

“Choosing Intimacy”

Theme: Not a Fan

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, March 24

MORNING QUOTE: *“On this trail called life, all of us are following someone's directions. None of us are really blazing our own trail. We all follow a path that's been laid out for us by someone claiming to know the way. The question is: whose directions are you following? What path are you on?”* -Kyle, NAF Study

MORNING SUGGESTION: Try this...Draw a winding path, and on it a stick figure that represents you. Then draw a large sign post. On the sign, name the path you are on. It might be called “Dad's Trail” if you have basically been following in your father's footsteps. Or it might be “Easy Lane,” in view of the fact that you do whatever seems easiest. It could be “Wall Street” because for you it has been all about money. Or it might be “Service Street” as you are truly striving to put others first. In any case, be honest. Name the road you are on. In three sentences try to describe why you have chosen this path.

EVENING REFLECTION: If you stay with the path you are currently on, where will it lead in 10 years?

END OF THE DAY FOCUS: Picture the destination of the path you are on as vividly as you can. Can you rest peacefully knowing that is where you want to end up. Go to sleep with that destination in mind.

Tuesday, March 25

MORNING QUOTE: *“Ultimately, what separates a fan from a follower is commitment. Many consider themselves followers, but what happens when their commitment is tested?”* -Kyle, NAF Study

MORNING SUGGESTION: Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a time recently when your commitment was tested – and you passed the test! What happened? How did it feel recalling and describing a victory like that?

EVENING REFLECTION: Think of someone whose commitment to Jesus you admire. If you were to write them a note thanking them for their inspiration and dedication, what would it say? Should you write the note and send it?

END OF THE DAY FOCUS: Go to sleep with this person you admire on your mind.

Wednesday March 26

MORNING QUOTE: *“Fans want to follow Jesus, but not in a way that interferes with their lives. According to some recent research I came across, sixty-five percent of American adults between the ages of eighteen and forty-two, would agree with this statement: ‘I have made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important.’ Now on the surface, that seems pretty good. Sixty-five percent is impressive, but according to the same research, these committed Christians lived a life-style that was quote, “Statistically equivalent to that of non-Christians.” So when asked about their activities from the previous thirty days, Christians were just as likely as non-Christians to have gambled, to have visited a pornographic website, to have taken something that didn't belong to them. They were just as likely to have gotten drunk and been involved with physical abuse. They were just as likely to have lied and talked badly behind someone's back. Fans try to compartmentalize their life.”* -Kyle, NAF Study

MORNING REFLECTION: Think about each of the statements below. Think of your honest opinion for each. Is it OK? Is it not OK? It Depends? Getting high is.... Lying to protect myself is... Getting back at someone I don't like is... Viewing porn occasionally is... Stealing from a greedy corporation is... Leaving my marriage if I am unhappy is... Doing whatever feels good is... Do you think Jesus would agree with your responses? How can you make a commitment this season of Lent to follow Jesus more closely?

EVENING REFLECTION: Think of a time in the past when you disagreed with Jesus over how to live your life, and you did it your way. Recount what you decided, why, and how it turned out. What do your answers show you?

END OF DAY FOCUS: This is what the LORD says-your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ***"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."*** (Isaiah 48:17-18) What phrase stands out to you from this section of Scripture? Go to sleep repeating that phrase over and over in your mind.

Thursday, March 27

MORNING QUOTE: *"Jesus made it clear. There is no such thing as 'selective allegiance.' When we decide to follow Him, He calls for a complete commitment and total surrender."* -Kyle, NAF Study

Picture Jesus in your mind standing before you, and saying to you, "Will you follow me today?" How would you respond?

EVENING REFLECTION: This may sound like a crazy idea – but why not try it? Place a chair near you. Imagine Jesus sitting in it. Talk to Jesus about your day so far – your concerns, decisions and hopes. If you are concerned others might see you talking to an empty chair, you might try holding up a phone to your ear bud so they can conclude you are just on the phone ☺ (And in a way, you are "on the phone.")

END OF DAY FOCUS: If you could have someone orchestrate your dreams while you sleep, who would it be?

