**Live in Community**

 Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Pursue Jesus**

“If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.” ([Jeremiah 29:13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Je29.13))

*Jesus’ offer is remarkably clear: If we look for Jesus, we’ll find Him. He’s not hiding from us, but closely connecting with Him does take us being intentional. We’re called to follow Him, to pursue Him. In this volume, we’ll look at how individuals pursued Jesus through the challenges of their circumstances. Pursuing Jesus is not only a mental exercise for personal growth, but it also means living out our faith in tangible ways: showing up, listening carefully, receiving grace, and trusting Him.*

**Session Overview**

**Receive Grace**

**Biblical Encounter:** A Sinner Comes Humbly to Jesus ([Luke 7:36–50](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.36-50))

**Outcome**: Don’t let past sin and shame keep you from Jesus.

*In this session, we’ll read about an unwelcome guest who interrupted dinner to pour a bottle of perfume on Jesus’ feet. This woman’s past sin and reputation caused the host to be frustrated. After all, the host thought that if Jesus was who He said He was, He should have known what type of woman she was and turned her away. Instead Jesus gave him and us a clear picture of how He addresses past sin and the shame that can prevent people from approaching Him.*

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| *First time leading* Live *for Adults? Check out the* [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf)*.* |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**Imagine you receive a social media notification from someone you knew in school. What’s the one photo or memory of you from that time frame you would hope they don’t share? |

Almost everyone has had a phase in life they wish to forget. It might have been as simple as a photo taken during an awkward time with problem skin, braces, or a bad haircut. But more often it’s a time when we made awful choices. We said or did things we wish we could change. The good news is that as we pursue Jesus, we can find freedom from our past. He helps us walk through our past sin and shame into forgiveness and wholeness.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Is it easy for you to accept grace and forgiveness from Jesus? Why or why not?



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| **QUESTION**Is it easy for you to accept grace and forgiveness from Jesus? Why or why not? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

Jesus likely spent most of the first thirty years of His life living with His earthly family in their small town. The Bible reveals very little about those years. However, once He stepped into public ministry, we read about how His influence began to grow. Many people loved Him and thought He was wonderful, but many Jewish leaders saw Him as a threat. They wanted to keep an eye on Him. Though we can’t be sure of his motives, one of the religious leaders invited Jesus to a dinner that was interrupted by an uninvited guest.

**Did You Know?**

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| Today’s Bible account includes an incredibly expensive gift—a perfumed ointment in an alabaster container. This container was a long-neck flask likely made of a soft material called alabaster—a white or light-colored variety of gypsum stone. The material, often imported from Egypt, was believed to help preserve ointments and perfumes. Though the passage does not say, if the cost of this perfume and container were similar to others in the Gospels, it could be worth as much as a year’s wages. |

**Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman**

Read [Luke 7:36–38](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.36-38).

The woman who showed extreme kindness to Jesus had a past she probably would have liked to erase. She had lived a sinful life, and everyone in town knew it. But at some point, it appears she had encountered Jesus and experienced His healing and help. In appreciation, she brought a very expensive jar of perfume and lavished it on Jesus as a gift of thanks.

She probably felt that everyone there that night thought she was worthless. Most likely, she had a hard time deciding to come in. She would have known that it was scandalous for her to touch Jesus in her culture. But she also knew Jesus was different. He had likely already given her freedom and forgiveness. He was worth all the trouble she would face to give Him this special gift of worship.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think this woman was like before she met Jesus? |

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| **QUESTION**What might you have thought about her gift if you had been at the dinner party that night? |

**Jesus Teaches with a Story**

Read [Luke 7:39–43](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.39-43).

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| **QUESTION**Do you think Simon would have ever invited this woman to be his guest too? Why or why not? |

It’s so interesting to notice that the Bible says Simon, “*said to himself,* ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!’ ” (verse [39](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.39), emphasis added). Then we read that Jesus answered his protest perfectly! That means Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts, proving His prophetic nature. It’s not hard to imagine that at least some of the other people at the party would have heard Jesus tell Simon the story about two debtors. However, they wouldn’t have known why Jesus decided to tell that story just then.

Jesus knew what they needed to hear. Simon and his friends thought they knew all about God and how to serve Him. But they had forgotten entirely about God’s grace; that was what Jesus came to remind everyone of. Even Simon had to admit that whoever had been forgiven most would love most. This woman had been forgiven of so much that she worshipped Jesus extravagantly. Her response is an encouragement and inspiration to all of us Jesus has forgiven.

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think the woman might have chosen that night to give her gift to Jesus? |

**Jesus Changes Hearts**

Read [Luke 7:44–50](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.44-50).

Jesus painted a clear picture for Simon. In that culture, a guest should have been treated well and offered many comforts when they arrived. But none of those things had been done for Jesus that night, letting everyone there know He was not an honored guest in Simon’s home. At the same time, a woman they all looked down on had shown Jesus much honor.

Jesus let everyone know they had things backwards. What appears on the outside of a person is not nearly as important as what’s happening in someone’s heart ([Luke 6:45](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk6.45)). The religious leaders thought they knew best how to serve God, but they didn’t even recognize His Son when He came right into their party. They thought they knew about worship and honoring God, but they dishonored Jesus. Instead, a sinful woman who had accepted His grace and forgiveness showed Jesus great honor and love in return. Though her past could have kept her away, as the host of the party thought it should, she pursued Jesus in spite of it. Pursuing Jesus isn’t about following a religious system or acting a certain way to earn God’s favor. It’s about having a real relationship with Him and letting Him change us from the inside out.

