



July 2017

Dear Friends and Partners of CWR/PTM,

Simon, a respected Pharisee, was hosting a fashionable dinner party with a prestigious guest list (Luke 7:36-50). The guests were honored citizens whose good deeds had earned them a place on the “A-list” of religious names in town. Though the actual guest list for dinner was small, anyone was permitted to stand in the courtyard and listen to the invited guest speak. Thus, a large standing-room-only crowd was waiting to hear a young Rabbi named Jesus.

Students of the Bible have been taught to think of Pharisees as self-righteous, but that description doesn’t even begin to fully define these proud, arrogant hypocrites. Most of the Pharisees we read about in the New Testament were spiritual legends in their own eyes—no human could love them as much as they already loved themselves.

But before this much-anticipated moment of Jesus’ address, the most notorious woman in town entered the courtyard. Everyone in town knew who she was—all the women knew about her and some of the men *knew her* the way the Bible speaks of a man *knowing* his wife. Perhaps, if it became known that any of the men who were present had paid for this woman’s services, they would have tried to keep their reputation intact by saying *they had never had sex with “that woman.”*

This “woman who had lived a sinful life” (Luke 7:37) was looking for Jesus. The crowd parted for her like the Red Sea—the silence was deafening—the piercing looks directed toward her were fiery darts of damnation. The scene was filled with high drama—every eye was on “this woman.” Minds were racing. *What would she do? What would Jesus do? How would Simon, a righteous, respected, religious leader react?* After all, “this woman” threatened the success of Simon’s dinner party and her presence would damage his reputation.

When “this woman” arrived at the place where Jesus was eating, she knelt at his feet, pouring perfume on his feet—weeping as she did so. The atmosphere was electric. In an astonishing public demonstration of immodesty, she let down her hair so that she could wipe Jesus’ feet.

Then “this woman” who made a living by selling her body, working in the shadows and on the fringes of society, started to kiss Jesus’ feet. The crowd was mesmerized—why would he let this woman touch him, let alone kiss his feet? No “good” man would ever talk to a woman who was not his wife in public. “Good” men in that culture crossed the street to avoid passing too closely to any woman—and this woman was a notorious, shameless and immoral woman.

This scandalous and outrageous drama, overlaid with sexual tension in the eyes of the beholders, played out right before their eyes. Luke tells us Simon was thinking that if Jesus really was a prophet and a Rabbi then he would never have let any woman do these things to him, and beyond that, Simon had to have been thinking if Jesus was who he “pretended” to be, he would also know what kind of a despicable, low-life woman she actually was (Luke 7:39).

Luke tells us that Jesus was fully aware of Simon’s thoughts and “answered” him by telling him a story of a moneylender (perhaps a few of the guests at Simon’s home had become rich in such a

profession) and two men who could not pay off their debt. As fascinating as the actions of the “sinful woman” had been, it merely set the stage for the lesson Jesus gave next.

Jesus illustrated his lesson to Simon by speaking of *a radically different kind of a moneylender who turned the money-lending profession upside down. This gracious moneylender in Jesus' story gave people what they owed him.* The moneylender in Jesus' story forgave one man who owed something like two months' pay and another who owed about two years' wages. After telling the story Jesus rhetorically asked/told Simon that the one who had been forgiven most [that is, the one who realized how much their forgiveness involved and how deep the love that produced it is] would love the most (Luke 7:41-43).

The author of the book of Luke was of course “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14), but his Gospel is unique in the word pictures he paints—early Christians also called Luke “The Painter.” The real subject of this dinner at Simon's house is not the woman, nor is it Simon—with this story Luke paints a *Portrait of God's Grace*.

The despised woman who washed Jesus' feet is a portrait of the gospel. She brought her broken, empty and tragic life to Jesus, with her monstrous debt, and he forgave her. He did not condemn her—that's the product of legalistic religion. *The law condemns, whereas grace forgives.* Jesus didn't shame her, reminding her how far she fell short of respectability—she heard no such lecture from Jesus. Jesus didn't use her as a negative illustration in a hell fire and brimstone sermon in which he threatened this audience, demanding that they live moral and upright lives. Jesus accepted her and gave her a new life—all by the grace of God.

In this *Portrait of God's Grace* we see the way God as the gracious moneylender does business. Everyone owes God everything. We are all in God's debt, whether we realize it (as did the sinful woman) or not (like Simon). This *Portrait of God's Grace* teaches us that God does not demand that we pay him what we owe—instead he pays us all that we owe and more.

Simon, the Pharisee, serves as an illustration of all that opposes and all that is opposite to the gospel of God's grace. Simon is a picture of the limits of law—and the products of law. The law enslaves us to this goldfish-like-bowl of a world where we are unable to swim any farther than the law allows. The law will inevitably focus our hearts and souls on the love and respect we have for our own abilities to secure and sustain our own life. *The faith that only God can give and impart, by his grace, frees and liberates us to love beyond our own little world and then to pass on the incredible grace of God to others.*

It seems evident in this story of the dinner at Simon's house that Simon only invited Jesus because he wanted to expose him and devalue his teachings. But Jesus showed up at the dinner, even though he knew he wasn't exactly an honored guest and even though he knew Simon would not demonstrate normal courtesies to him. Jesus loved Simon just as much as he loved the “sinful woman.”