Friday, March 27

MORNING QUOTE: C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, summarizes the call of Jesus this way: *"Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you...No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent, as well as the ones you think are wicked- the whole outfit."*

What is your reaction to this quote?

EVENING REFLECTION: Describe your favorite part of the day. Describe your least favorite part of the day. Did you learn something from answering these two questions?

END OF DAY THOUGHT: Read the morning quote three more times. Go to sleep focusing on whatever thought is the strongest.

Saturday, March 28

MORNING QUOTE: *"Fans want to follow Jesus closely enough to get all the benefits, but not so close that he calls them to sacrifice or surrender things that are important. If you're unsure if you're a fan or a follower, then ask yourself this: 'When was the last time my relationship with Jesus cost me something?'"* -Kyle, NAF Study

MORNING REFLECTION: Consider the morning quote: When was the last time your relationship with Jesus cost you something and how did that feel?

EVENING REFLECTION: *"Flexitarian is a good way to describe how many people today view their commitments. They are commitment...until it gets inconvenient."* Were you a flexitarian today? If so, describe one of your "forbidden meats". How did you feel?

END OF DAY FOCUS: Everything costs something. Even the "easy way," the way of low commitment, has its price. Sleep all day and it will cost you your physical vitality. Procrastinate on a work project and it costs you frustration and anxiety later. The real question is: what do you end up getting for the cost you paid? Think of something you know Jesus is asking you to do that will cost you, but instead of focusing on the cost, go to sleep focusing on the end result, the final reward.

Theme: Not a Fan
“Choosing Intimacy”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

March 22-23, 2014 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. 37 When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. 38 Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting 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 what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!”

40 Then Jesus answered his thoughts. “Simon,” he said to the Pharisee, “I have something to say to you.”

“Go ahead, Teacher,” Simon replied. 41 Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?”

43 Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.” “That’s right,” Jesus said. 44 Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

47 “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.” 48 Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 The men at the table said among themselves, “Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?”

50 And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

VIDEO Not a Fan Week 2 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Choosing Intimacy

It's good to be back with you after having been gone to the Holy Land for an amazing two week journey. We have tried to give you a taste of that these past few weeks and each week in this sermon series, we'll take you to a few of the places we were able to visit on our trip. The images you just saw on the screen were from the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of All Nations which sits next to the Garden, at the bottom of the Mount of Olives.

SLIDE Garden of Gethsemane Olive Trees (Graphic)

The tree you see on the video screen is thought to be around 2000 years old and some of these trees may very well have been in the garden as Jesus came here to pray. The Church of All Nations is one of the most beautiful churches that we visited as you can see from this image on the screen.

SLIDE Church of All Nations Interior (Graphic)

SLIDE Church of All Nations Ceiling (Graphic)

The ceiling is painted like the stars at night to give you a feel of Jesus coming to the garden at night to pray. At the front center of the church, in front of the altar area, is the rock of agony which is believed to be the place where Jesus came to pray that night before his death.

SLIDE Church of All Nations Rock of Agony (Graphic)

The beautiful mural on the back wall depicts this scene.

SLIDE Church of All Nations Mural (Graphic)

As we continue in this series of sermons on how we can truly follow Jesus, and not just be a fan, we focus today on choosing intimacy with God as we seek to follow. Intimacy is about closeness to God, revealing our hearts, and this scene in the Garden in many ways depicts that intimacy that Jesus shared with God as he struggled the last days of his life.

As we begin today, I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin the Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. At the top you will find one of the Scripture passages that we will be referring to today and below are lines where you can take down notes. There is something to write with in the pews in front of you. On the inside you will find daily meditation moments and Scripture readings

that come from the “Not a Fan” journal. During this season of Lent, the 40 days and seven Sundays before Easter, we invite you each day to take some time to read them on your own. There are reflections for the morning and the evening each day. I think if you spend a few minutes each morning and evening reading the Scriptures and asking these questions and reflecting upon them, they can help your heart and your mind grow as you seek to follow Jesus.

The main story I want to focus on today comes from Luke’s Gospel, chapter 7. This story takes place on the Sea of Galilee, most likely in Capernaum which was the home base for Jesus’ ministry. We are told just before this story Jesus had returned to Capernaum after having given the Sermon on the Mount. On the video screen you will see a map of Israel in the first century.

