

CHAPTER 7

Overview of Luke 7

In studying the gospels, particularly Luke, it is important to look for links between events or paragraphs. For example, how does the beginning of this chapter relate to the latter part of chapter 6? Chapter 7 begins with the healing of a centurion's slave. Read carefully and you will discover that the character of the centurion and those Jews who make his request have an important trait in common—they care for one another. Therefore, Luke is now giving an example of what it means to fulfill the Sermon on the Plain, and will show that one need not be a Jew either to “do” Jesus words or to receive blessings from Him. Also in chapter 7 we will witness the first resurrection. This event points to one of the great Old Testament prophets. This incident will then link to John the Baptist's question to Jesus, “Are You the Expected One?” Lastly, we will discover the difference between someone who thinks he is righteous but doesn't love, and someone who knows she is unrighteous, but who loves. One of them will receive a great gift from Jesus. Once again, this incident will point back to the Sermon on the Plain.

What to look for in Luke 7

1. As you read each paragraph ask, “How is God speaking to me personally through His word?”
2. Look for the links between the healing of the centurion's slave, the raising of a dead son, John the Baptist's question to Jesus, and the incident with someone who thinks he is righteous, but is not.
3. Look for love and compassion in someone who wasn't a Jew, but acted like someone who manifests the essence of the Law of the Lord.
4. Look for the similarity between Jesus' raising of a widow's son and a great Old Testament prophet.
5. Note how Jesus answers John the Baptist's question about who He is. Does He give a direct answer, or does He help John discover the answer for Himself?
6. Look for the inhospitable ways the Pharisee treated Jesus when he invited Him to dinner. Compare that with the way the woman treated Jesus.
7. Look for three blessings that result for those who believe Jesus is “the Expected One.”

1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

2 And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die.

3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, “He is worthy for You to grant this to him;

5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.”

7:1-10 Jesus, having completed a tour of ministry in southern Galilee, returns to His headquarters in Capernaum. There He will bring blessings to someone who isn't a Jew but demonstrates perfect faith in Jesus, something the Jewish leaders should have been doing. This is the first time in Luke that Jesus has a direct encounter with a Gentile; He offers him the same blessings as He offers Jews. This encounter foreshadows an encounter in the Book of Acts by Peter with a Gentile by the name of Cornelius, also a centurion (Act 10:1-48).

7:2-5 A centurion was a commander of one hundred Roman soldiers. He may or may not have been Roman, as centurions could have been appointed from any country in the Roman Empire. What is certain is that he is not Jewish. But also certain is that he demonstrates love and faith in a manner that all

6 Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof;

7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed.

8 “For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.”

10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Jews were supposed to, according to the Law of the Lord. His concern is for one of his slaves.

One mustn’t confuse the term “slave” with the concept of an American slave of the 1800s. “Servant” would be a better translation for today’s reader, but “slave” is indeed the more accurate translation. The Greek word here is *doulos* which is often translated “bond-servant.” Paul, James, Peter and Jude all called themselves “bond-servants” of the Lord Jesus Christ. A slave in this setting was owned by his master, but also taken care of and provided for. Slaves often earned a salary, and their status with their master could be very high, such as a master’s financial officer (steward) or someone who was in charge of the household. Exodus 21:1-6 lays the foundation for the concept of a bond-servant (“bondslave” in the KJV). After six years of service, the slave was free to leave. However, if he decided to remain employed to the master, a ceremony took place in which the slave’s ear was pierced with an awl to the master’s door. This constituted a life-long binding relationship between the master and the slave. This was the concept of the true bond-servant: a mutual loving relationship in which the bond-servant pledge his life-long allegiance and service to his master, and the master pledged his willingness to care for the servant and his household.

