

# ☐ LIFE OF JESUS

June 27, 2021 | *The Woman Caught in Adultery*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- Have you ever been caught red-handed in a sin or crime?
- Read John 8:1–11.
- Pray that God would help you seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

## THIS WEEK

### ☐ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus forgives sinners.

### ☐ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our only hope for forgiveness is in Jesus Christ.

### ☐ MEDITATE

*“She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more’” (John 8:11).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Use this section to prepare your heart to encounter Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Q: *How do you deal with guilt?*

Q: *How do you deal with other people's guilt?*

Experiences of overwhelming, uncontestable guilt tend to stay with us. My first grade PE class was lined up along the backstop of a baseball field. I saw a rock, and for some reason that can only be understood in the mind of a first-grade boy, I decided to throw it over the backstop. I watched as it soared into the air until it was a small dot in the sky. Then it fell out of the sky right on top of Jessica's head. She was dazed at first and then collapsed into a screaming ball of tears. The teacher ran over and asked what had happened. About ten arms flung up, their fingers pointed straight at me. There was no denying it. I was guilty. The teacher told me to go straight to the principal's office. I will never forget the overwhelming sense of guilt I felt. I could do nothing to erase what I had done. I guess my posture and look of sincere remorse influenced the teacher. When I got past third base, she called me back and had me apologize to Jessica. That was the end of it. Just as I will never forget the guilt, I will never forget the relief I felt at forgiveness.

In John 8:1–11, we encounter a woman who bore the immense weight of her guilt. She had committed adultery, and there was no denying it. She could only bear her guilt and contemplate her punishment. Her situation is the same one we all face before God. In this story, however, we also encounter our Savior's wonderful capacity to forgive sinners.

Q: *What is our only option for dealing with the guilt of sin?*

Q: *How does knowing we can never undo our sin make the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus Christ even better?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –According to Romans 3:23, every human being has sinned against God. We all bear the enormous guilt of our sins. Our only option to erase that guilt is to embrace the gift of salvation offered to us in Jesus Christ. Many people, even professing Christians, go through life bearing an enormous weight of guilt

because of sin. The corrupting nature of sin even infiltrates our ability to receive forgiveness. If you are bearing the weight of sin, confess those sins out loud to God and express your confidence in His ability to forgive.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Jesus thwarted the impure motives of the Jewish leaders and offered the adulterous woman forgiveness.

1. WHAT ABOUT THOSE BRACKETS?
2. SEEK JUSTICE FROM A PURE HEART.
3. JESUS'S RECORD OF SIN.
4. GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING.
5. JESUS FORGIVES SIN.
6. JESUS GIVES GRACE WITHOUT IGNORING SIN.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate John 8:1–11 more closely to understand its message and draw applications from it for us.*

## 1. WHAT ABOUT THOSE BRACKETS?

🔍: *What notes does your Bible contain for John 8:1-11?*

🔍: *Why do some people question whether John 8:1-11 belongs in the Bible?*

When you turn to John 8, the first thing you are likely to notice, depending on the translation you are reading, are brackets or some other notation around the text of John 8:1–11. The notation informs you that many of the earliest manuscripts do not contain this passage (7:53 is also absent). A similar situation occurs at Mark 16:9–20.

Most of us probably do not spend a lot of time thinking about how we got the Bibles we read in our devotions and take

to worship services. Your Bible is the product of a company that makes every effort to faithfully translate the Bible into English. Today, numerous companies produce Bibles. The English Standard Version (ESV), the translation used in these lessons, is produced by Crossway, a publishing company located in Wheaton, Illinois. The Bibles produced by companies like Crossway are based on manuscripts of the Bible that were copied, by hand, hundreds of years ago. The note in your Bible is a reference to these manuscripts. Some of these manuscripts do not include John 8:1–11, going from John 7:52 straight to John 8:12. Some of these manuscripts include John 8:1–11 after John 7:36, John 21:25, or Luke 21:38. (Chapter and verse numbers, of course, were a more recent addition to the Bible and do not appear in these ancient manuscripts.) This creates quite a conundrum for people who believe the Bible is God’s revealed Word. Does John 8:1–11 belong in the Bible or not?

This lesson will not answer this question directly but instead caution against two insufficient approaches to this problem. There are some people who want to simply point at the passage and say, “See, it’s in here and that settles it.” Those who make this response are typically skeptical of newer translations and believe the attempt to question the authenticity of John 8:1–11 is the project of modern scholars who want to destroy God’s Word. This response, however, is simply a denial of how modern Bibles are produced. It is an attempt to delegitimize the process which produced the very Bible they are pointing to.