SLIDE Holy Land in First Century Map (Graphic)

You can see on this map the Sea of Galilee in the North which empties into the Jordan River and then down to the Dead Sea in the south, near Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

SLIDE Sea of Galilee Map (Graphic-pick which one shows up best)

As we zoom in on the Sea of Galilee you will notice Tiberius on the southwest edge of the lake which is where our group stayed. It’s named after Emperor Tiberius and is mostly a tourist area these days. The rest of the lake, which is about the size of the Animas Valley, is more rustic and very beautiful considering the desert climate all around it.

SLIDE Sea of Galilee Map with Capernaum and Beatitudes (Graphic)

The northwest edge of the Sea of Galilee is where a majority of Jesus’ ministry took place. On this close up you can see two key areas, the Mount of Beatitudes and Capernaum.

SLIDE Mount of Beatitudes (Graphic)

We actually spent a Sunday morning on the Mount of Beatitudes and had a worship experience outdoors where we listened to the Sermon on the Mount.

SLIDE Mount of Beatitudes Worship (Graphic)

Inside the church you see on the screen you will find a beautiful place to pray.

SLIDE Church of the Beatitudes (Graphic)

Outside the church you have these beautiful views of the Sea of Galilee.

This is looking south and west from the church.

SLIDE Mount of the Beatitudes View west (Graphic)

SLIDE Mount of the Beatitudes View to Capernaum (Graphic)

This view from the Mount of Beatitudes is just above Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, which lies on the edge of the lake in this picture. The reason this is important for today's message is that Jesus has just left this mountain and headed into Capernaum according to Luke's Gospel. Capernaum is known as the town of Jesus and was an important city in Jesus' day.

SLIDE Capernaum – The town of Jesus (Graphic)

This is me with my mother entering the ruins of Capernaum, where you will find this waiting for you.

SLIDE Capernaum ruins with Temple (Graphic)

In the foreground you see ruins of first century Capernaum in the black. The white structure is the ruins of a 4th century synagogue built on top of some first century ruins of a synagogue.

SLIDE Capernaum Temple Ruins (Graphic)

The white stone used in the temple was imported from another region as there is none of this stone in the area. Just so you know we were really there, you can see me here in the ruins.

SLIDE Jeff in Temple Ruins (Graphic)

What I really want to show you are the ruins made from the black rock, which is natural to this regions and is volcanic.

SLIDE Capernaum Home Ruins (Graphic)

These are the ruins of homes and it is most likely that one of these homes belonged to Simon the Pharisee as he would have lived near the temple. We tend to read these stories and think they happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, but the truth is these are real stories about real people who lived in a real place.

SLIDE Capernaum Temple and Home Ruins (Graphic-leave up while we hear this story please! ☺)

In Luke Chapter 7, we read about two people who encounter Jesus in the town of Capernaum on very different paths. Jesus is invited to eat at Simon the

Pharisee's house. Simon doesn't give Jesus a kiss when He walks in, though that was the custom—at least on the hand. Typically the custom would've been to wash the feet of your guest or to have a servant do it. Jesus' feet went unwashed. Oftentimes when you had a guest, especially a distinguished guest, you would give them some inexpensive olive oil to anoint their head. That was their custom, but none of this happened for Jesus.

Jesus is eating at the house with Simon and his dinner guests and in the middle of their meal, there is an uninvited guest. Luke tells us in chapter 7 that she's a known sinner, a woman of ill repute. She walks into the house and she is weeping and crying. She falls at the feet of Jesus and the tears are now dripping off her cheeks and onto the dirty, muddy feet of Jesus—feet that should've been washed by the Pharisee when Jesus came into the house.

She sees that the feet of Jesus are not washed. She sees how her tears are making the dirt run off of His feet, and then she unties her hair. I don't think she planned this. She would've assumed Jesus' feet would be cleaned, but they were dirty. With her tears, she washes Jesus' feet and with her hair she dries them. She begins to kiss them, crying and broken. She pulls out a jar of very expensive perfume and she pours it on his feet.

Let's freeze that moment; we'll come back to it. Keep this story in mind as we talk a little bit about intimacy.