In this story, there is a loving relationship between the centurion and the slave. The words “highly regarded” indicate that the centurion respected the servant and cared about his well-being. The centurion, being a Gentile, apparently does not feel worthy to approach a Jewish holy man, and therefore sends a contingent of elders to make his request. The elders tell Jesus that the centurion is “worthy.” This is another way of saying the centurion is a “righteous Gentile”; that is, a Gentile who is worthy to be counted righteous in relationship to the God of the Jews, Yahweh. The elders justify the centurion’s righteousness before Jesus: “for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.” This means that the centurion paid for the materials and the construction of the synagogue, no little amount of money. Whether or not the centurion was a Jewish proselyte (i.e., one who converted to Judaism) is not stated, but there is no indication that he was. It appears that his part in building the synagogue was motivated purely by love for God’s people. On a side note, a synagogue at Capernaum from Jesus’ day has been unearthed by archaeologists.

7:6-10 Jesus heads off toward the centurion’s house, honoring the request of the Jewish elders. The humble heart of this centurion is exposed in verse 6 when he sends word that he is unworthy of having Jesus come into his house. This is not just a polite

gesture. According to Jewish law, Jews were forbidden to enter into the house of a Gentile, or especially to touch anything in the house. This would make the Jew ceremonially unclean. The centurion is basically deferring to Jewish laws of cleanliness and defilement. Whereas before, Jesus had entered into the house of a sinner and tax collector, Levi, entering into the house of a Gentile was an entirely different matter. Out of love Jesus was willing to do so. But also out of love, the centurion was willing to have Jesus *not* come into the house, fearing that doing so might defile the holy man. Here again, it was a gesture of love on the centurion's part. Therefore, he sends word to Jesus that coming into his house is not necessary. Based on faith—and logic—the centurion states that because of who Jesus is, He should be able to heal the slave simply by commanding it; that touching the slave wasn't necessary. This assumption is probably made on all the reports that are being made about Jesus' healings. Jesus, hearing the centurion's statement, is impressed by the centurion's faith and contrasts his faith with the faith of the Jewish crowd following Him and the Jewish nation in general. The Gentile centurion was demonstrating more regard in who Jesus was than the Jews following him. Such irony is not lost on Jesus...or Luke.

There is an important note here about the centurion's faith. The centurion's faith did not assume that Jesus *would* heal the slave, but faith that, based on who Jesus was, He *could* heal the slave simply by commanding it to be so. Therefore, it was neither the centurion's faith nor the slave's faith that brought about the healing. Jesus Himself brought about the healing. The faith exhibited here is not a "name it and claim it" kind of faith, but faith in who Jesus was and what He was capable of doing.

This incident with the centurion is an important one from the Gentile Luke's point of view. It is an incident that foreshadows the future of the church that will be established after Pentecost. The picture here is that, based on faith, Gentiles too can receive the benefit of Jesus' power and authority. Like the centurion, those who love and care about others will be drawn to seek Jesus, and those who put their faith in Him will receive His blessings. This healing is as much a lesson about love as it is about faith.

11 Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.

12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a

7:11-17 The next incident Luke records appears on the surface to have little to do with previous one. However, there is a relationship and it is found in the words "dead man." From the Jewish point of view, the centurion, being a Gentile and not having converted to Judaism, was considered spiritually "dead" because he was not a part of the "promise"; that is, a part of the chosen race descending from

widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

13 When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”

14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!”

15 The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother.

16 Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and, “God has visited His people!”

17 This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

18 The disciples of John reported to him about all these things.

19 Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the

Jacob (aka Israel). In spite of the fact that he loved the nation, he was nevertheless not considered a part of it, and as a result disqualified from receiving any of God’s earthly blessings or heavenly rewards. So this incident with the raising of the widow’s son alludes to the fact that Jesus can also raise a Gentile from the dead, based on the Gentile’s faith. Therefore, Jesus’ love supersedes Jewish law—He can raise even a Gentile from the dead and grant him heavenly rewards as well.

Additionally, Luke is setting the reader up for the following section regarding John the Baptist.

