

John 8:1-11 // Gentleness

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Date: 16 November 2025

[0 : 00] And with gentleness, we're going to be in John chapter 8, verses 1 to 11. If you want to open your Bibles or tap and swipe your way there, however you get there. This may not seem at first like a passage to talk about gentleness, but bear with me as we walk through it.

And I hope you're going to see some things that really struck my heart this week. The first thing I want to address is that in your translation, it may say that early manuscripts don't actually have this passage.

And conservative commentators all agree that it's not whether this belongs in the Bible. It's not whether this belongs in the New Testament. It's where in the New Testament.

Some translations will actually have this in Luke. So rest easy. This isn't something that someone just went, yeah, I'm going to write this and throw this in last second. That's not what happened here.

Jesus is at the Temple Mount just to set the scene. He's teaching maybe 100, 200 people. We don't know exact number, but there was a good sized crowd around him. Let's dive in verses 1 to 4.

[1 : 15] Here's a woman who's confused.

Scared. Dragged in front of a large crowd. I mean, airing her dirty laundry, which we're going to get to in a little bit.

And it's this terrible situation. If they had been really concerned about justice, or if they'd been really concerned about hearing what a teacher would say about this, wouldn't they have approached Jesus afterwards instead of in front of a crowd of 100 or 200 people?

Unless, of course, they're trying to trap Jesus. Which we already know they had been out to get him. So there's some things about this story that smell off.

And you're going to see them, I hope, too. Because the first question I had is, where's the guy? She was caught in adultery, but where's the guy? Keep that question hat on as we go through this.

[2 : 37] Okay? There's some interesting things here. She didn't want to be here. Probably felt like her world was ending. Certainly her social world probably felt like it was ending.

But they used the woman to set a trap for Jesus. They used her as bait. And if that isn't disturbing enough, the need for gentleness continues on.

Because it says that she was caught in the act, I think there's not a lot of doubt or room for doubt that this was a setup. Keep in mind that the Pharisees and scribes were out to get Jesus.

Jesus wasn't afraid to teach out in public. That didn't faze him at all. He was a bold teacher. He is a bold teacher. So I believe it was a setup.

The man that she was with was a setup. He had probably been told to seduce her. He might have even been paid to do so. Keep with me for a minute.

[3 : 39] The spies that were the witness to this, I think, were a setup. Stay with me. The hurry to arrest her was a setup. Dragging her in public and giving Jesus these questions, I think, was a setup.

Because she was used at bait. To snare Jesus into humiliation. According to Jewish law at the time, there was a high standard for evidence. You couldn't mess around with this.

Adultery was considered a capital sin, which means the death penalty. Thankfully, they had guardrails in place so that this wasn't just dealt with easily and quickly.

There had to be certain things that must happen in order for all parties to be protected and for justice to truly be done. I find it very curious that all of those things were just tightened up so easily.

A couple of those standards of evidence. One would be there had to be two witnesses to the act. Not just one. Their testimony had to be perfect. But any variance, any deviation, it was thrown out.

[4 : 48] The confession, everything was thrown out. And yet their testimony against this woman was perfect. Both of them. Now, when I say there had to be a witness to the act, it gets a little uncomfortable.

Okay? Because it wasn't enough that they saw a man and a woman leaving a building together. They couldn't make any accusation based on that. Their rules were so tight that if a man and woman were caught laying in bed together, that wasn't enough.

They had to be caught in the act, which means these guys are watching. It gets uncomfortable. How do you know this is happening unless you know when it's going to be happening? It starts to get a little weird.

You start to see the setup here. But that's how strict the standard of evidence was. And they had it all lined up. And they had it all figured out.

All to trap Jesus. And this woman's life was being used as collateral damage. Horrible. Verse 5. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.

[5 : 56] So what do you say? See, they had hoped to trap Jesus. There's a couple of nuances to this. If he had said, no, don't stone her, he would have been disobeying the law of Moses.

