

October 27
Lesson 9 (NIV)

GRATEFUL FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 13:3-11](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Luke 7:36-50](#)

LUKE 7:37-48

³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."



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KEY VERSE

As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. —Luke 7:38

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

Unit 2: Responses to God's Faithfulness

LESSONS 6–9

LESSON AIMS

1. Summarize the account of Jesus' anointing by the woman of [Luke 7](#).
2. Contrast the grateful behavior of the admittedly sinful woman with the ingratitude of the self-righteous Pharisee.
3. Suggest a specific action he or she can take in the coming week to display gratitude for forgiveness.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Saying "Thank You"
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. The Sinful Woman ([LUKE 7:37, 38](#))
 - A. Arrival (v. 37)
 - B. Breakdown (v. 38)

- II. The Host and His Guest ([LUKE 7:39–43](#))
 - A. Pharisee's Thought (v. 39)
An Unexpected Answer
 - B. Jesus' Parable (vv. 40–42)
 - C. Simon's Response (v. 43)
- III. The Guest ([LUKE 7:44–48](#))
 - A. On Hospitality (vv. 44–46)
Blindsided
 - B. On Forgiveness (vv. 47, 48)

Conclusion

- A. Showing Gratitude
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

alabaster	al -uh-bas-ter.
Bethany	<i>Beth</i> -uh-nee.
Capernaum	Kuh-per-nay-um.
Judea	Joo-dee-uh.
Nain	<i>Nay</i> -in.
Pharisees	<i>Fair</i> -ih-seez.

Introduction

A. Saying "Thank You"

Why is it so hard to say "thank you"? If you think it is not, then you are not the parent of a high school graduate who has received gifts of congratulations. If you are such a parent, you probably recall begging, pleading, cajoling—perhaps even threatening—to get the appropriate

thank-you notes written!

Some people see a distinction between nongratitude and ingratitude. Robert Emmons, for example, makes a distinction between two attitudes that do not say thank you. Nongratitude is mere forgetfulness, but ingratitude is actively negative and meant to punish another. Others like Gina Barreca, however, see no gray areas: a person who is thankful says so, and one who isn't, doesn't. She considers laziness in saying "thank you" a symptom not of forgetfulness but of a lack of thankfulness. This in turn reveals deeper character flaws.

This debate can go on, but there is no question that showing gratitude is a virtue that befits the disciple of Jesus. When Jesus healed 10 men with leprosy, he was disturbed that 9 of them never thanked him (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus' obvious implication was that all 10 should have given thanks. So who is more likely to thank Jesus for his work: a religious leader or a notorious sinner?

B. Lesson Context

Jesus was invited to dine in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36). The Pharisee's motive for this invitation is not given immediately (see commentary on 7:40). He may have wanted a time of quiet conversation with Jesus (compare the Pharisee Nicodemus in John 3). More

likely, the Pharisee had less than honorable intentions. By this time in Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees have already shown themselves to be hostile to Jesus' work. Luke 6:1-11 records two events in which they opposed Jesus. We might be surprised that Jesus accepted the invitation in the first place knowing the potential hostility of his host. If so, we'll be even more surprised to learn that he went on to accept at least one more such invitation (Luke 11:37).

The Pharisee's invitation in today's lesson does not mention any other guests, not even whether Jesus' disciples were invited. But apparently others were included in the invitation, perhaps additional Pharisees, since "the other guests" judged what they saw and heard while eating (Luke 7:49). Their presence as well as their attitude adds to our suspicion that Jesus was invited to this dinner as an occasion to mock or question him in some way (see on Luke 7:44b, below).

This dinner party occurred not long after the centurion's servant was healed (see lesson 8). The location is not stated; it could have been in Capernaum since that city was something of a headquarters for Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:13; Mark 2:1). While the healing of the centurion's servant did occur in Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10), we know Jesus left there and was in Nain, where he raised a dead man to

life (7:11-17). The dinner in the Pharisee's home happens sometime after those events (7:36). Following today's text, Jesus toured "from one town and village to another" in Galilee (8:1), so the anointing in the Pharisee's home could have been in nearly any of them.

Each of the Gospels reports on an anointing of Jesus by a woman while Jesus was attending a dinner. As a result, some believe each reports on the same event. While showing some similarities, the anointing recorded in the other Gospels (see [Matthew 26:6-13](#); [Mark 14:3-9](#); [John 12:1-8](#)) is almost certainly a separate, later event (see [John 12:1](#)). Each of the other accounts locates the event in Bethany in Judea ([Matthew 26:6](#); [Mark 14:3](#); [John 12:1](#)), while Luke's account belongs to the Galilean ministry ([Luke 4:14-9:51](#)). John specifically identifies the woman as Mary of Bethany, whose reputation is certainly not that of a notorious sinner (compare [Luke 7:37](#) with [John 11:1-5, 28-32](#)).

