

## MY DAUGHTER A PREACHER?

By Leslie B. Flynn, Nanuet, NY: Author, 1996

Reviewed by Dr. James R. Beck, Professor of Counseling,  
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Leslie Flynn has made many valuable contributions to the church during his long and distinguished career. He served as pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Nanuet, NY for forty years. He has written thirty-eight books including this 1996 title. I have never seen a long book by Pastor Flynn. His books are brief, not because he writes on unimportant topics but because he has the gift of concise statement and brevity.

Bernice and Leslie Flynn have seven daughters. Among them are a telecommunications engineer, a teacher, a database analyst, a lawyer, an artist, a professor of nursing, and a minister. Daughter Janna is an ordained United Church of Christ minister who currently serves as chaplain at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. This book is an account of Pastor Flynn's personal journey in response to his daughter's decision to attend seminary and enter the ministry. Pastor Flynn writes,

In looking back, I realize that previous to my investigation into the matter I really had no opinion to change. Though raised in an environment of disapproval of women preachers, I had gone along with this view uncritically. So I did not hold any conviction on the issue for I had never given the matter much study (p. 157).

The book explores Jesus and women, women in the early church, and women in American evangelicalism at the beginning of this century, among other topics. Happily, Flynn concludes that God has called his daughter, that she is following God's leading, and that God will bless her work.

While this book does not explore new territory regarding the issue of women in ministry, it does serve a useful purpose: This is an *ideal* book to give your pastor, especially if he is straddling the fence on this issue. One pastor speaking to other pastors can have a powerful impact.

## FROM MY POINT OF VIEW

## MEDITATION ON LUKE 7:36-50

Vernon Keith Rempel

She had bound her hair into a tight, black knot. But now the dark curling tresses are loose, cascading onto Jesus' wet feet, and all around Simon's dining room the meal turns to stone.

The trouble is, she is a sinner. Not a private sinner with sins of the heart, suitable for repentance in silence during Sunday morning confession. Nor a sinner in the general sense that we are all sinners saved by grace. She is a known sinner, one singled out by her sin, one publicly shamed by sinfulness.

Since she does not appear with any stable man by her side, it is tempting (and titillating) for us to imagine that her sin is sexual—prostitution or habitual unchastity. But maybe it is financial malfeasance. She has means enough to buy perfume in alabaster. The parable Jesus tells on this occasion speaks of money, which may be a hint. But we have no way of knowing.

Jesus had come out of the wilderness and was starting to attract some attention. People gathered to hear him speak. They came to him for healing. John the Baptist had sent word from his jail cell, wondering whether Jesus was the one he had been waiting for. And the Pharisees noticed that he ate and drank with sinners.

The sinner from the city, the dark-haired weeper, is not doing her reputation any favors by letting down her hair onto Jesus' feet. It is an immodest act, an act against morality and dignity, an intimate act in a public place. But she has to dry Jesus' feet; she has cried all over them. She had come to Simon's house meaning to honor Jesus with perfume, a humble anointing of the feet, dramatic but not scandalous. Instead, her tears come, speaking release from the depths of her heart-sickness. And now her hair is down and her shame confirmed.

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She is in exactly the wrong place for such a scandal. It is like the classic "running down Main Street in your underwear" bad dream. The house belongs to Simon, the Pharisee. In this house, the law is observed. The order of

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*Vernon K. Rempel is Pastor of First Mennonite Church of Denver, Colorado. He says the woman anointing Jesus' feet is one of his favorite Bible stories, on which he has based five or six sermons. This meditation was first published in the January 31, 1995, issue of Gospel Herald and is reprinted by permission of the author.*

the day is propriety. Simon, of all people, does not make social mistakes, or sins, or any other disruption. His fondest goal is to live right and thereby invoke the day of God's kingdom. The orderliness of his life, from morality to social grace, is cut from the whole cloth of his religion.

Therefore it is no accidental omission: He deliberately snubs Jesus. The lunch invitation is intended to be a public demonstration of Jesus' place in the eyes of the Pharisee. Jesus comes to eat, and Simon offers him no honor or consideration. He gives him no kiss of greeting. He offers him no water to wash the dust off his feet. And if he was really favorably impressed with Jesus' teachings, he could have given the ordinary sign of anointing with oil. But he gives nothing.

Did the woman observe all this? In any case, her intent is the opposite of Simon's. She plans to honor Jesus. This she does, and resourcefully. When she wets Jesus' feet with her weeping, she improvises to dry them. And in the midst of all the shameful drama, she manages to complete her mission after all. She perfumes his feet, and kisses them.

This resourceful woman shows "great love." But Simon thinks, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." For Simon it is not love. It is a mess. In his house. At his table.

At this point, Jesus has a chance to redeem his own reputation. He was being called "a friend of sinners." He could show Simon that he knows his "p's and q's," a teacher who understands the need for respect. Distance himself from the shame. Tell the woman that it is all very well to show gratitude but that she is really out of line.

Instead, Jesus offers Simon this idea. Maybe the woman is very, very, very grateful. Like a debtor who has been forgiven 500 days' wages. Much more grateful than somebody who has only been forgiven, say, a tenth of that amount. What we have here is that "she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little," Jesus notes. Not that Simon has little to forgive. But how can you forgive an unrepentant heart of stone?

Then Jesus explains how it is that they are in the presence of faith, not shame. "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment." Faith, not shame.

Simon's intent was to snub.  
The woman's was to honor.  
For one, much was forgiven;  
for the other, nothing.  
Out of shame came  
peace; out of death, life.

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This, of course, becomes the ultimate question in Jesus' life. The public shame of this repentant sinner prefigures the public sinful shame of the cross, which Jesus accepts rather than abandon his ministry. And then, with the woman, Jesus also prefigures the rest of the story. He says to her, "Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Which is a glimmering, even a flooding of resurrection light. Out of shame, peace. Out of shameful death, life.

At this point, Luke's curtain drops on the story. What could possibly happen next? I imagine the woman giving Jesus a farewell glance and leaving the house, not without dignity. I imagine Jesus offering a bit of final rhetoric on his way out: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And I imagine the other guests plunging into a tight knot of fervid discussion: "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

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