

## THE GOSPEL IN STEP 12

### Introduction

The story is told in Luke 7 of a woman described only as “sinful” who crashes a dinner party thrown by a religious leader named Simon, in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Jesus. Simon, who was a Pharisee, had invited Jesus to this dinner party. We’re not sure why he invited him - he was a religious leader in the community, and perhaps he wanted to see what all the fuss was about, as Jesus’ reputation as a teacher and prophet was growing.

And yet, he insults Jesus from the time he shows up. It was customary for the host to offer water to the guests so that they may wash their feet, but Simon offers no water to Jesus. It was also customary to greet guests with a kiss, but Simon doesn’t do this either, although we presume he greeted his other guests with a kiss. And a special guest would have been given olive oil for their hands and face, but Simon doesn’t offer this to Jesus, either.

It would seem that Simon intends to **put Jesus in his place**. Yes, the rabble may be impressed with his teaching, but he was in the big time now, and he needed to learn to respect the religious establishment in general, and Simon in particular.

But then, as Luke tells the story, a woman known in the community for her sinful behavior (most likely a prostitute) steps out of the shadows while all the guests are reclined around the table, pulls out an alabaster jar of expensive ointment, kneels at Jesus’ feet, and begins washing his feet with tears flowing from

her eyes, wiping them with her long hair, and applying the expensive ointment to his feet. And Jesus acts as if this is all completely normal.

Simon the host can't stand this. He thinks to himself, "If this man were really a prophet, he would know who was behind him washing his feet with her tears."

And Jesus, who of course was a prophet, reads Simon's thoughts (because he is God, and it is perfectly appropriate for us to bow at his feet and kiss his feet – he is our King), and tells him a story. The story is about two debtors and one creditor. One debtor owes fifty days wages, and the other owes five hundred days wages. Neither is able to repay their debt, and the creditor forgives both.

"Now," Jesus says, "Which debtor would love the creditor more?" Simon answers, "Well, I suppose the one who owed more," and Jesus says, "Exactly."

Then Jesus proceeds to point out the differences between the woman and Simon. Simon offered no water to Jesus for his feet; the woman washes Jesus' feet with **her hair and tears**. Simon did not even offer a customary kiss; the woman is continually kissing Jesus' feet. Simon offers no oil for his face and hands; the woman has spent money she probably doesn't have for a special ointment that she is rubbing into his feet.

"And why is this woman demonstrating such extravagant love?" Jesus asks. "It is because she has been forgiven much. But if you haven't been forgiven much, Simon, you won't love much either."

Then Jesus turns to the woman, and says, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Now what does this have to do with step twelve? Well, here's the Gospel I see in step 12: **Jesus has forgiven you for a reason. He has forgiven you (a lot), so that you may love (a lot); so that you might put him in his place.** And where is his place? It's at the right hand of God the Father. Putting Jesus in his place means worshipping him as my Lord and my Savior. It's why it's so natural for the woman, and also so natural for Jesus. He is King, and she is worshipping him.

This woman has had a spiritual experience, not as a result of working the steps exactly, but she has experienced Jesus Christ. And because of this experience, she is now able to love a lot. She now loves Jesus passionately, as we can see from the story, and it is this love that has changed the way she lives. She's a society outcast, and yet she is now not ashamed to go seek out Jesus. She is carrying the message of his grace and mercy to this dinner party. And while the story doesn't exactly say this, I think her life on the streets were over.

She can love much because she's been forgiven much. She can live a different life because she realizes she's been forgiven much.

Jesus has forgiven you for a reason, and that reason is you will put him in his rightful place as Lord and Savior. And in relation to step 12, this means we will honor his Great Commandment: to love him, and to love others the way he has always wanted you to.

### Step 12

"Having had a spiritual experience as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and practice these principles in all our affairs."

As Dean and Paul have been preaching as they have taught on step 12, this is not graduation, but simply the next step of our journey of recovery and healing. We have stuck around long enough for the miracle to happen, and because something has happened in us, we now have the privilege to share our experience with others. We “get to” do this, as Dean said. We don’t “have to” – we get to, just as the Luke 7 woman got to extravagantly love Jesus.