I. The Sinful Woman

(LUKE 7:37, 38)

A. Arrival (v. 37)

37. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar

of perfume.

Dinner parties, often hosted in a courtyard, frequently include people the host has specifically invited and others who come to listen to or see a guest of honor. Uninvited people are allowed to come and participate as spectators. This custom emboldens the *woman* to come to the dinner, even though she is known as leading a *sinful life*. This suggests that she is a prostitute or adulteress. Likely there are several uninvited guests, and she is able to slip in unnoticed. She does not come out of curiosity or boredom; she comes on a mission to see *Jesus*.

The woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany (see the [Lesson Context](#)) also had an *alabaster jar* ([Matthew 26:7](#); [Mark 14:3](#)). This is one of the similarities that has led to the confusion of one event with the other. Such containers are appropriate containers for various oils, though other materials are also used.

[Mark 14:3-5](#) establishes both the nature and value of the *perfume* in the other account. But no such specifics are noted in the scene before us. Even so, this may be a great sacrifice on her part.

Host and guests adopt a posture of reclining while sharing a meal, the custom of the day. Low tables require that guests lie on their sides, leaning on their elbows and eating with their right hands. The significance of these facts is seen in

the next verse.

B. Breakdown (v. 38)

38a. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping,

Because the guests are reclining around the table, the woman has an opportunity to stand *behind* Jesus *at his feet*. The reason for her emotion is not readily known (see commentary on [Luke 7:47](#), below). But her reaction to Jesus' presence is obvious to everyone in attendance as she stands *weeping*.

38b. she began to wet his feet with her tears.

After an unspecified length of time, the unnamed woman changes posture from standing to kneeling near Jesus. That's the only way for her to be able to be in a position to *wet his feet with her tears*.

38c. Then she wiped them with her hair,

There's more than meets the eye here as the woman uses *her hair* as a washcloth. Women's hair of this era is meant to be bound up. Therefore this woman's letting her hair down is quite a departure from propriety. This act further suggests that she is lost in the moment with Jesus. She does not consider what anyone else might see or think.

38d. kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Perhaps the woman has come intending to anoint Jesus' head (compare [Matthew 26:7](#); [Mark 14:3](#)). But for reasons unknown she does not do so. Instead, she anoints his feet, as Mary also will do ([John 12:3](#); see [Lesson Context](#)).

This act of anointing Jesus recalls the definition of *Messiah*—"anointed one." Priests, prophets, and kings experienced anointing in Israel. Jesus fulfills all these roles ([Matthew 21:11](#); [27:11](#), [37](#); [John 4:44](#); [18:37](#); [Hebrews 7:23-28](#)). Thus this anointing is more appropriate than anyone in the room (other than Jesus) realizes!

What Do You Think?

What are some tangible, visible ways we can express gratitude to God?

Digging Deeper

What expressions of such gratitude are best kept private, if any? Why?

II. The Host and His Guest (LUKE 7:39-43)

A. Pharisee's Thought (v. 39)

39. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

The Pharisees frown on associations between "good" and "bad" people. A fre-

quent complaint of theirs about Jesus is that he spends time with sinners. That was the issue after the calling of Matthew/Levi earlier (Luke 5:29, 30; compare 15:1, 2; 19:1-7). Shortly before this event in the Pharisee's home, Jesus himself confirmed that he has a reputation as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34).

The host (whose name is Simon, per the next verse below) makes a mental note of Jesus' "failure." Likely Simon wants to discuss it with his Pharisee friends later, though all other Pharisees in attendance no doubt have noticed as well.

This criticizing thought betrays the Pharisee's ulterior motive for inviting Jesus: Simon doesn't want to learn; he wants to find fault. Perhaps Jesus' *Pharisee* host was not present at the time when Jesus acknowledged being friends with sinners. Otherwise, Simon would know that Jesus does indeed spend time with sinners, even eating with them.

Because Jesus allows this woman to touch his feet and anoint him, the Pharisee thinks that Jesus must not realize that this woman is a *sinner*. Since Jesus does not know her character, so Simon's thinking goes, then he cannot be a *prophet*. A prophet would know such things! But Simon the Pharisee operates from a false premise: he cannot establish

what Jesus knows or does not know about the woman because Jesus has already demonstrated a willingness to associate with sinners (see on Luke 7:47, below).

