

LESSON EIGHT: THE FACE OF LOVE

Some days are disasters, broken, dreary, failures. You walk out of your place of work feeling low and depressed. As you get into your car, you sink into the driver's seat with a sigh. You've tried so hard to be a success, to please your boss, to be respected. You want to feel important, to be respected. Then you arrive home or pick up your child at the day-care center. As soon as your child sees you, he or she gets excited and runs to you, jumps into your arms for a hug. You discover that all the love you think you need to earn is right there in your arms. Your performance at work is unimportant. You have love offered as a free gift without any conditions.

PRAY: Father in heaven, You demonstrated Your love to us by sending Your Son, Jesus, into this world to be our Savior. Send us Your Holy Spirit to remind us to seek Your face always. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Carl Coleman was driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars stopped, and the woman driving the other car got out to survey the damage. She was distraught. It was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days out of the showroom. Coleman was sympathetic, but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data.

She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents that were in an envelope. On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband's distinctive hand, were these words: "In case of accident, remember, Honey, it's you I love, not the car."

—Paul Harvey Jr., *Paul Harvey's for What It's Worth* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 31.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:36-50. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did the Pharisee invite Jesus to his house for a meal?

He wanted to observe Jesus closely. The Pharisees were constantly trying to find fault with Jesus. They believed that they deserved eternal life, because they kept the letter of the law perfectly. They believed that other people could not be saved, because they did not keep the law. Since Jesus condemned them, they constantly tried to prove He was a sinner. Moreover, the Pharisee did not show the common courtesy he provided the rest of his guests (see verses 44-46).

2. What does it mean that the woman was a sinner?

It means that she was like everybody else the Pharisees looked down on. One would certainly not assume she was an adulteress as is commonly assumed. One may infer that she had a reputation for repeating a certain sin (e.g. gossip), but one should not go beyond that. She simply did not live up to the standards of the Pharisee.

3. How did the woman gain access to the Pharisee's house?

It was quite common for other people in the village to observe the festivities at such an occasion. The Jews always reclined when they ate, lying on cushions, leaning on their left elbow, and eating with their right hand. Their feet pointed away from the table toward the wall. The woman thus gained access to Jesus' feet.

4. Why did the Pharisee refer to Jesus as "this man"?

It was a derogatory reference. He didn't even use Jesus' name. However, one must remember that he was not speaking out loud. No one else in the room knew what he was thinking besides Jesus. How surprised he must have been when Jesus answered his thoughts.

5. When Jesus referred to the two debtors, what point was He making?

His reference was not to the numbers of sin, but to the consciousness of sins. Simon did not think he sinned at all. The woman, on the other hand was highly conscious of her sins.

6. The woman took care of what Simon had neglected. Why?

She was demonstrating her humility and repentance. She went beyond common courtesy, weeping out of sorrow for her sins. By kissing Jesus' feet she demonstrated her love for Him. The whole house would have been filled with the aroma of the perfume.

7. Why did Jesus say that her sins were many?

That's the way the woman felt. She was highly conscious of her sins, and they were a burden to her. As Jesus noted, she loved all the more, because she was so acutely aware of her sins. Simon should apply the rule to himself.

8. Why did the other guests express shock that Jesus forgave sins?

They didn't believe that Jesus was God. They believed He was a mere human being. Rightly, they believed that only God could forgive sins. Jesus has also given the authority to forgive sins to His Church. Whenever there is repentance, forgiveness must always be offered.

CHALLENGE: Make a private list of those people whom you find difficult to forgive. Develop a strategy by which you can develop ways to demonstrate God's forgiveness and love to others.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Many years ago, when a famine was bringing misery in Russia, the writer, Leo Tolstoy, passed by a bridge in Moscow where many beggars gathered. They were on the verge of starvation and were asking him for alms. Seeing a beggar, Tolstoy searched in his pocket for a coin, but discovered that he had nothing with him, not even a copper coin. Embarrassed, Tolstoy took the beggar's hands in his own and said, "I'm sorry, brother. Don't be angry with me. I have nothing with me today." The thin face of the beggar became illuminated, and he said in reply, "But you called me brother—that was a great gift, sir."

—Ronald E. Vallet, *Stepping Stones of the Steward* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 129.

Jim Arends of Trinity Lutheran Church in Spring Grove, Minnesota, tells of an old cartoon that pictures a preacher at the pulpit and a deacon sitting behind him with a grumpy expression on his face. The preacher says, "So until next Sunday, remember that God loves you, I love you, and Brother Al here is working on it."

CLOSING PRAYER: Teach us to love, O Lord. Empower and equip us to love not just those who love us, but also to love the unlovable. As we bask in the glow of Your love, help us to seek Your face always. Help us not only to tell others of Your love and our love for them, but also by showing them the face of love. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.