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| **QUESTION**What questions would you like to ask this woman about this encounter with Jesus? |

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| **QUESTION**What might Simon have been thinking after everyone left his home that night? |

**Reflect**

**Don’t let past sin and shame keep you from Jesus.**

The Bible is a wonderful gift that shows us how to live today. Story after story helps us see that we can be changed through God’s power and forgiveness, and that we can live in healing and restoration. In this encounter, Jesus ministered to both a sinful woman and to Simon, a religious leader. Jesus also has a message for us: God’s grace is His love freely given in spite of our past sin. We cannot earn it or demand it; we can only receive it with a grateful heart. No one can be made right by doing what the Law commands ([Romans 3:20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ro3.20)). Only Jesus can save us from our sin. The wonderful news is that no one has sinned too much or too badly for Him to reach out and forgive if we ask Him. His grace is greater than all our sin and shame.

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**Who in the story can you relate to more—the sinful woman or Simon the host? Why do you think so? |

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| **QUESTION**The woman in the story gave Jesus a lavish and generous gift of worship and thanks when she experienced His forgiveness. What might that look like for you? |

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| **QUESTION**Is there a past sin or shame that you struggle to forgive yourself for? How can this woman’s example help you to do so? |

**Activate**

This story shows us one person’s response to Jesus’ amazing grace. Her life was a mess, but Jesus set her free from all her sin and shame. He changed her life and gave her the power to walk in freedom. Her extravagant worship reflected the great work that Jesus had done in her life. What Jesus had done in her heart and mind overflowed to those around her.

**Challenge**

We can let what Jesus has done for us overflow to the people around us too. One of the easiest ways to share the hope of Christ is just to talk about what Jesus is doing in our own life. This week, look for at least one opportunity to encourage someone else with a story of Jesus’ grace and forgiveness in your own life.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

This woman and Jesus showed us a powerful lesson of grace and forgiveness. Let Jesus speak to you throughout the week about walking out of your sin and shame into freedom and health through the devotions.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: A Sinner Comes Humbly to Jesus**

Read [Luke 7:36–50](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.36-50).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**What is Jesus saying to you about walking in freedom from past sin and shame? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: A Woman of Great Faith**

Read [Joshua 2:1–24](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jos2.1-24).

This Old Testament story is about the Israelites as they were just beginning to step into the land God had promised them. They needed help to overcome some obstacles in their way. One person who helped them was a woman named Rahab. We might skip right over what verse [1](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jos2.1) says about her: She was a prostitute. Without her help, the two spies might have never made it safely out of Jericho.

If we were writing the script, most of us would never choose a prostitute to play a major role in Bible history, but God did just that. Her past didn’t disqualify her from being used greatly by God. In fact, we can read about her further in [Hebrews 11:31](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Heb11.31), where she was listed in the great hall of people of faith. In [Matthew 1:5](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt1.5), she was listed as an ancestor of Jesus himself. The Bible plainly teaches that our past sin and shame should never keep us from pursuing Jesus.

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| **QUESTION**What pieces of Rahab’s life surprise you? |

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| **QUESTION**How does Rahab’s story challenge you? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: A Sinner’s Cry to God**

Read [Psalm 51:1–19](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps51.1-19).

This beautiful song was written by the great King David after being confronted about his fall into adultery and murder. Twice in the Bible, David is called a man after God’s own heart ([1 Samuel 13:14](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Sa13.14); [Acts 13:22](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac13.22)), but here we see him reeling and repenting after a horrible series of choices. He had known God’s goodness and mercy all his life, but then he walked away from it into sin and selfishness.

The prophet Nathan had to help David understand how great his sin was ([2 Samuel 12:1–14](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Sa12.1-14).) [Psalm 51](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps51) was David’s cry of sorrow for turning away from God. It has been a comfort to so many who have read its words. We can follow David’s example of being greatly sorry over our sinful choices. And we can also follow his example of repentance or turning away from sin and back toward God.

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| **QUESTION**What verses of this psalm stood out to you most as you read it? |

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| **QUESTION**What did David learn through this experience? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: The Unmerciful Servant**

Read [Matthew 18:21–35](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.21-35).

One of the greatest lessons for all Christians is that what God does in us, He always wants to do through us. The blessings of God are never supposed to stop with us. God means for them to flow through us to help other people know Him, too.

Jesus told this sobering story about a person who was forgiven a huge debt, but then refused to pass that on. He took God’s grace and forgiveness, but then did not share it. We must be careful to learn from this lesson. We cannot accept the mercy of God ourself and then refuse to be merciful to others. We have been forgiven so much, and we must let God’s grace shine through our life.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think it would feel like to watch a story like this happen in real life? |

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| **QUESTION**How is God challenging you through this passage? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: God’s Grace Is Sufficient**

Read [Acts 7:54–59](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac7.54-59); [8:1–3](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac8.1-3).

This passage is the introduction to a man named Saul. We see that he held everyone’s coats while they killed Stephen. Then he began to try actively and aggressively to destroy the Christian church. But if we keep reading through [Acts 9](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9), we see that Saul (also known as Paul) finally met Jesus and had his entire life turned upside down.

One encounter with Jesus turned a man from being full of hatred to being full of love. He went from being the worst persecutor of the Church to the greatest church planter and Christian author of all time. If anyone could have been crippled by shame and guilt for what he had done, it would have been Paul. But God’s grace is sufficient ([2 Corinthians 12:9](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Co12.9)). He can free us from all of the baggage that comes from our sin. No one knew that better than Paul, and his writings have helped countless people walk in freedom and victory.

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| **QUESTION**How does God’s work in Paul’s life inspire you? |

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| **QUESTION**What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about grace and forgiveness? |