7:11-12 Nain, a few miles southeast of Nazareth, was just one of the many cities Jesus preached the gospel in. The fact that there was a “large crowd” indicates that mother was probably of a well-known if not prominent family. She apparently had only one son, obviously a grown man by this time, and had already lost her husband. The loss of her son had terrible implications. The son was the only one who could take care of her and provide for her. Without the son, she had no means of income and no one left to carry on the family name. Without a son, her future became perilously uncertain. Therefore Jesus “felt compassion for her” and instructs her not to weep. Jesus is not denying her loss but giving her hope.

According to Numbers 19:16, anyone touching a dead person or “grave” (coffin or bier implied) would become ceremonially unclean. (Notice the pattern regarding Jesus challenging the Jewish laws regarding what is clean and what is unclean, and how the laws affect a righteous person. Entering into the house of the centurion would have made Him unclean, and touching the bier would have made Him unclean. Jesus is setting new standards for determining clean and unclean, and what defiles a man.) What happens next shocks the crowd. When the procession comes to a halt, Jesus reaches up, touches the coffin and speaks to the dead man. The dead man sits up and begins to speak. It is the next words, however, that have profound implications. Luke records, “And Jesus gave him back to his mother.” These are the exact words that are used to describe Elijah’s actions when he raised the widow of Zarephath’s son (1 Kings 17:8-24). These words are not lost on the crowd, who declare, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” Little do they realize that more than a prophet has arisen among them.

Once again, love and compassion are at the forefront of the story. This time the source of love is Jesus Himself.

7:18-30 So far in Luke, we’ve witnessed numerous miracles by Jesus; specifically lepers being cleansed, demons being cast out, paralyzed men made to walk again, the dead being raised, and those who are poor

Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"

20 When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?' "

21 At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.

22 And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

23 "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

in spirit being given good news. Who knows how many other miracles and healings Luke left out in his gospel. Luke will now pull all of Jesus' ministry together to justify His answer to a critical question by John the Baptist: "Are You the Expected One?" Other than John's early ministry, Luke has written little about all that has happened to him, other than that during this time he was in prison (3:20). So Luke now returns to John the Baptist for the purpose of not only validating his ministry, but providing the reader what Jesus thought about John.

7:18-23 "Expected One" can also be translated "Coming One"; both are references to the expected appearance of the Messiah. If we return back to chapter 3 and review John's preaching, it is quite obvious that John's emphasis was not upon the healing aspects of the Messiah's message, but upon the issues of the judgment of unrighteousness and sin. When John said that the Messiah would baptize with "fire," he is referring to the fiery purification of sin brought about by judgment, as affirmed by his statement, "...He will burn up the chaff and unquenchable fire." So far, John has heard nothing of judgment, either in Jesus' teachings or in His actions. Therefore, it is quite logical for John to wonder if Jesus is actually the Messiah that he had anticipated would bring judgment, or just another prophet.

Jesus's response to John is to quote Messianic passages from Isaiah 35:5,6 and 61:1. So the return message back to John is clear: Jesus is the Messiah, but the judgment aspect of His ministry has yet to be fulfilled. This is a foreshadowing of an important message that will eventually become evident in the New Testament: *one Messiah but two comings*. The reason? There must first be a judgment of sin before there can be a judgment of the world and its unrighteousness.

There is one other interesting observation here. Luke has recorded all the miracles listed in verse 22 but one—that the deaf hear. The only gospel writer who actually refers to a deaf man being made to hear is Mark, in chapter 7. There are two possible explanations for this. First, the healing of people who were deaf is assumed in Luke's earlier statements that Jesus was "healing them all" (e.g., 6:18, 19). Second, there is the implication that those who are rejecting Jesus' message are "deaf" to His teachings, another swipe at the Pharisees and scribes, and a precursor to Jesus' statement in the next chapter, "...And hearing they may not understand" (8:10). Thus, an explanation of why Jesus spoke in parables.

The practical lesson being taught in this passage about John's question and Jesus' response has to do with our expectations of Jesus and our expectations of God's plan. We may not always be able to see

24 When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

25 “But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are *found* in royal palaces!

