

AT THE FEET OF JESUS

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Often when I speak with a woman in a personal conversation, I like to ask “Who is your favorite lady in Scripture?” Some ladies have to think awhile before they come up with an answer; others have a very quick reply. For me, my favorite woman in Scripture is usually the one I have been studying about most recently. So, at the time, of this writing I would have to say Mary of Bethany has become my favorite woman in the Bible. She has much to teach us about adoration, devotion, and living our life at the feet of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But what we learn about Mary points us to an even greater truth: the truth that Jesus Christ is the greatest Gentleman and Lover we will ever meet. It is my desire and prayer that through the study that follows, each of us would fall in love with Jesus all over again! For He, and He alone, is worthy of praise, honor, and glory. I want to live my life at the feet of Jesus!

At the Feet of Jesus: Humility and Forgiveness

A biblical study of Mary of Bethany begins in Luke 7. She is not actually mentioned by name in this passage, but it is the first recorded event in her life. She is found four times in the Gospels, and many people overlook this first incident in Luke 7 because the passage just speaks of an unknown woman, described by the term “*a sinner.*” An important key to Bible study is comparing passage with passage. Joh 11:2 tells us that “... *it was Mary [of Bethany] who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair.*” Therefore, an accurate comparison of Scripture teaches us the woman in Luk 7:37 spoken of as “*a woman in the city who was a sinner*” is Mary of Bethany.

In order to properly understand Luk 7:36–50, we must also use another Bible-study method, and that is **context**. It is important to look at where this passage is found in relationship to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. This is early in His ministry. In the previous verses of Luke 7, He has just raised the widow’s son and brought him back to life. Jesus is already engaged in miracles of healing with the result that people are beginning to recognize this man as the promised Messiah.

In Luk 7:16–17, it says, “*fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, ‘a great prophet has arisen among us!’ and, ‘God has visited His people!’ This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding districts.*” People are beginning to recognize the name and power of Jesus Christ.

And then we come to a Pharisee’s home:

“Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him [Jesus] to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.” Luk 7:36–38

Now, I want you to travel back in your mind to biblical times and culture, and picture with me the beauty of what this woman is doing. She was known in that city as an immoral woman. She was familiar with the whisperings and glares of other women and the all-too-common stares of men. That’s not a very comfortable place to be. This woman walks into the Pharisee’s house with a heavy burden of guilt and shame. When the passage says “*she learned*” that Jesus Christ was going to be at the Pharisee’s house, the Greek word indicates that she found out almost at the last moment. She was desperate to see Him for she had learned that He was the One who could forgive sins and redeem a broken soul like hers. This is the Man who had the power to heal her heart and cancel her past. And so, she boldly goes into the Pharisee’s home and falls at the feet of Jesus. Every time we see Mary of Bethany in Scripture, she is right there—at the feet of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

At the feet of Jesus is a place of humility, a place of surrender, and a place of worship. This is the place of being “sold out” to Jesus Christ; and this is where we find her. She breaks the alabaster vial and freely pours the contents of it on the Lord’s feet and begins to wash His feet with her hair. Ladies, how much time do you spend on your hair every morning? It’s a fair bit for some of us, because our hair is given from God for our glory, something that frames our face and beautifies us. Yet, she is using her glory to wipe the feet of Jesus. This is the humility of her soul and the adoration that she has for the Lord.

Now Jesus, being the loving and gracious God that He is, being the greatest Gentleman that ever walked the face of this earth, being the Lamb that is worthy, receives her adoration because He knows her heart. Isn’t it comforting to know that there is One who always looks beyond our past and beyond our outer person, to see and appreciate the hidden person of the heart. Jesus peered deep into her heart and knew that she was coming to Him in repentance and faith. She believed in Him as her only Lord and Savior. So He graciously accepts her offering and her adoration.

Now, there is someone else present in the home and that is the Pharisee. Remember, we learned earlier in the chapter that everyone was now saying that Jesus was a prophet because of the miracles He was performing. I think when the Pharisee invited Jesus Christ into his home, he

must have done so believing the reports about Him. But in Luk 7:39, we find the Pharisee, upon seeing Jesus allow the woman to touch Him, saying to himself:

“If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”

In the Pharisee’s judgmental, religious mind, the actions of Jesus negated all the previous reports about Him. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus—the perfect and Holy Son of God—accepts this woman without condemnation, while the Pharisee condemns both Jesus and the woman. His own self-righteousness and the hardness of his heart prevent him from seeing the beauty of this moment. It is a struggle for any hardhearted person to see much beauty in this world because they barely see beyond their own belly button. In each of the four stories involving Mary of Bethany, we find another person in the setting who contrasts with her humility, faith, and devotion. Obviously, in this Luke 7 passage, it is the Pharisee.