There are others who want to point to the word “earliest” in the note and say, “See! The earliest manuscripts do not include John 8:1–11, so it must have been added later.” This response is also insufficient. While the age of a manuscript is important, this cannot be the sole factor to determine what was originally in the Bible. For instance, some of the manuscripts in which John 8:1–11 does not appear contain marks or signals that perhaps indicate that the scribe who copied it knew of other manuscripts that did include it. That being the case, the reading of John that includes John 8:1–11 is at least as early as the manuscripts that do not include it, even though none of those manuscripts survived. There are numerous other reasons to refuse to allow this issue to be settled by what the earliest manuscripts contain.

🔗: *How should we approach John 8:1-11 and Mark 16:9-20 devotionally?*

🔗: *What patterns of interpretation for other Scriptures can show us how to responsibly deal with John 8:1-11?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When studying and seeking to apply passages like John 8:1–11, it is important to remain cautious. Allow your conclusions to be guided by other passages of Scripture. Avoid drawing insights that cannot be verified by other passages of Scripture.

## 2. SEEK JUSTICE FROM A PURE HEART.

### ☒ JOHN 8:1-6

Q: *What Scripture were the scribes and Pharisees referencing?*

Q: *Why were the Jewish leaders bringing this woman to Jesus?*

The Pharisees had caught this woman in adultery. Her sin was punishable by death, and they were ready to enact this judgment. It is just to seek judgment for sin. Sin is an offense to God and must be accounted for. But there are multiple indications that the scribes and Pharisees were not seeking justice with pure motives. Although Jesus was a popular figure, He held no official position among the Jews or the Romans. The Jewish leadership did not need His permission to carry out the woman's sentence. Furthermore, Leviticus 20:10, the law to which the Jewish leaders are referring, called for the death of both the man and the woman. If the Pharisees had caught this woman in the act, they should have been able to produce the man who was guilty of adultery too. Finally, John directly stated the leaders were not sincerely seeking justice (John 8:6).

The scribes and Pharisees frequently approached Jesus with the wrong motives. For example, in Luke 11:53-54, the scribes and Pharisees tried to convince Jesus to teach, not because they wanted to learn from Him but because they wanted to catch Him saying something blasphemous.

Q: *Why do your motives matter?*

Q: *Do impure motives glorify God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus's teaching frequently focused on the heart. Right actions are important, but Jesus recognized that many people do the right actions but with the wrong heart. One way we could think of this is in terms of love. The scribes and Pharisees rightly wanted justice for the woman's adultery, but their true motive was to condemn Jesus. They did not love justice. They loved their own power and influence. This week, do a motive check on your spiritual life. What activities do you do because of your commitment to Christ?

### 3. JESUS'S RECORD OF SIN

#### ❏ JOHN 8:6, 8

Q: *What did Jesus do when the Jewish leaders confronted Him about this woman's sin?*

Q: *What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground?*

The most perplexing aspect of this passage is Jesus writing on the ground. John does not tell us what Jesus wrote, nor does he explain why He wrote it. We can suggest ideas, but every suggestion is ultimately based on speculation.

Many people wonder what Jesus wrote on the ground, but perhaps the key to understanding what Jesus was doing is that He wrote it on the ground. Words carved into stone are permanent. Ink on paper is permanent. The words Jesus scribbled in the dust on the ground in the midst of the temple likely did not last an hour. They were not permanent. We can say this for sure. Perhaps then, there is reason to speculate that He wrote something related to sin. Perhaps He wrote the woman's sin on the ground and maybe even the sins of the leaders who accused her. This would show the record of sin in this world is not permanent. Something could be done, had to be done, to provide forgiveness of sin.

This proposal for understanding the message of John 8:6, 8 is similar to what Paul claimed in Colossians 2:13–15, which states, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” In this passage, Paul said the record of sin has been canceled by nailing it to the cross. The record of sin was rendered void. It was not permanent. Paul said, as is the situation in John 8, that the cancelation of sin disarms and shames the rulers and authorities, though Paul probably had cosmic or supernatural beings in mind whereas the authorities in John 8 were Jewish leaders. Again, the suggestion that Jesus wrote something related to sin in John 8:6 and 8 is speculative, but the idea is consistent with the rest of what we see in John 8 and with other Scripture.

Q: *Are you able to forgive others who have sinned against you?*

Q: *Why is it harmful spiritually to hold grudges?*

**APPLICATION** – Christ died so that our sins may be forgiven and no longer held against us. If only Christ’s followers would hold lightly to the wrongs committed against them! Do you hold grudges against those who have offended you? Holding grudges is a poor reflection on the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus must learn to keep their record of wrongs in the sand. Doing otherwise places a greater emphasis on the wrong committed against you than Jesus placed on the wrongs committed against Him. Give up the grudges you are holding against others, and, if possible, use your forgiveness toward others as an illustration of the greater forgiveness available in Christ Jesus.