26 “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet.

27 “This is the one about whom it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’

28 “I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

God’s plan being carried out in the world or in our personal lives because our expectations of Jesus are different from God’s will and plan. God’s greater plan in John’s day was that His love for all mankind must be made manifest through the cross before His judgment of all mankind can be fulfilled at His second coming. John is actually getting what he had hoped for—repentance. But unknown to John, God is going to give *the whole world* a chance to repent because “(God) so loved the world.” Therefore, as a result of the cross, Jesus’ followers can now experience the unbelievable love of God and learn, through His word and the Holy Spirit, how to express that love to a lost world.

7:23 Jesus simply states, “How happy and blessed those will be who see, understand, follow and conform to God’s plan,” rather than take offense at Jesus if He does not immediately exact judgment on the world’s unrighteousness. There will, however, be those who actually do take offense at Jesus because He does not bring judgment on the Romans and reestablish Israel to its former glory.

7:24-30 Jesus now turns to the crowd and affirms the ministry of John the Baptist. Along the theme of expectations, verse 24 has the sense, “What did you *expect* to see in the wilderness?” If the people expected to see someone other than a prophet, they were mistaken. But John wasn’t just another prophet: he had a unique calling, and that was to announce the arrival of the Messiah. Once again, Jesus indirectly affirms that He is indeed the “Expected One” and that John’s ministry was to fulfill the Messianic prophecy found in Malachi, the last writing Old Testament prophet (3:1).

In verse 28, however, Jesus places John the Baptist in perspective regarding the true kingdom of God. As far as Old Testament prophets go, John was the “greater” in the sense that he was privileged to announce the arrival of the Messiah. But compared to those who eventually *receive* the blessings of the Messiah by the forgiveness of sins, they will be even “greater.”

This is the third time Luke has recorded the phrase “kingdom of God” (see 4:43 and 6:20). Luke, along with John and Mark, use the phrase “kingdom of God” whereas Matthew prefers the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” The two phrases are virtually identical in meaning. The kingdom of God refers to God’s plan for how humanity should be. It is a good-news message, full of hope, healing and the forgiveness of sins. But it is also a message of judgment against all things that are not a part of the kingdom of God; that is, the kingdom of man, the world, and Satan. Therefore, those who receive Jesus’ message will be “greater” than John the

Baptist because they will see, understand, experience and be eternally blessed by the kingdom of God. Those who are least in this kingdom of God will have a greater message even than John the Baptist because they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit individually and proclaim not only that the Messiah has come, but that through the Messiah all sins may be forgiven, eternal life may be assured, and *anyone* can experience God's wonderful and magnificent love and learn to express that love to others.

Luke observes in verse 29 that those who had accepted and received John's message were vindicated, and that they were on the right side of God's plan and on their way to receiving the fullness of the kingdom of God.

In verse 30, Luke uncharacteristically inserts his own commentary rather than make a purely historical observation. He clearly states that those who rejected the message of John the Baptist—that repentance is needed—have rejected “God's purpose” and plan, and therefore will reject the message of the Messiah. Luke will prove his point when Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee named Simon, as recorded at the end of the chapter.

There is therefore an important practical lesson here: there is no experiencing the kingdom of God without first repenting and experiencing the forgiveness of sins that comes by virtue of the cross of Christ. The gospel, void of the message of repentance, is a false gospel.

31 “To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like?”

32 “They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’”

33 “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’”

34 “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

35 “Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He

7:31-35 Luke now proves his observation in verse 30 with the words of Jesus. The key words are, “What are (men) like?” (referring to the Pharisees). Jesus states that the “men” of His generation are like children complaining when others don't do what they expect them to do. Flutes were used for making melodies appropriate for merriment and joyful dancing. A dirge is a song of mourning associated with a funeral procession. The Pharisees are therefore like annoying children who whined when John the Baptist came with a message of judgment (dirge) and Jesus comes with a message of joy (flute). Either way, the Pharisees are not happy. Why? Because the message of both the flute and the dirge is one of personal repentance. Without repentance, there is death. With repentance, there is joy. But the Pharisees, rejecting both messages, will only experience judgment and never experience joy. For those who have received “God's purpose” (v. 30), they will be vindicated (justified) in the end. This point is painfully illustrated in the next event Luke records.