But the far greater failure of the Pharisee is his inability to recognize his own sinfulness. Rom 3:23 says, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Jeremiah puts it in a little bit harsher terms when he says, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”* (Jer 17:9). Coming to the realization in your own heart that you are a sinner is the first step to realizing you need a Savior. We deny people who acknowledge that need when we fail to convey to them in the Gospel message the fact of their own sin. *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8). The Pharisee bought into the satanic lie of religion: that he was good enough because of his good deeds and obedience to the law. He needs Jesus Christ just as much as the woman does, but instead of falling at Jesus’ feet for forgiveness, he stands in judgment. He remains chained in sin, while the woman becomes free!

Now let us see how the Lord deals with this situation. In Luk 7:40, Jesus speaks with the Pharisee revealing that He knows the inner thoughts of the man. Jesus says, *“Simon, I have something to say to you.”* And Simon replies, *“Say it teacher.”* And then in Luk 7:41–42, Jesus presents Simon with a situation to ponder:

“A moneylender had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?”

The Pharisee replies correctly, *“I suppose the one whom he forgave more”* (Luk 7:43).

And then Jesus turns to the woman to further expose to the Pharisee the hardness of his heart.

Jesus speaks to Simon these words, *“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little”* (Luk 7:44–47).

In biblical times and culture, hospitality was a big thing! The streets were dirty and dusty, and a guest might enter your house hot and in need of refreshment. It was customary in this day to do three things for a person entering your home:

1. The first thing was to wash their feet. The Pharisee did not wash the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the woman in her humility and her worship washed His feet with her very tears.
2. The second thing was to greet them with a kiss of peace. The Pharisee did not greet the Lord Jesus Christ with his kiss, but the woman could not stop kissing the Lord's feet.
3. The third custom was to burn incense or to put perfume on the head. The Pharisee did not do this either, but the perfume that the woman used would have been that greeting of hospitality to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So everything that the Pharisee was supposed to do, the pride in his heart kept him from doing. But the humility and desperation in the woman's heart gave her the opportunity to display her love in the Pharisee's place.

And then in Luk 7:48–50, the Lord speaks to the woman—the sinful, immoral woman that the world shakes a finger at and tosses away as broken:

“And He said to her, ‘Your sins have been forgiven.’ Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this man who even forgives sins?’ And He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

Psa 130:1, 3–4 says, *“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD ... If You, LORD, should mark iniquities [sins], O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You.”* I think in this scene of Luke 7, Mary of Bethany is crying out in her heart for forgiveness, and she has come to the only One who can forgive her sins—the Lord Jesus Christ, for *“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”* (Col 1:14).

How beautiful are the last words that Jesus speaks to Mary when He says *“Go in peace.”* This is probably the first moment in Mary's life that she ever experienced peace in her heart: the peace of forgiveness, the peace of eternal life, the peace of love and acceptance from God's beloved Son—the Prince of Peace (Rom 5:1; Isa 9:6)! This forgiveness and peace is available to each one of us through simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Mary of Bethany loved much because she was forgiven much. When we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are freely given His forgiveness. His forgiveness liberates our soul from the power and penalty of sin—freeing us to live in the light of His love forever. What a beautiful gift! But with the gift of His forgiveness also comes the responsibility to forgive others in the same way, for Eph 4:32 (emphasis added) says:

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, **just as** God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

We love the receiving part of forgiveness, but we sometimes struggle with the giving part. When we apply the forgiveness of Jesus Christ to those who have hurt us or betrayed us, it is also a freeing thing for our soul, delivering us from the bitterness that threatens to rob our soul of peace and joy. An unforgiving heart is a painful and unnecessary burden to carry through life!

As believers in Jesus Christ, the hope of our soul should be conformity to His likeness. To forgive others is perhaps one of the greatest opportunities we have on earth to manifest His likeness. Consider this powerful quote found in the clothing of a dead child at Ravensbruck Concentration Camp:

“Lord, remember not only the men and women of good-will but also those of ill-will, but do not remember all of the suffering that they have inflicted upon us. Instead, remember the fruits that we have borne because of this suffering; our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you let all of those fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.”