What Do You Think?

How should we respond, if at all, when others question our associating with certain people?

Digging Deeper

In what circumstances should we heed the challenge of other believers about such associations?

AN UNEXPECTED ANSWER

I began my Christian college teaching career at a small college in the Midwest. In those days, Christians tended to see moral issues in more black-and-white terms than today. For example, in regard to alcohol, the consensus among most Christians was that it absolutely should be avoided.

In this cultural setting, someone hypothetically asked the president of the college, "Would the school accept a million-dollar gift from the brewery down the road?" The president answered, "If the brewery wanted to give the school a million dollars, we'd baptize it and use it for God's glory!" His answer was tongue-in-cheek, but it didn't sit well with the questioner.

The Pharisee expected Jesus to con-

firm his prejudice against others and affirm his black-and-white view of the world. The Lord looks a bit deeper into human hearts than we can! What assumptions do you hold that Jesus might call into question?

—C. R. B.

B. Jesus' Parable (vv. 40–42)

40. Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

The name of the Pharisee is delayed until this point. In other Gospel accounts of an anointing, the host is also named Simon ([Matthew 26:6](#); [Mark 14:3](#); contrast [John 12:1, 2](#)). Though this could lead to the conclusion that these are the same events, one very significant detail sets Luke's account apart from those of Matthew and Mark. In the latter two accounts, Simon is referred to as a “leper,” not a Pharisee. The fact that he is called a leper and yet is able to host a social occasion suggests he has been healed by Jesus. Such a person would be unlikely to treat Jesus as will the host of this dinner (see on [Luke 7:44–46](#), below).

Jesus' attention-getting *Simon, I have something to tell you* serves to rouse the man from his faulty chain of thinking. Jesus wants the man's full attention, and he gets it.

41. “Two people owed money to a

certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

One denarius represents a day's pay for a common laborer (see [Matthew 20:2](#)). *Five hundred denarii*, then, represents about a year and a half's wages. Even so, the lesser debt is still significant.

To repay the debt, either borrower would have to make substantial sacrifices. The one owing *fifty* denarii could perhaps make enough such sacrifices to repay the debt. The other borrower, however, is certainly beyond his ability to repay; he will never scrimp and save enough.

42a. “Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both.

The parable ends with a dramatic surprise. For one borrower, this goodwill produces a convenience: he no longer has to worry about being extra frugal for a few months to save up the 50 denarii he owes. For the other, it is lifesaving. Hopelessly in debt, he and his family faced the specter of being sold into forced servitude to repay the debt (see [Matthew 18:25](#)).

What Do You Think?

What modern metaphors or analogies might we use to help someone understand the depth of God's grace and forgiveness?

Digging Deeper

What are some dangers in using such a technique?

42b. “Now which of them will love him more?”

The lender shows love to both borrowers by forgiving the debt. Such generosity expects a response of *love* in return. The question assumes that one or the other will feel greater love.

C. Simon’s Response (v. 43)

43. Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Simon recognizes that greater forgiveness inspires greater love. He may not yet see that he is about to be rebuked for his own evil thinking in regard to *Jesus* (see commentary on [Luke 7:39, 47](#)).

III. The Guest (LUKE 7:44-48)

A. On Hospitality (vv. 44-46)

44a. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?”

Of course *Simon* sees the *woman*! He has just been regarding her with contempt (see [Luke 7:39](#)). *Simon* might real-

ize now that *Jesus* is about to turn the tables.

44b. “I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Jesus calls attention to *Simon*’s own failures as a host. He has not accorded his guest the usual comforts demanded by cultural mores of hospitality. The host must provide *water* and a servant to wash his guests’ *feet*. *Simon* has not done that, at least not for *Jesus*. (One wonders whether the others at the table have received this kindness.) *Jesus*’ feet would have remained dirty and dusty were it not for the actions of the woman.

The Pharisee’s failure to extend the usual courtesies of a host to a guest gives credence to the idea that the host has no intention of honoring *Jesus*. In contrast, the sinful woman has corrected *Simon*’s inhospitable reception by honoring *Jesus* in a most humbling way.

45. “You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

Customary hospitality includes a greeting with a *kiss*. It shows a measure of affection, as one would expect from a well-intentioned host to his guests.

Once again, the *woman* has supplied what was lacking on *Simon*’s part. *Kissing Jesus’ feet* and not his cheek demon-

strates her humility and devotion.

What Do You Think?

What additional hospitality can our church provide to ensure that all visitors feel welcome?