And they went, aha! You come to disobey the law of Moses. If he had said, stoned her. Then he would have been in trouble with the Romans.

Because at the time, the Jewish people couldn't pronounce an execution. Which, interestingly enough, is why they couldn't pronounce an execution against Jesus a little later on. So he would have been either in trouble with the Romans or in trouble with the law of Moses.

They thought there was a no-win situation. I think they were probably thinking, oh boy, we got him now. Man, this troublemaker, we finally got him. But Jesus had another option.

Verse 6. This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. Jesus' response here is amazing.

[7 : 00] And you'll see it nowhere else in the New Testament. He finger-painted in the dirt. Okay? There are so many people that have lost their minds trying to figure out, what did he write?

I've heard so many different things. From non-Christians, oh, he was writing a warning spell. You know? From Christians, oh, he's writing all of the lists of sins from all of the crowd. So that he could kind of say, ha-ha!

But they forget the most important part, as I see it. He bent down. Who cares if he was writing in the dirt? He associated with this woman in one of the worst moments of her life, knelt down like a good father to his daughter.

And met her in that place of awfulness. He didn't stand over her with judgment. He didn't stand over her with anger. He didn't end angry at the crowd. No, he bent down.

Who cares what he wrote in the dirt? The Lord of Lords identified with someone in one of their worst moments. I think that's very important. Instead of amping things up, because he could have, you know, if he was on one side, he would have said, Yeah!

[8 : 13] Yeah! I want public support! Start her! He could have, you know, amped up another side and said, you know, well, I don't know. This needs to be taken care of. And he could have gone political about it.

Instead, he just knelt down with her, almost pretending like he couldn't hear all of the accusations. What a radical thing to do. Down to a low posture, met this woman on the ground in her humiliation.

Jesus drew near to her in an uncomfortable moment. You poor daughter, let me protect you by being with you at your low place. Now, I wanted to share a couple of stories.

When I was doing street ministry in Vancouver, about 6.30 in the morning, I would usually go for a good long walk around. I'd be praying, but also looking for situations that I could help out with.

At the time, I worked for a fairly large organization called Union Gospel Mission. I was also pastoring a church. And so I had some resources with Union Gospel Mission to be able to help somebody if they needed it.

[9 : 23] And there was this girl that was curled up in a storefront. So what it was is like, you know, you had the storefront windows that go out like this. It goes in a little bit to the front door. So there was like this little stoop kind of thing, covered.

And she was kind of curled up in the fetal position there. And it looked like she had been sleeping or trying to that night. And I had noticed that she kept on doing this like she was sleeping like that.

Now, I know from, and this is another story for another day. I know from my time sleeping in stairways and in places like that, sleep is one of the things you lose very, very quickly because you can't get a good rest.

Somebody's going to steal your stuff, hurt you, or kick you out of wherever you are. You don't rest very well. So I saw the situation. I thought, I've been there. So I sat down in front of her.

And she kind of startled as she looked and said, it's okay, you can sleep. And she fell asleep. She was snoring. About two hours later, she woke up. And, you know, of course, first question usually gets asked is, do you have a light?

[10 : 25] I've noticed that in street ministry. People don't come up to me or have never come up to me and said, excuse me, do you have the gospel of Jesus? I really want to get saved. It's do you have a light. So I always carried a lighter with me.

Okay. I gave her a light. And, you know, she didn't, she didn't look the part. She didn't look like she belonged there. She was too fresh for lack of better terms.

And I said, what, what's your story? And she told me that she had had this huge fight with her family. She got on a train from the eastern part of Canada all the way to the far west where I was.

And she didn't know where to stay. She didn't have any people. Right. And so she just curled up in this doorway. So I listened to her story for a bit. And I recognized her. There's two sides. And I know there's a whole bunch of dynamics going on here.

But I know the street would eat her alive if she stayed. So I gave her the card of one of the outreach workers that was there at the time. I said, if you go there, we're going to put you on a train back to Toronto.