What depth of soul this child gained from his intense suffering! This is a boy who has lost his childhood, his peace, his health, his joy, and his very future to evil men. This amazing young man was able to see what he had gained from both his suffering, and the opportunity to forgive. He focused not on the pain but on his growth in character, integrity, and relationship with God. How God had opened his heart and allowed His grace to take root and bloom there! From the suffering inflicted by evil men, he had gained friends, learned loyalty, and courage. He focused not on his personal suffering but on the fruit that the suffering had brought in his life.

I want you to ponder for just a moment on the most difficult thing that you have ever had to forgive. That very thing that you may wish had never happened to you, you may wish could be erased from the canvas of your heart; that may be the very thing God uses to draw you to Him! That very thing could end up being your greatest blessing because of what have you learned from that trial.

Consider these verses on forgiveness, and forgive others in just the same way:

1. Psa 103:2–3 (emphasis added), *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; Who pardons **all** your iniquities, Who heals **all** your diseases.”*

Col 2:13b (emphasis added), *“... having forgiven us **all** our transgressions.”*

The forgiveness of Jesus Christ covers **all** sins! Therefore, we should be willing to forgive others of all sins—the ones we consider both big and small.

2. Mat 18:21–22, *“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”*

The forgiveness of Jesus Christ knows no limit. If He commanded Peter to forgive his brother up to 490 times in a day, think how much greater His forgiveness is for us! This should not give us license to continue in sin; rather out of appreciation for His grace, it should motivate us to strive for purity from sin.

There should be no limit to the number of times we are willing to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ. I have never had anyone sin against me 490 times in one day, but I think I have come close to remembering someone's sin against me that many times in a day. When an unforgiving spirit repeatedly rises up within us, we must overcome it through confession and application—once again—of the forgiveness of Christ.

3. Heb 8:12, *“FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE”* (quoting Jer 31:34).

Psa 103:12, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*

When Jesus forgives us, our sins are no longer an issue in our relationship with Him. Our sin is forgotten and moved from us as far as the east is from the west. (The east and west never meet, by the way!)

When we forgive others, it frees us to move on from the sin that has been committed against us. In ongoing relationships, such as a marriage, the sin does not need to continue to be brought up between us and the other party. That's freedom! We need to deal with people where they are in the present—not in the failure of their past. Remember, forgiveness cancels the past.

4. Eph 1:7–8, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ...”*

We do not deserve the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, nor is there anything we can do to earn it. Forgiveness is given to us as a gift when we believe in Him. I love the word used in this verse, “lavish.” It is the Greek word *perriseuo* and speaks of a downpour—superabundance in both quality and quantity, something that is superfluous and extravagant. This is the nature of God's extravagant grace toward us in Christ!

We do not show forgiveness to others because they deserve it; we show it as a gift in reflection of the character of Jesus Christ. Nor, should we ask them to work to earn our forgiveness. Forgiveness is unconditional. If Jesus lavishes His grace on us, it seems only right that we could show more than a trace of grace to others!

5. 1Pe 2:24 (emphasis added), *“and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for **by His wounds** you were healed.”*

Jesus paid the ultimate price for our sins: death on the cross. His love drove Him to suffer greatly in order to buy our freedom.

When we are willing to forgive others, it doesn't mean we are overlooking the sin or saying the sin doesn't matter; we are saying that we are willing to bear the suffering of it. We are willing to carry the burden of another's sin because Jesus carries the burden of our sin (1Pe 5:7; Mat 11:28).

6. Joh 8:11b (emphasis added), *“And Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on **sin no more.**’”*

When a woman was caught in the very act of adultery and thrown in the dirt at Jesus' feet, He spoke these words to her. He assured her she was free from condemnation yet encouraged her not to continue in the same pattern of sin. He forgives us in order to give us an opportunity for confession and correction, to learn from our failures, and to move on to victory.

In the same way, we should encourage others to learn from sin and failure and to turn to Christ for correction. There is opportunity to minister to the person who has hurt us and show them the way to pick up and move on in God's grace.

7. Luk 7:47, *“For this reason I say to you [He is speaking to the arrogant Pharisee], **her sins which are many have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.**”*

The sinful woman, knowing how much she needed the forgiveness of Christ, loved Him far beyond the reach of the Pharisee's "love," for he did not realize His great need for Christ. Forgiveness builds love in a relationship.