7:36-50 This is perhaps one of the most touching and poignant events Luke records. It is an exercise of

entered the Pharisee's house and reclined *at the table*.

37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,

38 and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."

41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

42 "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

45 "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet.

46 "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.

47 "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

contrasts. There is Simon the Pharisee who thinks he is righteous but is spiritually dead in his sins, and there is the "sinner" woman who knows she is unrighteous but is spiritually alive by virtue of forgiveness through Jesus.

7:36-39 "...reclined at the table." In Jewish households, people did not sit in chairs around a table, but rather reclined on pillows on their left sides. The right hand only was used for feeding, as they did not use forks and knives. The "table" would be in the shape of a semicircle so that the women (hostesses) could bring and replenish the food and wine. The host would lie at the head of the table, and the guest of honor would be positioned next to the host. It is unlikely any of the disciples were invited to this meal, but only other Pharisees and scribes.

During the course of the meal, a woman hears that Jesus is dining in Simon's house. There must have been many people attending the dinner, as she is able to work her way unnoticed to the main table. She approaches Jesus from behind and begins weeping. Her tears are like a washing of water upon Jesus' feet. She cleans Jesus' feet using her long hair as a towel. She then kisses the feet of Jesus—a sign of adoration and worship—and anoints them with perfume carried in a small alabaster vial. Many believe this woman to be Mary Magdalene who is mentioned at the beginning of the next chapter, thus a nice segue into the group of women who accompanied Jesus and the disciples. However, there is no reason to assume this. Also, this event is different from the one mentioned in Matthew where the woman was not a "sinner" but Mary the sister of Lazarus. Regardless, the label "sinner" most commonly referred to a prostitute.

Unlike marble, which is hardened limestone that can take a high polish, alabaster is a hardened form of gypsum, and though similar in appearance, does not have the features for hardness and polishing as does marble. Alabaster, which is mined in Egypt to this day, has often been referred to as "poor man's marble," as it is less expensive. Regardless, alabaster vials were excellent for holding perfumes, as there was no chemical interaction between the alabaster and the perfume, thus preserving its fragrance. Perfume was an important necessity for prostitutes, as bathing for common people was not easy and there was no such thing as a deodorant. Perfume was therefore used to overwhelm unpleasant odors and serve as an allure for male patrons. Here, the woman is using a costly possession once used to facilitate sin, turning it into a gift of worship and affection.

Simon notices that Jesus allows the "sinner" to touch Him, something that would by Jewish tradition defile Him. The statement, "If this man were a

49 Those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?”

50 And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

prophet” betrays Simon’s motive for inviting Jesus to dinner. He is either going to try to trip up Jesus on some point of the law and find reason to accuse Him, or he is going to find some reason for telling others, “I invited Him to dinner, and He didn’t seem like much of a prophet to me!” That he would test Jesus in this way betrays a lack of belief and failure to repent from the beginning, and fulfills Jesus’ words condemning “children who sit in the marketplace.” **7:40** Notice that Simon does not say, “Say it, Lord,” or “Say it, Master.” He says, “Say it, Teacher,” which is to call Jesus an ordinary rabbi, or teacher. Simon grants Jesus no more recognition that being just another Jewish rabbi.