### The Gospel in Step 12

But the step as we read it is not really the Gospel, because it’s a statement of what we do, and (remember) the Gospel is always about what God has done and is doing. So let me re-write step 12 from a Gospel point of view: **“Having opened your eyes to my Gospel, I continued to apply this Gospel to your heart, and I continue to strengthen you to do the work I’ve called you to do.”**

There are three pieces of this statement, and step 12, that I’d like to look at tonight. First, “Having had a spiritual experience” and “Having opened your eyes to the truth of My Gospel”. What exactly is our “spiritual experience”? Secondly, “We tried to carry this message to others” and “I continued to apply this Gospel to your heart”. What is God saying to us, and what are we saying to others? And third, “And practice these principles in all our affairs” and “I continued to strengthen you to do the work I’ve called you to do”. What is the connection between practicing the steps in all our affairs and God enabling that to happen?

### God Has Gotten My Attention

What exactly is our “spiritual experience as a result of these steps”? Is it salvation? Is it healing? Is it transformation? It is all of that, and more. It’s hard

to define, but in my life, I would say my recovery began when I realized that God had gotten my attention. It took Him a while, at least by my reckoning. But my growth started to happen when I realized my struggles with other people were not about them, but simply God's way of getting my attention.

No matter our recovery issue, it is never about our circumstances or experience – it is always about our reaction to those circumstances or experiences, and the sooner we realize that God is using all those experiences, even the really unpleasant ones, to get our attention, the sooner our recovery takes off.

So I would submit that the “spiritual experience” of step 12 is “having our eyes opened to the Gospel” – having our eyes opened to the good news of Jesus Christ. As Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18-20, we have had our eyes opened to the hope that we have in Jesus, the inheritance that is now ours in Christ and the power of Christ that is now at work in us.

Many of us enter recovery feeling hopeless – perhaps that's true of someone here tonight. But part of God's attention-getting is to give us hope. We are hopeless in our addiction or depression; we are powerless in our sin. This is step 1. But when God gets our attention, we begin to believe that there may be a power that could restore us to sanity (step 2).

When our eyes are opened to the truth of the Gospel, we recognize our need for a Savior. We've tried to do life our way for too long. We've tried to be a better person; follow more rules; beat up ourselves more and more when we don't “do it right.” Or we keep trying to avoid God's call on our life. We're the center of our universe, which entitles us to get whatever it is that we think can satisfy.

Any way you slice it, we need a Savior. And then, as God continues to get our attention, as he continues to open our eyes to His Gospel, we realize we have a Savior – a God who loves enough to have died for us. Our God is not just a Creator – He is a Father Who loves His children. He is all-powerful and all loving, at the same time.

The woman in Luke 7 knew this. Perhaps she had heard him in the synagogue in Luke 4:

- <sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

When he rolled up the scroll and said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, her heart would have been moved – she was poor! She was oppressed! She was a slave to the lifestyle she was in. She was an outcast and Jesus was talking to her!

She knew she needed a Savior, and as he spoke she believed in this Jesus proclaiming that He was her Savior, so that Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you.” Jesus had opened her eyes to the truth of His Gospel. He was her Lord and he was her Savior. She would respond with love and obedience. She had put Jesus in his rightful place. This was her “spiritual experience.” It is so good when God gets our attention – I am so grateful He got mine.

### I Communicate Grace

So we have had a spiritual experience in step 12 (It is step 12. If

you're here tonight not able to say this, just understand that it hasn't happened yet. Stick around until the miracle happens. If you keep showing up, so will God.). What's our response? It is to "carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

"We tried to carry this message to others" – the corollary I'm suggesting in the Gospel version is this: "I continued to apply this Gospel to your heart." What do we have to share with others but our strength, hope and experience? And where do we get this strength and hope and experience? We get it from an ever-increasing understanding of God's grace in our lives. It is, as Paul says, the peeling away of the onion-layers to get to the sweetest part. The more we discover about ourselves, the more grateful we are for God's grace.