When we are willing and able to forgive others, it builds a bond of love between us that is sometimes stronger than before the breach of trust. The love of Christ is powerful (2Co 5:14–17)!

8. 2Co 5:14–19 (emphasis added), *“For the **love of Christ controls us**, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh ... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**, namely, that God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”*

At times, it seems very difficult to forgive another person who has greatly sinned against you. Actually, humanly speaking, it is nearly impossible. But when we depend on the

love of Christ to be the power of our forgiveness, we are calling on a love far beyond ours—a love great enough to forgive the whole world!

When we consider others as souls that Christ was willing to die for, what grounds do we have not to forgive? If they are believers, they are “new creatures in Christ”; if they are unbelievers, we have the opportunity to show them the love of Christ in a way they may never have seen before!

We each are given a ministry—it is the ministry of reconciliation, meaning a bringing together of two separated parties. In relationships where there has been a breaking of fellowship through sin on the part of one party or both, the goal to strive for is reconciliation. That is always God’s desire. But sometimes only one party seeks after reconciliation. I would encourage you to be the party willing to reconcile, and pray for others to come to that same desire. To God be the glory!

Corrie Ten Boom was greatly hurt in the persecution of Christians in WWII. She suffered long in a concentration camp that took the life of her sister. After the war was over, she struggled with forgiveness and asked a pastor how to deal with the bitterness in her heart. This is the counsel he gave her:

“Forgiveness is like letting go of a bell rope. If you have ever seen a country church with a bell in the steeple, you will remember that to get the bell ringing you have to tug awhile. Once it has begun to ring, you merely maintain the momentum. As long as you keep pulling, the bell keeps ringing. Forgiveness is letting go of the rope. It is just that simple. But when you do so, the bell keeps ringing. Momentum is still at work. However, if you keep your hands off the rope, the bell will begin to slow and eventually stop.”

If there is someone you are struggling to forgive, I would encourage you to heed this pastor’s advice and take your hands off the rope!

At the opening of this lesson, I asked you to picture yourself in the Pharisee’s home watching the beauty of Mary of Bethany at the feet of Jesus. Now I would ask you to go back to that image, remove the Pharisee from the picture, remove the guests, the feast, and even Mary. Remaining in that picture is Jesus . . . and you. Picture yourself at His feet with the forgiveness of God making all things new in your life. Let your soul lavish in the freedom of that forgiveness and be ready always to offer that forgiveness to others.

At the Feet of Jesus: Fellowship and Learning

In Luke 10, we have the next event in Mary of Bethany’s life. As in the first lesson, we will see Mary once again at the feet of Jesus, and another person in the room with a very contrasting attitude to Mary’s. This is a short passage packed full of valuable principles:

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who

was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'" Luk 10:38–42

As this passage opens up to us, Mary is with her sister Martha in the kitchen preparing for the arrival of a very special guest, Jesus. Being a wife and mother who has often entertained people that I held in great esteem, I can picture in my mind the fury of these preparations: sweeping the floor, cleaning the house, cooking the best of recipes so that when Jesus arrives, the ladies are ready to honor Him in their home. Keep in mind that both Mary and Martha want to show honor and hospitality to the Lord, but they have very different ways of expressing that desire. Martha tries to honor Him by showing how much she can do in her own strength to serve Him. Mary honors Him by sitting at His feet as if to say, "Lord, I am empty, fill my soul!" There is a huge difference between the two!

So Mary is seated at the Lord's feet, and they are having a time of fellowship. He is teaching. She is listening. Mary is hungry—not for the food from the kitchen that feeds the body, but hungry for the food of truth that feeds the soul. Mary and Jesus are building a relationship together. She is not satisfied to know Him just as her Savior; now her heart's desire is to know Him as a friend, a companion—to walk with Him, to enjoy His presence, and to grow in her faith and understanding. Mary wants to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Consider with me for a moment the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He willingly left the glories of Heaven, set aside His deity to come to this earth as a man, to live in flesh and blood, to tire like we tire, to hunger like we hunger, to thirst like we thirst, to live like we live, and finally to taste sin and death on our behalf. He did these sacrificial things—not only to save us, but to give us the potential of moment-by-moment fellowship with Him. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe wants an intimate relationship with you and me! Mary responded to the sacrifice of Jesus by sitting at His feet to learn of Him and from Him. How often we are like Martha and deny the Lord this fellowship in order to impress Him instead with what **we** have to offer!