7:41-50 Jesus now gives a parable that even Simon can interpret, but most likely will assuredly never fully understand and certainly not apply to himself. The parable is about two debtors. From Simon’s perspective the debtors are people who owe money to others. But the meaning of the parable is deeper. The debtors are sinners who owe God the penalty for their sins. Simon is unable to see this because he does not believe Jesus and feels he has no need of repentance; that is, he does not see himself as a sinner who owes God anything. In the parable, the one who is owed the debt forgives both debtors, even though one debtor owes a lot more than the other. Simon does not make the association that the woman at his table is the debtor who owes more, and that he himself is also a debtor because of his own personal sin. Continuing to see this parable as merely a story about money, Simon “judged correctly” when asked, “which one of them will love him more?”

One must not miss the relationship between love and the forgiveness of sins. Simon, feeling himself as righteous, does not love Jesus because he does not feel he needs forgiving of anything. But the woman, who knows she is a sinner and has been under bondage to sin for quite some time, feels the immense power of Jesus’ love for her because He is capable of forgiving her of her sins, no doubt having heard of Jesus forgiving the paralytic.

Notice, too, that Jesus describes the forgiveness as “graciously forgave.” That means a kind of forgiveness that is offered without consequences and without owing anything in return. This is not “conditional” forgiveness, or forgiveness offered with strings attached. The debt is completely written off without any demands for repayment and without any contingencies. The forgiveness is offered with grace and therefore complete and final.

7:44-46 Here is the most glaring contrast and perhaps the reason the woman wept over Jesus’ feet. She witnessed Simon’s complete lack of love, acceptance and hospitality toward Jesus, something abhorrent in Jewish culture.

It was customary in Jewish homes to wash the feet of guests. Offering hospitality, which in the Greek means “loving strangers,” is high on the list of standard Jewish culture. It is a practice that is to be followed as a way of showing love and affection for guests, and according to the law, was to be offered even to strangers. Part of hospitality upon inviting a guest into a house was foot washing. Usually a servant performed this task. Jars of water were kept near the entrance of the house. Feet would become dirty due to the accumulation of sand, dust, dirt or even mud from the wearing of sandals. The guest would sit on a bench while the servant would scoop water out of the large jar and pour it into a pan or basin. He would then remove the sandals, wash the feet, and wipe them dry with a towel. The guest would then be offered indoor sandals for the household, a Middle Eastern custom that continues to this day. If the guest were special, the host would then pour a little oil on the head as a symbol of anointing, signifying that the guest was indeed special and loved by the host. Simon, seeing Jesus as no one special, neglects to offer any of these common hospitalities to Jesus. Most likely, this shocks the woman and she cannot contain her grief over Simon’s lack of hospitality and his condescending attitude toward Jesus.

7:47-48 Jesus now ties the parable into the real-life situation with the woman. Here again, Jesus relates love with forgiveness; this time, however, there is a twist. The pronouncement of the forgiveness of her sins comes only after she has performed an act of love. He states, “. . .her sins . . .have been forgiven, for she loved much.” You might expect Jesus to say it the other way around: “She loves much *because* her sins have been forgiven,” which fits better with the parable. The unusual—and surprising—phrasing by Jesus puts a whole new slant on the relationship between love and forgiveness. Jesus is actually saying, “She is forgiven of her sins *because* she has shown much love to Jesus by worshipping Him and recognizing Him as Lord.” The clear implication is that by truly loving and worshipping Jesus, sins are forgiven. Jesus probably phrased His statement this way in contrast to how Simon did *not* show love to Jesus. The point is this: Simon, who thinks he is righteous and does not need the forgiveness of his sins, is still in his sins and unforgiven because he has not loved Jesus and recognized Him as Lord.

The irony of the response of those reclined at the table is not lost on Jesus. The thought behind the guests reasoning is that only God can forgive sins. To acknowledge that the woman’s sins have been forgiven by Jesus is to acknowledge that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. This incident with the woman being forgiven of her sins is not as demonstrably

dramatic as the paralytic's in chapter 5, but this incident is unique in the clear relationship between love and forgiveness. It implies that without love, or in this case the withholding of love, there cannot be the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 50 points to the key that opened the door to forgiveness—faith. In the original language, the word “faith” is the noun form of the verb “to believe.” Therefore it was the woman's belief of who Jesus was and what He could do that opened the door for forgiveness. Therefore, in the end, her love was the result of her faith, and it was the faith that saved her, not her act of love.