Digging Deeper

To what extent, if at all, should worship services be planned to benefit unbelievers? Why?

46. “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

To *put oil* on another’s *head* goes beyond the normal treatment of a guest. It is reserved for very close friends or someone whom a host especially wants to honor (compare [Psalm 23:5](#).) This contrast demonstrates the point of the parable. The woman has supplied not just what is lacking in the treatment of Simon’s guest. She has added a special blessing that shows great love. She is not able to anoint Jesus’ head, but she has done what she could with the resources she has.

BLINDSIDED

“I sure didn’t see that coming!”

According to those who keep track of the changes in the English language, the term *blindsided* was first employed as a verb as early as 1960. It was used to describe a situation in a football game

when, for example, a member of the defense came up from behind the quarterback or a receiver and tackled him before the target was aware of the tackler’s presence.

The term has come to have many uses since its sports-related beginning. We’ve all been in situations where news blindsided us. It could have been news of a loved one’s death, or it might be the sudden, unexplained breakdown of our heretofore perfectly running automobile.

We could say that Jesus sometimes used his parables to blindside his listener. He told Simon a story that seemed to come out of thin air. By the time Jesus finished, however, there was no way Simon could escape the conviction of Jesus’ words.

Do you need to be blindsided by Jesus for him to get your attention?

—C. R. B.

B. On Forgiveness (vv. 47, 48)

47. “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Jesus here proves that he knows exactly what kind of woman has been attending him. She has *many sins*, to be sure. But she shows a great measure of love that suggests she knows she has been *forgiven*.

Jesus' declaration refutes Simon's unspoken thought that Jesus does not possess the divinely given awareness of a prophet (see commentary on [Luke 7:39](#), above). Jesus' parable serves as a rebuke to Simon's objection that Jesus should not allow a "sinner" to touch him. Simon never voices that contention aloud, so how does Jesus know that Simon objects to Jesus' allowing a "sinner" to touch him? Jesus shows he not only knows who the woman is; he knows what Simon is thinking!

Just as likely is that the woman has come in faith. Her gracious acts of anointing and kissing Jesus' feet are done with some manner of expectation on her part. Simon, on the other hand, feels no need for anything from Jesus, least of all forgiveness. Simon believes himself to be righteous—more righteous than most people. Thus he *loves little*.

48. Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus not only accepts her gift; he stands up for her. He exonerates her before the scorning crowd. He sends her home with a blessing!

What Do You Think?

What can we do to help fellow believers who have difficulty accepting the fact that God has forgiven them?

Digging Deeper

How will we know when sharing Scripture passages is not working and we need to supplement with a different witness?

One wonders whether Jesus says this as much for the benefit of the others at the table as for the woman. We can only guess what the woman feels as she leaves Simon's house. She must have come with considerable fear and trepidation. But her awareness of her need had driven her to seek out Jesus personally (compare [Matthew 9:20](#)). She must have known that she would be scorned by the Pharisee and many, if not all, of his other guests. To be able to honor Jesus is enough for her to face them all.

[Luke 7:49](#) (not in our lesson text) records the reaction of those guests. It's along the lines of, "Who does this Jesus think he is?" This is the second time Jesus has declared forgiveness of sins for someone (see [Luke 5:20](#)). The witnesses' response is the same both times ([5:21](#)).

On the earlier occasion, Jesus defended his authority to forgive sins ([Luke 5:22-26](#)). Here he seems to ignore the critics. It's the woman who is important. He turns back to the woman and says, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" ([Luke 7:50](#)).

Conclusion

A. Showing Gratitude

How do we say “thank you” to Jesus? Today’s text suggests we do so by acts of kindness. Of course, we cannot minister directly to Jesus, as the grateful woman did at Simon’s house. But we can minister to our peers. We express our gratitude to God by kind acts to others (Luke 10:25-37; James 1:27; 1 John 4:20, 21). At least, we do if we are truly grateful! If God’s grace and forgiveness toward us have produced in us the kind of love they produced in this woman, then that love will show in our treatment of other people. We will show our gratitude by being gracious.

B. Prayer

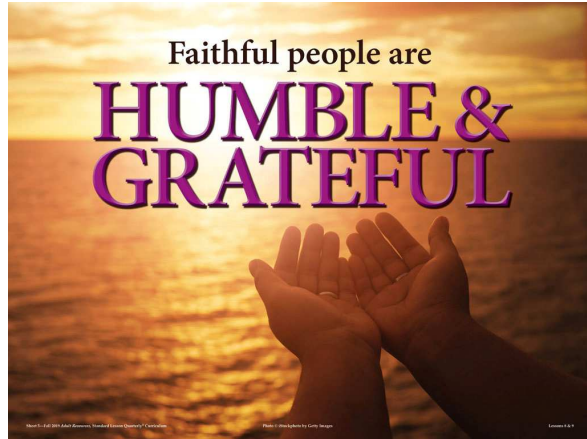
O God, thank you for forgiving our many sins. May we show our love and gratitude by our loving treatment of one another. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Thankfulness may consist merely of words.