So Martha is in the kitchen working, distracted with all of her preparations, and she comes up to the Lord and says, "*Do You not care that my sister has left me to do all of the serving by myself?*" This is a very strong accusation from Martha, "*Do you not care?*"

Probably, every one of us, at some time in our life, has felt that same accusation in our heart. Sometimes we look at other people's lives, and we easily see the way God has answered their prayers, helped them, and blessed them. We come back to seemingly hopeless situations in our own lives and may feel forgotten by God. It is very easy in that situation to echo Martha's words and say, "*Lord, do you not care?*" But Martha's words reveal to us the condition of her heart and, therein, the fault of her service.

Jesus addresses this fault on two levels. First, He says to her, "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things.*" I don't think we have to go to a Greek dictionary to understand the words "*worried and bothered*"; we probably only need to go to the mirror of our own soul, and the understanding of these words will be clear. As women, we too often reflect the inner condition of

Martha's soul by being caught up in the many worries of this life. And sometimes these worries creep into our service to God—the very activity that should come from a thankful and pure heart.

Ladies, when you are serving Jesus in any aspect of your life—whether it be service to your family, your friends, your church, or the broader realm of missions—where is your heart? Is it resting in Him, trusting in Him, and relying on Him for the love and strength of your service? Or is it “*worried and bothered*” about so many things? Are you frustrated that no one notices your service? Are you serving out of duty rather than love? Are you serving in arrogance rather than humility, for your glory rather than the glory of God? These are just a few of the many ways that, in the middle of serving Jesus, our heart can become “*worried and bothered*” about so many things. The result is service that is unrewardable in God's sight: service that will be burned as wood, hay, and stubble, and service that robs us of the joy of a poured-out life.

Service to God is a beautiful thing when it is done with a beautiful heart. Service to God is a worthless thing when it is done with a “*worried and bothered*” heart. In this passage, Jesus is giving Martha a “gut check,” and He also challenges us to check the condition of our heart.

And then Jesus continues His rebuke to Martha by saying, “*but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*”

After Jesus speaks to the condition of Martha's heart, He then speaks to the priorities of Martha's life. Jesus Himself set the standard of pure and undistracted devotion to God as His life proved out His words in Heb 10:9, “*BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.*” David says in Psa 27:4, “*One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in His temple.*”

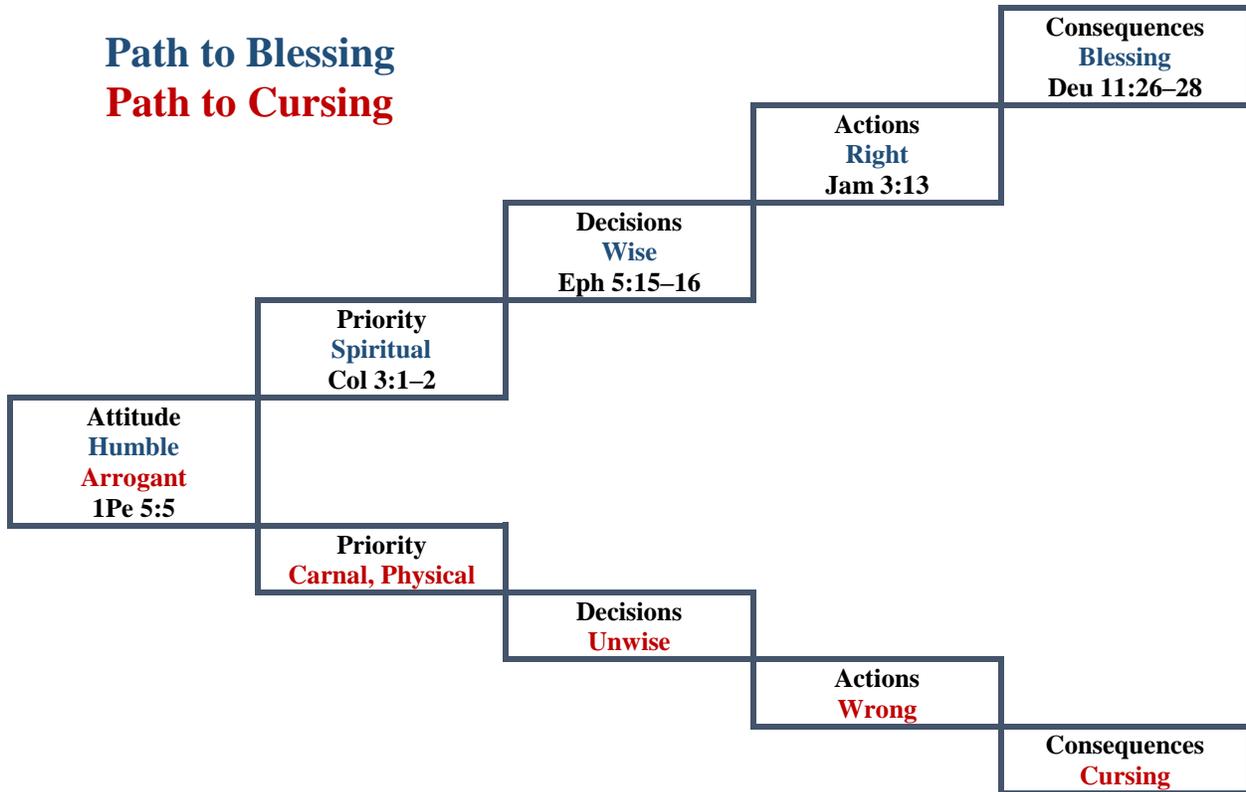
It's not that David never prayed any other prayer in his life, but the “*one thing,*” as in the number-one priority in his life, was fellowship with his God. Paul echoes this sentiment when he says in Phi 3:8, “*I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” These quotes all speak of priority—the priority of a humble heart to abide with God in fellowship, understanding, and obedience. Have you ever heard the quote, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing”? This is what Jesus was telling Martha!

