

## John 8:1-11 - Jesus faces sin and offers forgiveness <sup>1</sup>

**Before the lesson** – Prepare the handout, “John 8:1-11.” Have a stone for each class member for the Transformational Exercise.

**Fellowship Question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

When did you learn to write?

When it comes to drawing, rank yourself with 1 being “I have no talent at all” to 10 being “I’m an expert who could teach others to draw.”

### Information

In today’s story, Jesus writes or draws in the sand.

John 8 has a beautiful story with a controversial background. The debate of whether or not this story belongs in the Gospel of John is ongoing in scholarly circles. The story of the woman caught in adultery is not in the most ancient and best texts. It is found in manuscripts of 900 AD and later. Apparently, this was a stray story about Jesus’ ministry that did not find a home until copiers decided it deserved a place in John’s Gospel. Even there, it is found in one of three different places. Some manuscripts have the story at the end of chapter 21 in Luke’s Gospel. In modern translations, the story is usually put in brackets or in a footnote with an explanation of its late appearance in manuscripts.

Despite those challenges, there is no doubt that this story is true to the nature and character of Jesus. It is consistent with John’s teaching that Jesus came to his own yet was rejected (1:11) and illustrates Jesus’ statements later in this chapter, “You judge by human standards; I judge no one.” (8:15) and “Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” (8:46)

Let us use the Holy Reading (*lectio divina*) exercise to have our own experience of living into this story. I will read the story to you three times. After each reading, I will ask you to jot down a few reflections. This handout has the story and the reflection questions, but do not look at it yet. Wait to read it after the first reading.

[Distribute the handout with the passages and reflection questions.]

Imagine you have never heard this story. Listen to it as if you are hearing it for the first time.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc., 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

[Read John 8:2-11.]

You may turn the handout over now. If you would like to follow the reading, you have the text. Or, you may want to listen with your eyes closed.

In our second reading, imagine you are one of the characters in this story. What perspective do you gain as seen through that person's eyes? Which character will you be?

[Read John 8:2-11.]

In our third reading, pay attention to what questions this story raises for you. What makes you curious? What factual questions are raised? What makes you convicted?

[Read John 8:2-11.]

What character did you become in this story? What emotions did you feel as that character? What perspective or insight did you gain as that character?

What made you curious?

[Use the following selections from some Bible scholars to address some issues that may arise.]

“The dilemma in which [Jesus] is placed is either to agree the woman should be stoned or to teach that the law should be broken. But the dilemma may be even sharper. Under Roman rule, only the Romans could exercise the death penalty, so Jesus might be being asked to agree to oppose the Romans or to oppose the law of Moses.”<sup>2</sup>

What did Jesus write? “There is no hint of answers. Jesus takes charge of the pace of the drama, slowing it down, refusing to play it the way his opponents want, his silence allowing the tension to build.”<sup>3</sup>

Raymond E. Brown surveys five possible ideas for what Jesus wrote, then concludes, “There is simply not enough evidence to support any of these surmises; and one cannot help but feel that if the matter were of major importance, the content of the writing would have been reported.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 175.

<sup>3</sup> Ford, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 334.

“Without sin” - “Jesus’ focus is not on the woman alone but is evenly divided between the scribes and Pharisees and the woman...Indeed, what is striking about this story is that Jesus treats the woman as the social and human equal of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus talks to both sets of characters about sin...Jesus invites both the scribes and Pharisees and the woman to begin life anew in the present moment. They are invited to give up old ways and enter into a new way of life.”<sup>5</sup>

“Be the first” - “It challenges all of them and readers to radical self-examination as regards habits of blame, judgment, condemnation, and punishment. Its impact is like Jesus’s sayings in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Do not judge, so that you will not be judged.’” (Matthew 7:1-5) <sup>6</sup>

“Jesus is not saying that every magistrate must be sinless to judge others, a principle that would nullify the office of judge. He is dealing here with zealots who have taken upon themselves the indignant enforcement of the Law, and he has every right to demand that their case be thoroughly lawful and their motives be honest. He recognizes that, although they are zealous for the word of the Law, they are not interested in the purpose of the Law, for the spiritual state of the woman is not even in question, or whether or not she is penitent. Moreover, Jesus knows that they are using her as a pawn to entrap him.”<sup>7</sup>

“All alone” - “Jesus was left alone without the accusers but with the woman, and the crowd still there as audience of this drama - there would be no reason for them to go away and every reason to stay to the end.”<sup>8</sup>

“Do not sin” - “Recognition of the need for repeated self-examination, confession, and forgiveness in a community whose embracing reality is abiding ‘in the Son and in the Father’ (1 John 2:24) is clear in the First Letter of John. With many scholars, I see this letter addressing a community that is trying to live according to the Gospel of John, meets the inevitable problem of repeated sin, and affirms both that ‘the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin’ and that ‘if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.’” (See 1 John 1:7-2:3)<sup>9</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

[Distribute a stone to each class member.]

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<sup>5</sup> Gail R. O’Day, “John”, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Woman’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 297.

<sup>6</sup> Ford, 175.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 338.

<sup>8</sup> Ford, 176.

<sup>9</sup> Ford, 177.

Is your stone holy or evil? It's neutral, isn't it? Think of this stone as latent energy. The stone has no agency. It cannot leap, skip, or fly on its own. The bearer of the stone does have agency. The bearer of the stone can use the stone for good or for bad.

You are a rock bearer. You can choose to "stone" someone. You can use the stone for a helpful purpose. You do have to bear a gemstone to have something of beauty.

On your paper, write a prayer about your energy and how you want to use it in this new week.

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *Al-might-y* God. You have more power than we can conceive. Even your words have power. This new week, help us to use our energy in ways that glorify you and make more tangible your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## John 8:2-11 (NRSVUE)

**2** Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. **3** The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, **4** they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. **5** Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" **6** They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. **7** When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." **8** And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. **9** When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. **10** Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" **11** She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

[First reading.]

In our second reading, imagine you are one of the characters in this story. What perspective do you gain as seen through that person's eyes? Which character will you be? \_\_\_\_\_

[Second reading.]

In our third reading, pay attention to what questions this story raises for you. What makes you curious? What factual questions are raised? What makes you convicted?

[Third reading.]

Curiosities?

Questions?

Convictions?