## 4. GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING.

### ■ JOHN 8:9

Q: *Who was the first to drop their call for corporal punishment against the woman?*

Q: *Why did the scribes and Pharisees drop the case against the woman?*

The woman’s accusers were repudiated by Jesus’s response. They all realized that they too had sinned against God and had been shown grace. Reflecting on grace can turn our vindictive outlook on the sins of others upside down. John noted that it was the older accusers who were the first to drop their accusation. The older men were able to look back over a longer life of sin and forgiveness. They could see more easily the grace that had been shown to them. The younger men followed their example.

Grace should change our outlook on the sins of others. In the parable of the ungrateful servant (Matthew 18:21–33), Jesus told of an ungrateful servant who was forgiven an incredible debt but then refused to forgive just a small debt owed to him. Upon hearing of it, the master held him accountable. Jesus’s point is clear. Those who have been shown great mercy should be able to show mercy to others.

Q: *How does the grace shown to you in Jesus Christ differ from the grace shown to the Jewish leaders?*

Q: *How does grace change the way you respond to the sins of others?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – If you are unable to show grace to others, it is a sign that you have never experienced grace yourself. Make a practice of being understanding of the shortcomings of others. Also, be quick to forgive the sins of others against you. These are challenging demands, especially in a world as broken as ours, but your ability to show grace reflects the grace you have been shown.

## 5. JESUS FORGIVES SIN.

### ■ JOHN 8:10-11

Q: *Why did Jesus ask the woman who in the crowd had condemned her rather than telling her directly?*

Q: *How did the woman address Jesus?*

After calling attention to the grace shown to the Jewish leaders, Jesus showed grace to the adulterous woman. The Jewish leaders could not condemn her to death because they were not without sin themselves. Now, the woman only had to worry about the condemnation of the man who had not sinned. Jesus said that He did not condemn her either, not because He was a sinner, like the Jewish leaders, but because He would die in order to forgive sin and raise to life to show His victory over sin.

This point coincides remarkably well with 2 Corinthians 5:21, which states, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus became sin so that this adulterous woman might become the righteousness of God.



Q: *Would you describe yourself as a gracious person?*

Q: *How does Jesus's forgiveness free us from the burden of sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus Christ forgives sinners. This is the most wonderful news the world has ever known. Even for this woman, who committed a sin as harmful and intentional as adultery, Jesus stood ready to forgive and not condemn. Many people in the world believe they have messed up so badly that God is not able to forgive them. Their sin is just too great. But nothing could be further from the truth! If you are holding on to the guilt of sin, now is the time to appeal to Jesus for forgiveness. He has taken on sin so that we might be righteous before God.

## 6. JESUS GAVE GRACE WITHOUT IGNORING SIN.

Q: *Did Jesus deny the sin this woman was caught up in?*

Q: *Does the forgiveness we have in Jesus Christ eliminate our sins?*

Jesus denied the Jewish leaders' desire for capital punishment, but He did not ignore the adulterer's sin. He told her to "go ... and sin no more." Grace does not eliminate sin. Sin always has a price that must be paid and consequences that must be endured. This woman had to go back to a husband she had betrayed, children she had disgraced, and a community who knew her transgression. Furthermore, although John does not detail it here, Jesus would pay the penalty for this woman's adultery on the cross. Sin always has a price that must be paid, no matter what grace is extended.

The price of sin can be seen throughout Scripture. Isaiah 53:4–6, for example, states, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Clearly, forgiveness and grace are not free for Jesus.

Q: *Since salvation comes through Christ by faith, what keeps the gospel from becoming a license to sin without consequence?*

Q: *How can you love God more?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Some people use the phrase “just as if I had never sinned” in an attempt to explain the doctrine of justification. This statement is easy to understand, but it misses quite a lot in the doctrine of justification and misconstrues other elements. While this statement gets correct our verdict before God, it ignores the fact that Jesus suffered and died for our sin. Justification did not mean “just as if I’d never sinned” for Jesus. The cost for Him was quite high.

As Christians, we would never want to add to the sufferings of Christ. We will never be without sin in this world, and Jesus died so that all our sins would be forgiven. But we should never view His grace and forgiveness as a license to sin. To do so would be an indication we do not truly understand the gospel.

## NEXT STEPS

How can you escape the tremendous feelings of guilt associated with sin? The answer is to learn to love Jesus more. Loving Jesus keeps you from loving sin. Loving Jesus helps you embrace His sacrifice for your sins. Loving Jesus keeps you from turning to legalism and feeling the despair of never being able to deal with sin on your own. If you are trying to bear the burden of your sin, give it up and turn to Jesus in love.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

Holy Spirit, help me to trust in your work as the inspirer of Holy Scripture.

Jesus, thank you for paying the price of my sin and offering me complete forgiveness and freedom from guilt and condemnation.

Father, I thank you for establishing the plan of my salvation from the beginning of creation.

Jesus, help me to love you more as my Savior.