And the reason there is no graduation from the twelve steps is this understanding of who we are and who God is a lifelong project. Yes, I have anger and control issues, and I'm sometimes better in these areas. But, I'm also prideful; tend to judge too quickly; am too often self-centered. And yet, God still loves me. He is not done with me. He is constantly reminding me of His Gospel, and when I get it, when I realized he has applied another truth to my heart, I am moved to love him that much more.

So Jesus has forgiven you for a reason, and part of that reason is that you get to communicate grace. And that is what I share with others. One of the best parts of CR is that we talk about real stuff. No facades – no talk about careers, or politics, or how wonderful our children are doing. Actually, it's usually the complete

opposite – “My life is a mess.” “I don’t know where I’m going to wake up tomorrow.” “My kids are out of control.” It’s real stuff, and it’s heard by others who genuinely get what your saying. We talk with others about real stuff, and we talk about a real Savior, and we keep talking about this Savior, because He keeps applying his Gospel to our hearts.

Think of the example of the sinful woman in Luke 7 in this regard. Think of the impact of her testimony and example on all the other outcasts and sinners around her. She was forgiven, and she was loving her Savior in a way that not even a Pharisee could match. “I want what that woman has,” we would say. “I want her faith. I want to love like she loves.”

Get this – CR is always a blend of those who have strength and hope and those who want what those people have. And it is always an evolution. For those of you wanting what others have, please know that they were once in exactly the same position as you. God opened their eyes to the truth of His Gospel. He will open your eyes to the truth of His Gospel. God continues to apply his Gospel to their hearts. He will continue to apply it to yours.

### I Offer Grace

And the third part of step 12 is this: “And we practiced these principles in all affairs.” I like that this step refers to words and deeds. “We tried to carry this message to others” – speaking truth and grace, from our experience, strength and hope – and we “practiced these principles in all our affairs” – we try to live out what we talk about.

The Gospel here is that “God strengthens us to do the work He’s called us to do.” We’re saved by grace, through faith (Eph 2:8) so that we do the works that God prepared beforehand for us to do (Eph 2:10). And I will summarize this work as “offering grace” – showing grace – acting gracefully towards others.

Think of what you used to be – the idea of acting with grace, or showing grace, or even being seen as someone who could actually offer grace – I’m not good at it now, and I certainly used to be much worse. I would guess that I’m not the only one who at one point could never see themselves as an instrument of God’s grace (and remember, if you don’t see yourself that way tonight, stick around until the miracle happens).

But Jesus has forgiven you (a lot) for a reason, and another part of that reason is so that you can offer grace (in His name). He has forgiven you for a reason (as I said), and that reason is to love him more, and to love his people more.

What does offering grace look like? I’ve been memorizing this passage for the last few weeks:

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup> For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

God has comforted us in our affliction. He has comforted us in our addiction. He has comforted us in our compulsive behavior. He has comforted us in the midst of conflict with a loved one. He has comforted us in our depression and anxiety. Why? – He has comforted us in our affliction, so that we may comfort those in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

We do that so well here. It is a blessing to my soul to see this principle in action in so many of you on a consistent basis. I am not a fan of pain and suffering, but indeed “God never wastes a hurt.” So many of you are living examples of this, and it is an outworking of the Gospel in step 12. You have been saved to do the work that God prepared beforehand for you to – and an important part of that work is to comfort others in their affliction with the comfort with which you are comforted by God.

So that is the Gospel in step 12: You have been forgiven (a lot) to love (a lot). Understanding the full impact of all that Christ has done for you is the spiritual experience of step 12. It is God getting your attention. And when He has it, you begin to change. You are now able to love a lot. You are now able to love like the Luke 7 woman. You love the Lord and you love others by communicating grace and by offering grace. And you do this as God continues to speak the Gospel to you, and as He continues to give you the strength, in your affliction, to offer comfort to others in their affliction.

It’s a picture of real life lived in a sinful world with a sinless Savior in charge. It’s better than a less-than-real life lived with us in charge. You are forgiven. Love like you’re forgiven. Live like you’re forgiven. And to God be the glory.