

LESSON TWELVE

ADORATION

“She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

MARK 14:8-9



REFLECTION

Think of a meaningful gift you have given to someone. Think about what made that gift meaningful. Sometimes the gift's significance comes from what you wanted to express. Sometimes it comes from how you think the person would be affected or helped by the gift. How did that person respond to your gift? In what ways has that experience shaped the way you think about gift giving?

SITUATION

By this point in Jesus' ministry, tensions were at a high level. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem had occurred days before, and the religious leaders were desperate to solve the "Jesus problem." But in the midst of the attacks and constant scrutiny, Jesus took time to accept a loving gift. Note that while Mark does not identify the woman in this story, John tells us that she was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (see John 12:1-8).

OBSERVATION

Read Mark 14:3-9 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

³ And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. ⁴ But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? ⁵ For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. ⁷ For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. ⁸ She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. ⁹ Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

EXPLORATION

1. Why did some of the guests criticize the woman for her actions?
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2. How did Jesus respond to these criticisms of the woman?

3. How might the woman have felt after Jesus affirmed her actions?

4. Why did the woman choose to anoint Jesus at this time?

5. What did Jesus say was the significance of the woman's actions?

6. Picture yourself in the room with Jesus, the disciples, and the woman. How would you have responded to this very expensive gift?

INSPIRATION

Imagine yourself as a twelve-year-old facing a sink of dirty dishes. You don't want to wash them. You'd rather play with your friends or watch television. But your mom has made it clear: *clean the dishes*.

You groan, moan, and wonder how you might place yourself for adoption. Then, from who knows where, a wacky idea strikes you. What

if you surprise your mom by cleaning, not just the dishes, but the entire kitchen? You begin to smile. "I'll sweep the floor and wipe down the cabinets. Maybe reorganize the refrigerator!" And from some unknown source comes a shot of energy, a surge of productivity. A dull task becomes an adventure. Why? Liberation! You've passed from slave to volunteer.

This is the joy of the second mile.

Have you found it? Your day moves with the speed of an ice floe and the excitement of a quilting tournament. You do what is required—math problems and one chapter in literature—but no more. You are reliable, dependable, and quite likely bored. You dream of Fridays, holidays, a different family or a different job, when maybe all you need is a different attitude. Give your day a chance.

Daily do a deed for which you cannot be repaid.

In the final days of Jesus' life, he shared a meal with his friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Within the week he would feel the sting of the Roman whip, the point of the thorny crown, and the iron of the executioner's nail. But on this evening, he felt the love of three friends.

For Mary, however, giving the dinner was not enough. "Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3).

One-milers among the group, like Judas, criticized the deed as wasteful. Not Jesus. He received the gesture as an extravagant demonstration of love, a friend surrendering her most treasured gift. As Jesus hung on the cross, we wonder, *Did he detect the fragrance on his skin?*

Follow Mary's example.

There is an elderly man in your community who just lost his wife. An hour of your time would mean the world to him. Some kids in your city have no dad. No father takes them to movies or baseball games. Maybe you can. They can't pay you back. They can't even afford the popcorn or sodas. But they'll smile like a cantaloupe slice at your kindness.

11. Why was it difficult for the others to see the value in what Mary did for Jesus?

12. Why do you think Mary chose to offer this particular gift to Jesus?

LIFE LESSONS

In this passage, there was a crowd of people all sharing a room with Jesus. They were in his presence. Yet out of that crowded room, only one person expressed her adoration and love. The process of gratitude and worship requires some kind of personal connection on our part. It may be easier for us to go through prescribed motions and follow someone else's cues, but if that is the limit of our participation in worship, we will be left with little in the way of personal transformation. Being in Christ's presence and expressing our gratitude ought to change us. One of the best questions we can ask as we prepare for worship is, "How will I express what Jesus means to me today while I am with others?"

DEVOTION

Father, help us to take time to adore and worship you. Help us to maintain our promise of faithfulness to you, even in times when we are surrounded by people who oppose your kingdom. Give us great courage as we face the challenges of following you.

Or how about this one? Down the hall from your bedroom is a person who shares your last name. Shock that person with kindness. Something outlandish. Your homework done with no complaints. Coffee served before he awakens. A love letter written to her for no special reason. Alabaster poured, just because.

Want to snatch a day from the manacles of boredom? Do overgenerous deeds, acts beyond reimbursement. Kindness without compensation. Do a deed for which you cannot be repaid. (From *Great Day Every Day* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. Have you ever been criticized for loving God like Mary was? If so, in what ways?

8. Based on Mark 14:3-9, how should you respond to those who criticize your love for God?

9. What are you willing to sacrifice to worship God?

10. In what ways does Mary's example challenge your view of worship?