[11 : 27] Okay. And I never, ever want to see your face again. Never. Now, she got up. She left. And I can say with complete certainty, at least for the better part of six, seven months, I never saw her again.

I did hear that a train ticket was purchased. I never witnessed that she was on it. But I have to believe she was. Okay. We step into situations when people are literally and figuratively at their lowest.

We step in because Jesus did it for this woman here and did it with gentleness. Didn't, I didn't want to accuse her and say, well, what mess did you get yourself into?

This has to be your fault. Because I don't want anybody to do that with me. When I sin, when I fall, when I'm flat on my face and in the dirt. Oh, how I despair and long for a brother that will come and say, I see you.

Let me help you up. I know I've made bad choices. People don't need to be reminded that they made bad choices to get to where they are. They don't need that extra.

[12 : 38] And that's what I love about Jesus in this situation is that he looked at this woman and he didn't say, get what you pay for. He didn't say, you know, you play roulette.

It's going to come around your turn sometime. He didn't say any of that. He just met her at her level. I want to share another uncomfortable story. Not that this is a real one.

This is one that I, or maybe it is real. But this is one that I want to propose to you now. Because this is one of these things, what do we as a church do when this happens?

A girl gets pregnant and she's not married. And she comes to the church, she's known by us. Do we give her a baby shower or not?

You don't have to answer that. Of course we do. And I want to explain why. Because Jesus didn't look at this woman and say, I don't like adultery. I don't like anything in your life.

[13 : 40] I'm going to keep my distance from you. He did the exact opposite of that. He said, I see you, my daughter, as a human being. And you're caught in the web of this trap that these awful men have done to try and get at me.

Let me help you up. When someone is in their situation that's difficult, seemingly impossible, we don't shoo them away. We love them.

We get on their level, tell them the gospel, share the love of Jesus. We lift them up so that they can have a different life. We should never close our doors. Jesus didn't condemn her, neither should we.

It's an uncomfortable thing because automatically we're thinking, well, what does that mean we're going to condone the behavior? Jesus wasn't condoning adultery. Not at all. He was seeing the human element in a horrible situation.

And he showed gentleness on a level that I think we all could learn from, myself especially. Verse 7. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

[14 : 54] It was like Jesus couldn't even hear, didn't even want to hear the accusers. I imagine they were probably amping up the volume a little bit. It's like he's not listening to us. Jesus, what about this situation? Aren't you paying attention to this?

Don't you want to do the right thing, Rabbi? I imagine there would have been some trolling and some taunting going on there. But he didn't respond at all. In this moment, he was going to look at these religious leaders right in the eye and say something that pierces their heart.

It pierced my heart preparing for this, and I hope it does to you as well. So let me first deal with the wrong way to understand what Jesus said, in my opinion.

He did not mean by this that only someone who is sinlessly perfect can judge someone else. Other than himself, nobody liked that.

I hope that doesn't burst your bubble today. Okay? When Paul established churches, he had to confront sin a lot. He had to boldly say, this is what's going on here.

[16:00] You've got to right this ship. There's things that need to change here, things that need to be adjusted. Paul did that, but not from a self-righteous, judgmental point of view. That's not what Jesus meant.

He didn't mean that if you've ever sinned in your life, you never have the ability to talk with someone about their sin. That's not it either. It's a heart attitude that we need to have when we approach people.

That's a brokenhearted attitude. If we see someone that is going down the same road where we fell on at one point, we approach them with love, saying, Oh, brother, I've been down this road, and the signs look like you're going down it too.

And I want to tell you how it messed me up, and how Jesus saved me from this. Do you want to talk about this? That is a much different attitude than, get away from me.

You're a sinner, and you're going to spoil my Sunday experience. Very different attitudes with those two. I believe Jesus wants us to go through the gentle and lowly way of being humble.