I'm not sure if you know this or not, but when a baby is born, it cries a lot. It has no other way to communicate, no other way to say what it wants or needs. When our children are babies and they are crying, we sometimes never know what is wrong.

I worked in the church nursery once when I was in high school because a cute girl worked in there and I wanted to be near her. I could lie and tell you I wanted to serve, but that just wouldn't be true! She left the room once and left me in charge and one of the babies started crying. I had no idea why they were crying. I couldn't figure it out. I mean I was trying. I tried to understand what they needed, but I just didn't know. And when I didn't know, I would try everything. I figured it was a process of elimination, right?

I'd pick them up and hug them, give them the bottle, change the diaper...I waited for the cute girl to come back for that! When their cries got especially desperate, I would sing to them Billy Joel, "What's the matter with the clothes I'm wearing, can't you tell that my ties too wide?" That was the only song I really

knew by heart except, “Highway to Hell,” and I was pretty sure that wouldn’t be good in church. In the end, though, I didn’t know what to do, and neither did the cute girl either, to be honest!

But when the mother arrived, she always seemed to know. She would listen to the cry and say, “Oh, she’s tired.” Sure, enough, the baby needed a nap. Or she’d say, “Oh, she’s hungry,” and so you’d give the baby a bottle and all was right with the world. We would hear another cry and one mother said, “Oh, she needs her diaper changed. She wants a boy to change it.” At that point, I figured that the baby wasn’t really asking for me to change the diaper, but you don’t argue with the baby whisperer.

When the baby’s mother came in, it all changed. The mothers seemed to have an intimate, intuitive connection with all of their babies. In fact, there’s almost no relationship more intimate than a mother and her baby because a mother is able to know and understand her child’s wants and needs in a way that no one else can. Surely you’ve been in a room before with friends or family and a baby starts to get fussy? All of the sudden, everyone’s passing around that shrieking baby like a hot potato, hoping to see who has the magic touch. Nobody can get the baby quiet, but then mom walks in the room, and the baby just hears the voice of the mother and is somehow calmed. That’s an intimate relationship, knowing and being known completely.

On Christmas Eve this year I used several live infants in my sermon. Maybe some of you remember that? A couple of the babies were very quiet the entire time, but several of them got very agitated and started to cry when I held them. I was pretty sure that was because of all of you! When that happened I talked about how the baby Jesus probably cried too that night of his birth, but then I quickly gave the baby back to mom and they all quieted in a hurry! This happens in baptisms as well, when a baby starts to cry and I give them back to mom or dad and they immediately are quiet as they are comforted by the feel of that parent and the sound of their voice.

In a picture, that’s intimacy. I could read you the definition, explain where the word comes from, or how the word is used, but you wouldn’t really know what intimacy is. You would just know about intimacy. Here’s what I want to remind you of today. God made you to love you and God knows you intimately.

SLIDE God Knows You Intimately

Probably the best Biblical word for intimacy is the word “know.” It is first

used in the context of relationships in Genesis 4:1. Genesis 4:1 simply says this:

SLIDE Adam knew his wife Eve.

That's from the King James—we're going old school, here. And the Hebrew word for "know" here is the word "yada'." The definition for yada' is "to know and to be known completely."

SLIDE yada = "to know and be known completely"

But the NIV translates the word a little differently, because it puts it in context of what's happening. So your Bible probably says, Genesis 4:1: "Adam lay (had sexual relations) with his wife Eve..."

You get the picture. That is our context for "yada." Please don't giggle and brush past this. This is not just a yada, yada, yada moment, ok? This is a yada moment between a husband and a wife. It's this intimate connection on every level—to know, to be known. I think it's a beautiful picture. There's something to be said for the sacredness of sexual intimacy and when we first read about sex, it's about intimacy, not about physical pleasure.

There are other Hebrew words that could have been used, words used later in Scripture referring to the physical act, or even procreation, but here it is this intimate connecting. One Hebrew scholar calls it, ***"A mingling of the souls."***

It's hard to understand this until you see the difference between a brand new couple and a couple who've been together for a long time. A few months ago, I was out on a date with my wife. Whenever we go out, I'm not allowed to face the TV in the room. Otherwise it's not really a date for my wife. It's just her watching me watching whatever's on. I just can't help myself. So because I'm not allowed to watch the TV, I found myself watching these two tables near us. Two different couples sat at each table. One table had a young couple. They might have been newlyweds, but I bet they were still dating. This couple was all over each other. They were snuggled up close and talking to each other rapidly. They were making jokes, interrupting one another while their food was getting cold. But they didn't care. They just kept talk, talk, talk, talking.