In contrast to the rebuke Jesus gave to Martha, He commends Mary for choosing the “*good part,*” the Greek word being *meris*, which can be translated “portion” or “share.” It appears that Jesus is using a bit of a play on words to say that Mary's priority was the spiritual dish of God's Word rather than the tasty morsels that were cooking in the kitchen. Jesus told his disciples, “*... do not be worried about your life, as to what you shall eat or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?*” (Mat 6:25).

Several times in Scripture, the Word of God is likened to food for our soul. In the midst of severe temptation and hunger, Jesus said, “*MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD*” (Mat 4:4). The prophet Jeremiah reveals the joy of feeding on God's Word in Jer 15:16, “*Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.*”

There are many treasures we can seek after in this life, but the Word of God is more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey from the honeycomb, and rejoices the heart. Knowledge is available to us at every turn, but the Word of God makes wise the simple and enlightens the eyes. By His Word, we are warned, restored, encouraged, comforted; and in obeying God’s Word, there is great reward (Psalm 19). This is why Jesus encourages us to keep His Word the priority of our life, to daily choose the best portion.

When my husband teaches the Bible at home or abroad, he often uses an illustration of a path that leads to blessing and a path that leads to correction. And since he is the one who has taught me pretty much everything I know, I would like to use that path to illustrate the contrast between Mary and Martha:



- ❖ Attitude, “... and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**” 1Pe 5:5
- ❖ Priority, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Col 3:1-2
- ❖ Decisions, “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” Eph 5:15-16
- ❖ Actions, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.” Jam 3:13

- ❖ Consequences, “*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God ... and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God ...*” Deu 11:26–28

Insert Mary into the path of blessing.

She came to Jesus with a humble heart and spiritual priorities. She made a wise decision that was based on her spiritual priorities, resulting in the good actions of sitting at His feet. The result was praise from the Lord.

Insert Martha into the path of cursing.

She storms out of the kitchen to confront Jesus with arrogance in her heart. Her priorities were selfish, physical, and worldly. She made a bad decision that led to wrong actions. The result was rebuke from the Lord. Every moment of every day, we set our heart on one path or the other.

Finally, we need to consider the last few words of Jesus in Luk 10:42, “*Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her*” (emphasis added).

There are so many things that can be taken from us in this life. We have worked in villages where cyclones have hit, robbing people of their homes, their gardens, and their loved ones. War robs us of our sons; disease robs us of our health; age robs us of beauty; and sin robs us of peace. In marriage, there is joy in the joining of two into one flesh, and then—too often by divorce—the pain of severing one flesh back into two. As citizens of a fallen world, we are subject to life with its nasty thievery!

When Jesus stated that Mary had chosen what could not be taken away from her, He confirmed to us the eternal and unbreakable relationship of a saved soul with its Redeemer. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the gift of eternal life; and that life cannot be taken from us. The relationship that Mary was building with Jesus by sitting at His feet was an eternal relationship based on His faithfulness, for “*God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1Co 1:9).