[17:12] And when we see someone going down a bad road, we say it. But we say it with that brokenheartedness. How do you need help? What can I do? How can I walk with you through this?

Like, it's really obvious, man. And I don't mean to poke things or anything like that, but, you know, I just see this and this and this. And, man, I felt that too. What can I do to help right now? Get down with people where wherever they are, maybe it's off of our high horse, maybe it's me off of the stage.

And just simply identifying with people where they are and loving them where they're at. And making sure that they don't have anything in the way between them and Jesus.

In the Jewish legal system, when someone sinned, it was a capital offense. The one who initiated the execution was to throw the first stone. That person had to be one of the witnesses.

So, Jesus, to write this again, to look at this properly, he's saying, where are the witnesses? And you better be without sin. Keep in mind, even watching this couple in the privacy of a moment.

[18:22] You know, were your eyes perfect? Was your heart in a right place? Does your wife know you were watching this? Right? Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

He's asking for the witnesses to come forward. Of course, they couldn't. He's asking, if you see justice in what's happening right here. If you see justice in this woman being used as bait in order for me, Jesus, to get ensnared by the Pharisees and the scribes.

Throw the stones. But, of course, no one came forward. Because I believe they knew this was all a hoax. This was all a setup.

This poor woman, who we do not know her situation. It's possible, and again, take this with a grain of salt, that she was seduced by this guy who had yet to have been found in this situation as a part of this trap for Jesus.

We don't know what home she came from. We don't know how her husband treated her. We don't know if she was left alone. We have no idea. We don't know anything about her.

[19:32] Other than that, she was caught in a horrible situation. Young girl that comes to us that's pregnant out of wedlock. We don't know anything about the situation.

Let's treat her with gentleness and kindness. Open hearts and open doors. Just as we would hope. The same thing would happen for us. Not for guys.

You can't get pregnant. I don't care what anybody's saying out there. Okay. Sorry. It was a setup.

It was a seduction. And I don't know where the man was in all of this. But if they could degrade her and shame her, then so what? And Jesus thought this was horribly wrong. It was wrong for her to be used.

There are times when we have to speak to the sins of others. There are times when we see people going madly off in a direction that will harm them or the people around them. There are moments we have to say, excuse me.

[20 : 34] But do it with that broken heart as a sinner talking to one other sinner. Do it as one desperate soul for the gospel of Jesus to another desperate soul for the gospel of Jesus.

Not as someone who is higher and mightier. As someone who is walking the same road of difficulty of life that the person we're counseling is. We've been there.

We've been there. Verse 8. And once more he bent down and rode on the ground. And instead of staring these guys down, Jesus started riding on the ground from a lowly place again.

He has love and compassion for this woman. And he wanted to be gentle and lowly with her once again. He didn't try and change the crowd.

He didn't try and change their minds. He just simply identified with the woman in her place. Verses 9 to 11.

[22 : 06] her life. Where are your accusers now? My good daughter, you are safe. Where are the ones giving you shame now? Jesus himself wasn't going to condemn her. The case was thrown out of court, if you want to look at it that way. This woman was guilty of sin, but she knew the goodness of having no condemnation because Jesus, in his humility, drew near to her. In the middle of our own shame in the middle of our own humiliation, in the middle of our own situations, don't you just love the fact, the fact that Jesus will meet you and I where we are and just maybe even say, what are you doing here?

Let's go. We got other things to do. You'll not get shame from me. What I think Jesus does is he teaches us here in a simple way that it's better to avoid getting a cold than to get a cold.

And if you have a cold, we'll get through it. But if you can do something to avoid getting a cold next time, do that. Take vitamin C, wear a coat, whatever it is. I think it's as simple as that.

But we know well enough that she isn't going to go be without sin for the rest of her life. I sometimes wonder, and this is me guessing into this, if Jesus is saying something like, start falling down in the right direction towards him. We are going to fall. We are going to sin.