There is one final point that requires consideration. There may be a separation here between being saved and having sins forgiven. Being saved is obviously the result of faith. But it is also possible to interpret from this passage that unless one is willing to demonstrate love for others, the forgiveness of sins is hard to come by.

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. How did God speak to you through His word in this chapter? Name three principles that stand out in your mind. Now that you've narrowed down what those principles are, what are you going to do about them to have God's word become incarnate in you? How will those principles change your behavior, and especially, your relationships.
2. There is a theme of judgment throughout this chapter, though it is not eternal judgment. It has to do with the issue of judging others based on some religious or cultural stereotype. Is there any one or any type of person that you tend to judge? How will that affect your love and interaction with that person?
3. Go through the chapter and count the number of times the word "love" or its variations are used (in the biblical text, not the commentary). How does love play a part in how Jesus responds to those who love? What lesson will you walk away with as a result?
4. How would you identify yourself in regard to the two debtors? Are you one who owes little or are you one who owes much? How does that affect your relationship to Jesus?
5. What is the relationship between love and forgiveness? Is it possible to love someone and not forgive them? Is it possible to forgive someone and not love them?
6. Once again examine the relationship between love and forgiveness. How does the forgiveness of your sins cause you to love God more? If you've concluded that you love God more as a result of the fact that He has forgiven you of your sins, how does that affect your relationship with others, and your willingness to forgive them of their sins against you? Specifically, how quick are you to forgive others and show them the love and grace that has been shown to you?
7. John the Baptist had expectations of Jesus that He, being the Messiah, would bring judgment on all unrighteousness. That didn't happen, and John began wondering if Jesus really was the Messiah. What unrealistic expectations do you have about God? Are some of your expectations unrealistic? Are some perhaps not in line with His will and plan for *all* humanity? Do you expect God to answer your prayers immediately, and in accordance with the way you want them to be answered? If God isn't working in your life the way you would expect Him to, what needs to be adjusted?

The Discippler's Commentary
Fill-in Outline for the Disciple
Luke 7

7:1-10 – The healing of the centurion's servant; the centurion's life was characterized by _____

7:11-17 – The raising of the widow's son from the dead; a sign of _____

7:18-22 – The query by the disciples of John the Baptist: "Are You the _____?"

7:23-30 – The results of the call for repentance by John the Baptist: some accept, others _____

7:31-35 – Jesus' judgment on the generation: not only is the generation like children (childlike), it is _____

7:36-50 – The incident in a Pharisee's house: the woman's faith in Jesus resulted in her _____