Jesus said, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Mat 6:19–21). We tend to look at this passage as a reward passage, but think how it applies to relationships. If our heart yearns and longs for relationship and fellowship with Jesus Christ, the building of that relationship becomes an eternal treasure. Nothing in this life can separate us from that relationship and His love for us.

Paul assures us of the steadfast nature of Christ’s love in Rom 8:35 when he asks the question, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*” Some or all of these things may be on the horizon of our life, for the future is unsure. But let our hearts be convinced with Paul that, “*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:38–39). That about covers it all, don’t you think?

This inseparable love sticks with us in prison camps and hospitals, through lonely nights and hurried days, through persecution and pain, suffering and joy, even through temptation, sin, and failure. This love leads us up the mountain of trial and through the valley of death. It compels us to live for something greater than ourselves and assures us of a heavenly eternity. The love of Jesus, and the relationship it buys for us, is the treasure that cannot be taken away!

There are so many spiritual gems and jewels found in this well-known Mary and Martha story. But in closing up this section, I want you to consider the magnitude of one moment. In one moment of one day, Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus while Martha chose not to. The choice of that one moment is recorded for all of eternity so that millions of people over centuries of time can read, ponder, and benefit from the choice of that moment. The seemingly insignificant choice of that moment has eternal weight and glory. Each day, God gives us 86,400 seconds or moments. A moment may seem inconsequential or slight, but it is weighty and glorious if that moment is spent at the feet of Jesus!

At the Feet of Jesus: Comfort and Glory!

My maternal grandmother was born in 1876, the 100th birthday of the United States of America. When she was born, a family member gave her a large glass platter commemorating the centennial year of America. It had the Liberty Bell engraved on it and the words, “United States of America, 1776–1876.” My firstborn son, Carson, was born in 1976, the 200th birthday of America. When Carson was born, that 100-year-old platter was passed on to me for safe keeping until he was old enough to receive it. For a while, I had it displayed on a table in my home until little hands were old enough to reach it, then I wrapped it in a quilt and put it on a high shelf in the closet for safe keeping. One winter night in Arkansas, the temperature dropped and I woke in the wee hours of the morning, cold and shivering. I went to the closet, stepped up on a stool, and reached for an extra quilt—not remembering that the platter was wrapped in that quilt. As I pulled down the quilt, the antique platter fell out, hit the tile floor, and shattered into a million tiny little pieces.

I just wonder, has your heart ever felt like that? Broken and shattered? As if it could never be made whole again. Mine has, and I would venture to say that every single one of us—either as a child or an adult, sometimes both—has suffered through something that has left our fragile heart feeling like that broken platter. For some of us, the hurts are very visible and public; for others they are hidden, blanketed, and private. Jesus is an omniscient God who sees it all and an omnipotent God who can put all the broken pieces back together. Thank you, Jesus!

God has a purpose for every hurt and suffering in our life, and we need to understand that purpose. He uses suffering as a megaphone to amplify to the world the condition of our soul. In every suffering that comes into our life, our attitudes and actions will either shout out to the world, “I trust God, I believe His plan is perfect in my life, and I will rest in faith,” or we will shout out to the world, “My God is a very small God, and I cannot trust Him.”

In this lesson, we are going to look at a woman who suffered a great loss and see the purpose that God had in that loss. Once again, our woman in the story is Mary of Bethany; and once again, we will find her at the feet of Jesus—a place of comfort and a place of glory. Her story is in John 11, and we will start with verses 1–6:

*“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent word to Him [Jesus], saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’ But when Jesus heard this, He said, ‘This sickness is not to end in death, **but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.**’ Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.”* (emphasis added)

At first glance, this narrative seems to not make sense. Jesus loved Lazarus and the girls; Lazarus is sick. Jesus is known in Scripture as the One who comes when we call, “*a very present help in time of trouble*” (Psa 46:1), and so He stays two days longer in the place where He was. What? This seems out of character for Jesus. But, as the passage unfolds to us, His purpose becomes clear. This passage is kind of like our life. Often God brings something into our life that is unpleasant, difficult, and painful. We cry out to God for help and deliverance, and He seems not to hear. But if we hang on, trust and wait, His purpose unfolds before our very eyes.