We are going to make mistakes. Maybe adultery is not on your schedule, but you know what? Gossip might be. Lying might be. Right? How are those any different? We are all going to blow it.

[23 : 55] Be so grateful that we have a Savior who doesn't give us shame, but gives us renovation in our hearts. Be so grateful that we have a Lord that reaches us wherever we are on our level, picks us up and walks on with us, regardless of what happens. How can we not act and behave exactly like that to this dead and dying and hurting world around us? How can we not go be advocates for him with that same heart? I know you blew it. I see it. And that's a conversation for another time, but what do you need right now? Oh, you know, you need a jolly jumper for your kid?

You know, you need some couple of months of diapers? We got that. We're going to take care of that. In fact, we're going to throw a party because this baby's life means something. Okay? We step into the moment.

It doesn't affirm what happened before. It simply takes the situation we have now and approaches it with a gentle and lonely heart that we've sinned to. And we need help just like that fictional woman that was describing with that situation.

He gave her hope that he should continue, she should continue a life in him. See, she had a relationship with the Messiah now. Things are different. Things will always be different for her from now on. The shame and condemnation that society would give her, maybe even friends and family would give her, was now somewhere else. Jesus took it upon himself on the cross. We celebrated communion, and that's part of what it is, a part, is that payment for the sins that we can never pay for ourselves. He willingly gave himself up so that we could be free. And you and I, as Christians, what else should we be doing and on about but sharing that gospel with the world? It's the best news ever. We have a place in heaven. We have a way to it.

There's a Father waiting for us. Jesus has come to rescue us. Shouldn't the world know about this? Okay, your life looks like a bomb went off. A grenade went over off here socially. Okay, okay.

[26 : 11] But isn't Jesus bigger than all of that? Shouldn't our church be representative of Jesus to everyone in those situations? Come, experience his love. We'll help walk with you. Not because we figured it all out, but because we're walking too. And where there needs to be discipleship to learn how to not to catch cold again. Where there needs to be training and prayer. Well, you know what? We got that too.

But not because we've got it figured out, because somebody did it with us before. Okay? The spirit of our age, people think that sin and shame isn't the act. It's getting caught.

They're more worried about, well, if we get caught, we'll just glide on through. But that's not what it is here. It's not about getting caught. It's that God cares so deeply that we don't live our life drowning in shame, that he has a couple of things for us. There's a preventative for shame. Like I said, it's better to avoid catching a cold than catch a cold. Sure. There's the reality that our Savior is gentle and lowly and can speak to us and heal us wherever we are. And that goes for anybody walking in our door that we may not know. We may be struggling with shame today. Maybe the weight of what we carry behind us is feeling like a weight. The enemy works in the camp of shame. The Lord works in the camp of rebuilding and renovation and restoration. Let him restore you today. There's no ceremony.

You don't have to come talk to me. I'm another sinner falling just like you. Talk to the Lord between you and him and say, Father, I need your help today. As we close and as we round things out, Father, I need your help. I'm feeling shame. And there are some things that are remedies for this cold.

The remedy is just simply, I think, togetherness, community. Don't be alone. Don't go it alone.

[28 : 30] The enemy likes to divide and conquer. He's particularly good at whispering those little lies that had that happen. Don't do that. Don't give in to that. Be a part of the church, not apart from it. And let us together stumble our way on towards the Father. And if somebody has fallen down on their face first, let's take a moment and help them up so they can walk with us again.

Let's not leave them behind. Do you want to be set free from shame? Do you know somebody in your life that needs to be set free from shame? I'm sure you do.

So let's pray for them now as we close. Lift them up between you and the Lord. And if anybody's here that wants to have prayer one-on-one, grab someone around you. If you want to come pray with me, more than welcome. But there's a whole bunch of other people here that can pray just as well, just as meaningfully, just as powerfully. Grab someone and pray for them. Well, maybe not grab, that's the wrong thing. Approach them. Let's pray.