Next to them was this elderly couple, and I'm guessing they had been married for decades. It's possible they've spent over half their lives together. They didn't say a word. Nothing. I watched as they just sat there in silence, not saying anything. We might look at these two couples and think, "Isn't that kind of sad? It starts off this way, with this couple just talking, talking, talking, so much to say, so

much to share, and then decades later you have this elderly couple just sitting there in silence, and it's sad."

But you could look at it another way. It's actually sweet because they are communicating in silence. They're connecting in silence. For them, just being together is ample space for connection. They're able to communicate without saying anything. I don't know what they were saying to each other—maybe, "Why is that guy staring at us over there?" But they sat at their table, and they were able to connect because they share an intimate bond.

Now, you may not think that couple was actually able to talk to each other without speaking, but you understand their connection. You understand what it means for a woman and man to have intimacy, to yada' each other. What I'm about to tell you will seem a little bit strange to some of you or even a little bit weird. We'll work through some of the weirdness, but just be ready for it, ok?

If you trace the usage of yada' through the Old Testament, you'll find that over and over again, this is the same word that's used to describe God's relationship with us. Over and over, yada' is the word that's used to describe how God knows you and how He wants to be known by you.

Seems weird, right? The same word, the same connection used to describe a man and a wife is used to describe how God wants to know you. This can completely change the way we see our relationship with God. Thinking of the day-in day-out connection that my wife and I have, I'm embarrassed to look at how my connection with God compares. I wasn't connecting with God the way I connect with my wife. But learning this teaches us something: my relationship to Jesus is not a weekend fling. It's not a casual encounter. It is yada', a deep knowing. It's intimacy. David uses the word yada' about six times to describe how God knows us in Psalm 139: 1-7. He writes:

SLIDE 1 O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. 2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. 3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. 4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. 5 You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! 7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

You know, You know, You know. David speaks to God in this intimate way. It says, “God, You know how I feel, You know how I hurt, You know what I’m thinking.”

SLIDE God Wants You to Know Him

While it’s crazy that God knows us that deeply and intimately, it’s even more crazy to me that God invites us to know Him. God wants His soul to mingle with ours. For some wild reason, the Creator of Heaven and Earth has offered an invitation to you and me. He’s opened His heart and said, “I want you to know me more closely and minutely than you know anyone else. I want you to know my heart, to connect with me on a level that can only be reached through the most vulnerable intimacy. I want our souls to come together, for both of us to know the other deeply and wholly.”

When we read that in Scripture, it sounds kind of poetic and beautiful like classical literature. I think people are comfortable reading that like they would a piece of poetry. But if someone actually sent you a letter with that in it, you’d probably freak out a little bit.

Reading that from a real person, wouldn’t it kind of make you blush? It’s almost too much, right? You feel almost claustrophobic when you get done reading it. That’s ok. Many of us have a hard time knowing how to deal with intimacy. We can do pretty well at avoiding it, but when it’s right in our faces, some of us kind of lose it. That’s why it’s not surprising that one of the most common responses to intimacy is fear. You could understand that, right?

Honestly, intimacy can be pretty scary, because it involves allowing yourself to be vulnerable. Many of us fear intimacy with others and with God because we know that vulnerability and pain go hand-in-hand. Every one of us has experienced a betrayal, or a crushing blow from someone close to us. You opened up, you made yourself vulnerable, and then someone let you down.

And when we make ourselves vulnerable to God, we know He’s going to find some things that we’re not proud of. Think of the sinful woman in Luke 7. A woman of ill repute, she knew she had sin in her life and that made her unworthy to touch the Messiah. And because we’ve all fallen short, we know that God’s going to look into our lives and find things that he’s not excited about. So it kind of makes sense that many times we would be afraid of that vulnerability.