Gratitude is shown in acts.

—Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1821–1881)



Visual for Lessons 8 & 9. Use this visual to introduce the *Into Life* section (next page) and/or as a backdrop to the closing prayer.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with **NIV** Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the **NIV** Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the following sentence on the board:

The greater the gift, the greater the gratitude.

Ask volunteers to tell stories from their past that illustrate how this sentence was true for them. Tell students that today’s Bible story shows the gratitude of a woman who had been forgiven much by Jesus.

Into the Word

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, today's Bible story aloud. Ensure that the reader stops at verse 48 in order not to introduce other elements—as important as they are—that might overshadow the point of today's lesson.

Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following multiple-choice sentences. Ask students to work in pairs or groups to agree on answers. Then read the sentences aloud to the class, asking for responses and discussing why students chose differently. (For many of these, there is not one correct answer. The lesson commentary provides information and background to help you respond to class members' choices.)

- 1—The Pharisee invited Jesus to his home because he wanted to (a) honor Jesus (b) trick Jesus (c) know more about Jesus.
- 2—The woman came to see Jesus because she (a) was a curious member of the crowd (b) was grateful that Jesus had forgiven her for her sins (c) wanted to do something good for a holy man.
- 3—The woman washed Jesus' feet because (a) his feet were dirty since the host had not provided a servant to wash his feet (b) her tears wet his feet, so she decided to finish the job with the ointment she had brought (c) she wanted to make a sacrificial gift of gratitude or worship.
- 4—The host was unhappy because (a) the woman was a person of ill repute (b) he

assumed Jesus wasn't the prophet he claimed to be (c) the woman's outburst interrupted the meal.

- 5—Jesus told the parable of the two debts because he wanted (a) the Pharisee to learn about forgiveness (b) the woman to learn about forgiveness (c) the crowd to learn about gratitude.
- 6—Jesus rebuked the Pharisee because the man (a) had a wrong attitude (b) needed to discover that Jesus had read his mind (c) needed forgiveness as much as the sinful woman.
- 7—Jesus contrasted the woman with the Pharisee because he wanted to (a) shame the Pharisee (b) praise the woman (c) make a point about the connection between gratitude and forgiveness.
- 8—Jesus told the woman her sins were forgiven because he wanted (a) her to know that (b) the Pharisee to grapple with this claim to be deity (c) those in the crowd to think about their own need for forgiveness.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Reflecting on God's Forgiveness" activity on the activity page, which you can download, to be completed in pairs or groups. After several minutes, discuss with the whole class.

Into Life

Brainstorm with the class, asking them to answer this question: How can we feel and demonstrate more gratitude to God for his forgiveness? Ask class

members to shout out as many answers as you can write on the board in 90 seconds. Then go back and circle the answers the class believes are most significant. Close with a prayer for class members to act on the ideas they have listed.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “A Graph of My Gratitude” exercise from the activity page. Ask students to complete it in one minute. If learners cannot pinpoint a gratitude level for each line on the graph, ask them to mark the time in their lives when they were most grateful to God. Then discuss with them the questions on the activity as indicated.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(October 27—Grateful Faith\)](#)

REFLECTING ON GOD’S FORGIVENESS

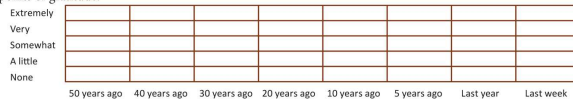
Try to imagine the mind-set and the attitude of both the Pharisee and the sinful woman in the Luke 7 account. What might they have written in their diaries the evening after that event happened? In the space below, jot down their contrasting interpretations of what Jesus said and did. Include what they might have included in their prayers that evening. You need not write complete entries, but only phrases that would have been included.

Simon’s Diary

The Woman’s Diary

A GRAPH OF MY GRATITUDE

On the graph below, put points to indicate how grateful you’ve been to God in the past. Connect the points to make a line graph that tells a story of your gratitude. Circle the points that represent the highest points of gratitude.



How does your graph relate to your understanding of God’s forgiveness?

What would make you more grateful for how he has forgiven you?

How can you demonstrate this gratitude?