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What Would You Do With This Woman?

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Even though most women have been hurt by men at some time in their lives, efforts are made in our culture to protect the rights of women. Such wasn't the case in ancient Israel. At the time of Jesus, women suffered under cultural, legal, and religious oppression. Indeed, men actually created laws that hurt women.

Women, Slaves and Minors

Josephus, the ancient Roman-Jewish historian, noted that the Jewish Law marks women as inferior to men in all things. A repeated rabbinical mantra, "women, slaves and minors"—demonstrated that women, like Gentiles slaves and minor children, were under the authority of a man and had limited participation in religious activity.

Women weren't allowed to testify in court or study the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). In fact, Rabbis would rather burn the Pentateuch than have a woman read it. Another saying of the Jewish religious leaders referred to women as, "greedy at their food, eager to gossip, lazy and jealous."

Jesus Treated Them Differently

I'm sure you'd agree such thinking is misogynistic and oppressive. And yet, in the midst of a culture with such a low view of women, Jesus always treated them with compassion and respect. He repeatedly violated cultural mores to reach out and care for them.

I wonder what it was like for a woman to meet a man who always looked out for her best interest . . . a man who understood her hurts and needs . . . a man who sought her highest good. I can't help but think it would take getting used to. I mean, wouldn't the pain from past hurts restrict a woman's ability to *quickly* trust a man? Wouldn't the universal disrespect for women among men affect how a woman viewed Jesus? Seems that way to me. And yet, Jesus put women at ease.

A Dinner Party

He interacted so lovingly that a reputedly "sinful" woman showed him affection by washing his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing them with her lips, and pouring perfume over them. All of this at a dinner party hosted by a Pharisee who quickly condemned Jesus for allowing her to touch him.

I have no idea how I'd respond if such a thing happened to me. What would you do? My imagination only lets me go so far:

My Imagination Only Goes So Far

I'm at a party sitting on a couch talking with a friend. A well-known erotic dancer enters through the front door, approaches me, kneels at my feet, takes off my shoes and socks and . . . it would stop there. Who am I kidding? It would stop when she knelled. No way would she pour perfume on my feet, wash them with her tears, kiss them with her lips and dry them with her hair.

And yet, that's what happened to Jesus. And he wasn't uncomfortable, even though everyone else may have been. He accepted her expression of love and harshly condemned the Pharisee who judged her. He saw her pure heart with pure eyes. Jesus then said, "Her sins—and they are many—are forgiven, for she loved me much; but one who is forgiven little, shows little love" (Luke 7:47). Not only did Jesus accept the woman, he defended and honored her.

Another Woman

Another woman, caught in adultery, found safety in his words and forgiveness in his love. A sick woman found someone who cared enough to heal her. Mary Magdalene, demonized by seven spirits, found freedom. Later, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary.

It's easy for women to get lost in the New Testament crowds. But if you read the gospel accounts with an eye on women, and how Jesus treated them, you'll discover he always saw their greatest need and met it.

More than that, he changed their lives for the better.