Sadly, Simon did not recognize his need for the love, forgiveness and grace of God. He was in love with himself, he lived well and he felt like he was self-sufficient. He stood upright and he rode tall on his spiritual high horse, prancing by/around losers like the sinful woman. The “sinful woman” knelt down, recognizing her many failings and flaws, and as her tears flowed she found grace. God's grace is never deserved. God's grace can only be received. Grace is only given away, never earned. *Grace is not wages earned, but a gift given.*

“Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48,50).

When Jesus looked at the sinful woman with compassion and love, forgiving her, it was the first time in many years that a man had looked at her as a person worthy of respect, rather than an object to be used and then discarded. She didn’t earn the grace and forgiveness she was given—even though Jesus said *her faith* had saved her.

Some faith is based on prior knowledge and experience, so that we exercise faith when we get in a car and turn the key, assuming it will start. We exercise faith when we turn on the light switch or turn the handle on a water faucet. When we have never experienced something before, we often “step out” in faith. We exercise faith when we forgive our spouse or parent or child or friend and we then, in faith, trust them not to hurt us again. When we exercise faith we make ourselves vulnerable to loss, hurt and pain.

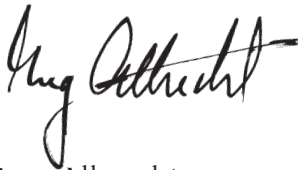
Faith in God—the kind that we read about in the ministry of Jesus—is best understood as a gift of God that we receive, and then we exercise it. Divine faith that we might have or exercise is best understood as God’s gift because it flies in the face of all logic and reason, and because it is a counter-intuitive response opposed to all that we naturally treasure and cherish as fair and just.

The grace of God imparted the faith to the sinful woman we read about in the seventh chapter of Luke, and once she received it and embraced it she was empowered to exercise that faith back toward God. Thus “her faith” was not a faith she earned, deserved or produced, but rather “her faith” because she had received it by the grace of God.

All that is of any consequence and has lasting, eternal value belongs to God—all that has divine significance begins with him. Jesus is the beginning and the end. It is all about the love of God that God “first” gives to us (1 John 4:19) and then we, in turn, once we have accepted, received and embraced that love, may love him and others, with that love that is now “ours.”

Praying that this finds you well, thanking God for you and his love and grace he has given you, with gratitude to him for the way that he enables you to pass on his grace to others.

Because of the amazing grace of God,



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

P.S. Here’s a note from someone who is being helped by the ministry of CWR/PTM, which you support through donations and prayers. Thanks for doing your part in this life-changing ministry!

I deal with depression and discouragement—some days I feel great, and other days I feel lower than a worm. I must tell you that on those days I invariably return to the magazines and resources from CWR/PTM or one of your incredible monthly letters, and without fail you, in Christ lift me up. You are better than meds!—North Carolina

CWR/PTM Prayer List—July 2017

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for my ongoing struggle with anxiety. I know God can help, but the pain is becoming too hard for me.—Texas

Please pray for my husband who is a diabetic and suffers from depression.—Mississippi

Please pray for my health, especially lung trouble and low blood sugar.—Ohio

Please remember me and a family member in your prayers. We are both handicapped and disabled. We are having a hard time just coping with day-to-day-life.— Tennessee

I'm requesting prayer for my co-worker to have a successful outcome with his chemotherapy treatments.—California

Please pray for a homeless friend. He can't find a home and my roommate doesn't want him here.—British Columbia

Please pray for my daughter who is bipolar and needs professional help.—Mississippi

Please pray for my husband who has complications from diabetes (neuropathy and fatigue).—Texas

Please pray for my sister who has leaking valves in her heart.—Ohio

Please pray that my daughter sells her house quickly and that my brother's dental surgery goes well.—New York

Please pray for my grandson who lives in a very high crime area in Missouri.—Illinois

Please pray for my wife who has severe headaches all the time. This has gone on for years.—New Hampshire

I suffer with severe COPD. Please pray for speedy and complete healing.—Kentucky

Please pray for us. I am 76 years old and we just lost our house. Pray that we can find housing soon.—North Carolina

Please pray for me. I'm suffering from insomnia, chronic fatigue and arthritis pain.—Ontario, Canada

Please pray for my granddaughter's pregnancy that she will deliver a strong and happy baby.—Alabama

Please pray for me—I have sciatic nerve problems which are worse when the weather changes.—Mississippi

My husband is receiving treatment for brain cancer. Please pray for his strength and for his complete recovery.—Texas

Please pray for law enforcement officers, fire fighters and EMS workers everywhere.—Texas

Please pray for my daughter who has been deployed four times overseas. She just came back from Korea.—South Carolina

Pray for my sister (age 83). She suffers severe pain in her feet and legs due to an ulcer, and can't sleep.—Minnesota

Please pray for me as I'm suffering from prostate cancer.—Illinois

Please pray for my friend whose husband died. She needs a house to rent with her nine children.—Ohio

Please pray for my husband who has lung problems and my grandson who has kidney problems.—Kentucky

Please pray that my niece will be given strength from God to see her through all her troubles.—West Virginia

Please pray for my grandson who is now going through rehabilitation.—Alabama

I had surgery on my left arm, needed for the continuation of my dialysis. Please pray that I'll recover soon.—California

We need prayer. My father's had three silent strokes. My brother and sister and I will be his care givers.—Pennsylvania

Dear God: We bring you many requests and needs. You know each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for your love and grace, we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—Amen.