesus' Name, or begrudge the time and effort of ministry because there is little reward, response or recognition. Help me to learn afresh the liberty of giving freely so that others may understand Your grace, and see it demonstrated in the way I serve them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SCATTERING SEED

Luke 8:4-8 *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

This parable of the sower mirrored the hearts of the people who crowded around Jesus. He started the story while the people were still gathering, and as they jostled to hear Jesus. A few would have heard everything, others would pick up fragments. And of those who physically heard His words, only a few might have understood the meaning He intended. But Jesus was speaking about them: people whose hearts were careless, hard, or distracted; and also some who were eager to apply the message to themselves.

Using familiar farming illustrations, Jesus was not just teaching the crowd: He was teaching His disciples. They needed to understand the hard ministry truth that although the gospel offers wonderful blessings, many will resist the Word of God growing up within them. The different soil-types described in the story show a range of responses to what God says. If the Word fails to produce a crop, it is not the seed which is defective, but the soil which is unreceptive and therefore unproductive.

This information is as valuable to us as to the apostles when the Early Church grew. We must expect that spreading God's Word will meet both resistance and rejoicing. But that is not a reason to stop sharing the Word: it encourages us to keep witnessing despite discouragement and disappointment - because where it is welcomed, the blessing is disproportionately great. So if you honour Jesus as your Saviour, please don't stop living it and talking about Him, because somebody somewhere will have receptive soil. And when it seems that nobody is interested, don't forget that somebody will be hungry for forgiveness, love and peace with God - your job is simply to tell them that Jesus is the Way.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. Thank You that Your Word has the power to change my life, as I am willing to receive what You say and act upon it. Please forgive me for the things I allow into my life which squeeze out Your Word and encourage my deafness to truth. Help me to be amongst those who continue to be eager to hear and respond in faith, so that the blessings You have promised may be evident in my life: to Your praise and glory. And may I never grow weary of telling others, however much some may resist the truth, because others are hungry to find the salvation which only comes through Jesus. In His Name. Amen.*

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SHARING THE SECRET

Luke 8:9-10 *His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.'* (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Some things are too precious to tell to everybody. We only share secrets with those we trust and who really want to know. In order to test who is really interested for the right reasons, we might see how people respond to a little of the story. If they are uninterested, we can move the conversation on: if they show respect and are concerned to know more, we will tell them more. That is why Jesus spoke in parables. Truth-seekers recognised the need to understand the meaning of the story, while truth-evaders walked away from the possibility of being exposed by the mirror of truth which Jesus applied to their hearts.

The disciples wanted to know more. That was Jesus' purpose in choosing them. He wanted these men to be equipped to lead the church: not as priests fulfilling religious rites, but as partners in the 'family business' with God. They needed to be more than faithful servants ([John 15:15](#)): it was essential that they understood the mind and heart of God, the basis for His plans and the reasons behind His powerful actions. Others, who could not care, would have no right to share in the salvation-ministry of Christ.

Jesus was not looking for people who knew everything (most of the disciples were uneducated: [Acts 4:13](#)), but for people who wanted to learn how to minister like Jesus ('disciple' means 'learner'). They needed facts, yes; but also they needed to understand what 'made Jesus tick'. Those secrets were only for those who wanted to be like their Master. It is still the same today. No amount of theological education will make a person holy if they don't have a deep desire to have a heart like that of Jesus. On the other hand, everybody who wants truth to penetrate their lives will find that Jesus reveals more and more about Himself and us too. Which group are you in?

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father. Thank You that you are still looking for people who are willing to receive Your truth and share the secrets of Your kingdom. Please forgive me when I do not want Your Word to reform my heart and mind. Help me to welcome what you say so that I can learn and be prepared to receive more. And I pray for those of my friends and family who have resisted Jesus for so long; please help them to repent and be willing to learn from Christ. In His Name. Amen.*

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LIFE IN A SMALL PACKAGE

Luke 8:11 *"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God." (NIV)*

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Seeds may be eaten as food, but their primary purpose is to reproduce the life of the organism, in another place at another time. The Word of God is seed: it contains truth which is the spiritual genetic material of God's kingdom. Wherever, and whenever, it takes root in a human heart, the characteristics of God's heart are formed in that person. Without it, nobody can enter His kingdom.