The Discipler's Commentary
Answer Outline for the Discipler
Luke 7

- 7:1-10 – The healing of the centurion's servant; the centurion's life was characterized by love
- *Perhaps the first thing that needs to be explained to the disciple is what a centurion is.*
 - *Explain the consequences for a holy Jewish man to be responding to a Gentile and what implications there would be if Jesus were to enter the centurion's house?*
 - *The discipler will certainly want to point out the love exhibited by the centurion, both concerning his servant and in his help for the Jewish people, as well as his respect for Jesus.*
 - *Explain what a "bond-servant" is, and how one became a bond-servant in biblical times (as opposed to an ordinary servant).*
 - *Ensure that the disciple understands why Jesus said of the centurion, "...Not even in Israel have I found such great faith."*
 - *Ensure that the disciple understands that Jesus' interaction with the Gentile centurion will have great implications in the Book of Acts when Peter is called by God to visit the centurion Cornelius.*
- 7:11-17 – The raising of the widow's son from the dead; a sign of Elijah (1 Kings 17)
- *Help the disciple see the relationship between the spiritually "dead" centurion (from a Jewish point of view) and the physically dead son of the widow.*
 - *Explain to the disciple why the loss of a widow's son was such a terrible thing in Jesus' day.*
 - *Explain the implications of a Jewish person touching a dead body (clean vs. unclean), and why it was an important act that Jesus touch the dead son.*
 - *The discipler might want to have the disciple look up the passage in 1 Kings 17 to see the comparison with Elijah.*
 - *Have the disciple find the "love message" in this incident.*
- 7:18-22 – The query by the disciples of John the Baptist: "Are You the Expected One?"
- *Remind the disciple who John the Baptist is, and not to confuse this John with the writer of the gospel.*
 - *Define "Expected One" and, if necessary, review for the disciple the Jewish expectation of a Messiah.*
 - *Allow the disciple to speculate why John the Baptist may be questioning whether or not Jesus is the Expected One. Perhaps the disciple might want to look up the passages from Isaiah.*
 - *This is a good place to introduce the concept of "One Messiah but two comings of the Messiah."*
 - *Ask the disciple what expectations he or she has from becoming a Christian. Are those expectations realistic and according to God's plan, or are they unrealistic, based on hope, and not substantiated with Scripture. Apply that to John and what expectations he may have had.*
 - *See if the disciple can figure out why the second coming of Christ has not taken place. (The answer is simple: God is delaying Jesus' return so that as many people as possible can hear the gospel message and be saved.)*

7:23-30 – The results of the call for repentance by John the Baptist: some accept, others reject

- *If this hasn't been done already in chapter 3, review the ministry of John the Baptist compared to other Old Testament prophets, and in light of Malachi 3:1.*
- *See if the disciple can figure out the answer to verse 28; that is, that there is “no one greater than John,” yet “he who is least...is greater than he.” (The answer is in the commentary.)*
- *Explain to the disciple that the phrase “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” have the same meaning.*
- *Very important for the disciple to comprehend is why both John the Baptist's and Jesus' messages were rejected by Israel's spiritual leaders. (Hint: it all has to do with the issue of personal sin and the need for repentance.)*

7:31-35 – Jesus' judgment on the generation: not only is the generation like children (childlike), it is illogical

- *Explain the difference between music made by a flute and music that is a “dirge.” Show how these two types of music are associated with both John the Baptist's and Jesus' messages.*
- *Make sure the disciple understands that what Jesus is saying in verses 31-35 is that it is a lose-lose situation for the messenger. The spiritual leaders will always find something wrong with the message and the messenger. However, verse 35....*
- *See if the disciple can figure out the meaning of verse 35. The key word is “Yet,” and the meaning is essentially this: those who choose to believe and follow John the Baptist and Jesus will eventually be vindicated (proven correct; avenged) in the end.*

7:36-50 – The incident in a Pharisee's house: the woman's faith in Jesus resulted in her being saved

- *Explain to the disciple how a Jewish dinner took place; that is, reclined at a table (as opposed to da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper!).*
- *Explain what were the normal customs for inviting a guest into a house, and how Jesus was neglected in regard to those customs. Show how that relates to the behavior of the woman.*
- *As a good exercise, have the disciple tell the story in his or her own words. It's a good way to get the story right!*
- *Make sure the disciple picks up on the irony of who is the “greater sinner” and the real sinner here.*
- *Ask the disciple why the Pharisee's answer to Jesus question in verse 42 is so ironic.*
- *How do the Pharisees betray their true heart by asking the question, “If this man were a true prophet....”*
- *Have the disciple describe the relationship between love and forgiveness. Make sure the disciple understands why this concept is so important in understanding the gospel.*
- *Help the disciple see the contrasts of love from the woman and the lack of love from Simon.*
- *Help the disciple sort through these three concepts: faith, love and forgiveness of sins. Which came first? What resulted in sins being forgiven? (The answer is this: faith comes first, then comes the forgiveness of sins, then comes the love and gratitude for Jesus once one knows that their sins have been forgiven. The woman's acts of love were the result of her faith. It was not love that saved her...it was her faith in Jesus.)*