But when we learn to really follow Jesus, we know that there’s so much more gained from intimacy with God. We know that God’s there with us through

any pain we endure. That comfort, knowing that God's with you, can only come through intimacy.

SLIDE Fans Choose Knowledge, Followers Embrace Intimacy

In church, we've often failed to embrace that kind of intimacy with Jesus. Instead, we've created a system focused around learning, not unlike Simon and the other Pharisees. Admittedly, our default setting is knowledge, not intimacy.

The founder of our faith tradition as United Methodists is John Wesley. He knew all about God and was amazingly well read. He knew his Bible and theology inside and out. He even followed God in 1730 to the New World to save the heathens in the colony of Georgia. He was an abject failure at that and headed back to England dejected and with a faith that was shaken to its core. He even wrote in his journals that he was not sure there even was a God.

On the boat ride back to England a storm came up and they were all told to prepare to meet their maker. Wesley held onto the boat in fear, unsure of his salvation or the presence of God. Then he looked over and saw a group of Moravians singing and praising God in the midst of the storm. Wesley wanted a faith like that! The storm did subside and Wesley went to Bible study with that group of Moravians and on May 24, 1738 John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed. He realized he needed a faith where the head and the heart go hand in hand. He did trust in Christ and would later write it was not until that day that he truly became a follower of Jesus. He had discovered intimacy.

We struggle with this today as Christians in North America in the 21st Century. Think about it: We love having Bible Studies, many of which include some kind of workbook that includes a curriculum for working through a particular book of the Bible. Sermons are accompanied, often with an outline members can fill out or follow. A great number of preachers read their sermons, which makes their presentations, by definition, a lecture. Private Christian academies have been established all over the world, ranging from grade school to graduate studies, all of which offer different courses that study God: theology, exegesis, Greek, Hebrew, etc.

We even do it to our kids! They go to Sunday School, where they are taught lessons and are assigned different Bible verses to memorize. Some of them even compete in Bible Bowl competitions, all of which are won or lost depending on how much Biblical knowledge you've accumulated and how fast you can raise your hand or hit a button. (And yes, I am a little bitter about never winning).

Don't get me wrong: studying and learning from God's Word is invaluable. Jesus referenced, read, and quoted all kinds of passages from the Old Testament, ample proof that he had studied God's Word with great care and diligence. However, we can't expect knowledge to replace intimacy, even though we often try to. I think we try to substitute knowledge for intimacy because knowledge is so much easier.

It's easy for us to say, "Well, I know about Jesus." But Jesus wants to know us. That's where we find Simon the Pharisee. He knew a lot about Jesus and his teachings, and he wanted to learn more. He calls him Teacher, emphasizing that he's most interested in learning from Jesus, not opening up to Jesus. Simon sees all the woman does for Jesus, her embarrassing actions, and the Bible tells us in Luke chapter 7, verse 39 that,

SLIDE 39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

40 Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. 41 Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. 44 Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

47 "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

48 Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 The men at the table said among themselves, “Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?”

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

Simon brought Jesus to the meal, but all he wanted was knowledge. He wanted to keep things shallow, and he defined his relationship by not washing Christ’s feet, not caring to kiss him, not being willing to anoint his head, but this woman was willing to open up to Jesus. She made herself vulnerable, being totally willing to open up and let Jesus know her.

So will you let Jesus know you? Will you embrace the close and intimate relationship God wants to have with you? Because with that intimate relationship comes forgiveness and yada’, something only followers truly experience.

Peace is what comes when we really open up to God. That word peace was something we saw all over the Holy Land. In Hebrew it is Shalom.

SLIDE Shalom Plate (graphic)

This word is more than just the absence of war. It’s about being made whole. It’s about being made new. This is what intimacy offers us, a chance to be made whole.

My prayer is you will discover that this season of Lent. Will you pray with me?

SLIDE Prayer

God, helps each of us to experience Shalom this season of Lent. Give us courage to truly follow you and let go of fear of intimacy. You want for each of us to be known by you and to know you. God, help us to let go of those things which keep us from you—our addictions, our failures, our successes, our false sense of security through our possessions, our guilt from the past, our fear of death and our insecurities. Give us new hearts to love you and love each other this day and every day, in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.