Horticulturalists get the best qualities for a crop by selective breeding programmes; and animals are bred for a high meat or milk yield. The secret is in the seed. The genes are the truth of the species and, if uncorrupted, will reproduce its distinctive features. In the same way, those who allow God's Word to penetrate their heart, will find that it starts to redefine their desires and passions. Although it may be well presented by a fine preacher or author, the essence of truth is God's alone, and His purpose is to bring it to life in whoever is willing to hear and believe what He says.

God uses His Word to recreate broken lives: indeed there is no other way to be reformed into the image of God. His Word has the extraordinary power to dissect through the mixed motives of our tangled minds ([Hebrews 4:12](#)). It may be transmitted on paper, by word, on TV and through the internet. It may be on a shelf, contained in a tract, in a memorable conversation. It never goes stale and will still have the same impact many years after it is written, translated or printed. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Word read or heard may ricochet around someone's mind until they choose to submit to God. If we really believe that, surely we will spread the Word like a farmer scatters seed. Aim to have Gospel conversations, give away tracts of Scripture, invite friends to hear a Biblical preacher, write an appropriate verse in greetings cards and letters ... and above all, keep on being transformed by it ([Romans 12:2](#)).

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that You are true in every way. I believe that the Bible is Your special gift of truth to the world, having the power to get to the heart of every matter. Please forgive me when I run my own life without reading what You have to say, and for ignoring its life-giving truth. May I resolve to treat Your Word as You intended: to live by it and to share it with others, so that I may be useful in Your kingdom. Help me also never to be ashamed of Your Word but to share it in whatever way I can. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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DOWNTRODDEN INDIFFERENCE

Luke 8:12 *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

A path is only a path because the ground is trodden down by many feet. Whatever it's original purpose, the strip of hard soil is defined by the people (or animals) that walk over it. The result is an impervious surface which will not allow anything to grow. Jesus used that analogy to describe people who hear God's Word but are unchanged by it. The seed of Truth has no chance to germinate because a resistant shell is around the person's heart.

The devil has a special interest in encouraging people to become hard-hearted; because he can then snatch away the seeds of Truth. But how do hearts become hard? The picture of the path gives us a clue. Over many years, probably from childhood, others have walked over their hearts until they actively choose to resist whatever comes to disturb their attempts to be in control of their own lives. Unwelcome circumstances dry out their capacity to respond appropriately to others, especially those in authority. Such life stories suit Satan's purpose well in depriving these people of the only way to a new life. Those who cooperate with the devil find that God allows them to have their own way, and He then finally hardens their hearts - as He did with Pharaoh.

What is the answer? This parable simply diagnoses the problem without prescribing a remedy. It taught the disciples to expect that some ministry will be apparently barren: but they must not be deflected by discouragement. However, following the analogy, sometimes the cracks in the dried-out soil can provide lodging places where the Word can hide until the rain comes. However hard the soil has become, God's Holy Spirit can soften the ground; so it is no waste to 'sow' God's Word on the 'path' because if even a little gets hidden in the cracks, it will germinate when the rain comes. We do not know the outcome but God always has the last word: to confirm the hardness or to show mercy ([Romans 9:18](#)). Our task is to keep 'sowing' the Word; irrespective of what we think the outcome will be ([2 Timothy 4:2-5](#)).

Prayer: *Loving Father. Thank You that Jesus taught straightforwardly about those who harden themselves against the Word; allowing their downtrodden lives to dictate their spiritual future. Forgive me when I have done the same, and hardened my heart so that I could not hear Your truth or apply it to my life. Please help me to dig up such old paths and allow room for Your Word to grow in me. Help me to be patient as I share Your truth with others, not being discouraged by apparent lack of response, but praying that You will have mercy on those I love and pray for. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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