Now the disciples who are with Jesus also question His delay until in Joh 11:14, Jesus says to them plainly, “*Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.*”

As always, Jesus was in control. He knew exactly what was happening with Lazarus and his sisters, and He knew there was a greater purpose and outworking of His power waiting in the shadows. He even outlined to the disciples with Him the purpose for Lazarus’ suffering: that the Son of God would be glorified. He desired to unveil to them all the beauty of His glory! I would encourage you, as you read through Scripture and feed on its truths, take notice of the marriage between suffering and glory. You will find that in almost every passage where suffering is mentioned, there is also the promise of glory!

God has a purpose in our suffering, and His purpose is to bring glory to Him. Don’t we often talk about God’s glory, sing about it, and praise it? And then when we get into suffering situations, we often ask “Why, God?” When we ask why, we are asking the wrong question. The question we should ask is “what?” What do you want me to see in this situation? What do you have to teach me here? And His answer comes back to us from Scripture—My glory!

Consider Rom 8:18, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*”

Do you believe that to be true in your life? In whatever suffering situation you are facing now, or will face in the future, do you believe the glory of that situation can far outweigh the difficulty of it?

Consider also 2Co 4:17–18, “*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*”

This passage presents us with a clear comparison of affliction and glory. The afflictions we suffer in this life are light, while the glory gained is weighty. The affliction we suffer is temporal, while the glory

gained is eternal. No matter how long we may endure a suffering situation: days, weeks, years, decades, or even a lifetime, God says, compared to eternity our affliction is but a dot in time. Doesn't this passage put our life into perspective? Because of these comparisons, we should not fix our eyes on what is seen, but on what is not seen, for we walk by faith and not by sight!

So, Jesus finally decides to go to Bethany, which is near Jerusalem. When he arrives in Bethany, Martha runs out to meet Him while Mary remains in the home, being consoled by friends. We will pick up in Joh 11:21 with the conversation between Martha and Jesus:

“Martha then said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’”
Joh 11:21–26

This is a very clear presentation of the Gospel, as we would expect from Jesus Christ. He states the most powerful truth in the universe: that He gives eternal life to those who believe in Him! I love the simplicity of His words. Since we live in a day and age when Gospel truth is so distorted, it is refreshing to go back to the words of Jesus *“he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.”* We are in the Book of John—the **Gospel** of John; it is the most evangelistic book in the Bible. In the Book of John, the word “believe” is used almost 100 times. What is the way to forgiveness and eternal life? Believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior!

When Martha meets Jesus, her words sound a bit accusatory, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died,”* as if she is questioning His delay. And so He takes the opportunity to counsel her with words of assurance and hope: to bring her to a point of soul-surrender to the circumstances of her life. I say this because in Joh 11:32, Mary is going to say the exact same thing to Jesus, but the context of her words is very different. Let's look at the meeting of Jesus and Mary in Joh 11:31–35:

*“Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, **and fell at His feet**, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept.”* (emphasis added)

What I want you to see is that with Martha, Jesus counseled; but with Mary, He wept. As she fell at His feet, He could see the surrender of Mary's heart. Still she hurt, she wept, her heart felt the great loss of her dear brother; but she was surrendered to His sovereignty, purpose, and plan. And Jesus wept with her. He is the God of compassion and comfort, as Scripture says, *“Just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ”* (2Co 1:5).

I have lived long enough on this earth to know the sharp pain of a shattered heart, and the heavy weight of suffering. But I have also lived long enough to know that along with the suffering (that sometimes seems more than we can bear) comes the abundance of comfort and healing from God's heart and hand. Healing is a process; it takes time, just as the healing of our body takes time. But Jesus, our faithful Friend, is there in our suffering to weep with us, put His kind arms around us, and walk with us through the healing process until one day we wake up, and the brightness of the sunrise that for so long seemed dim is glorious, colorful, and full of hope once again. God is faithful!

As I reflect on times of heavy sorrow in my life, it seems as if God has a way of helping us forget the pain, while opening our eyes to His glory. I see the plan and the purpose that He had for everything that He brought me through. Did I mention God is faithful? But we can't hope to receive that comfort and healing, we can't hope to see His purpose if we are unwilling to surrender our pain and sorrow at His feet.

So, you know this ends with Jesus going with Mary, Martha, and the others to the tomb of Lazarus and raises him from the dead. Jesus said at the beginning of this story that He wanted them to see His glory. Did they see it? Absolutely! The raising of a man from the dead is glorious—a miracle that can only come from the hand of Him who has power over life and death.

The Hebrew word for glory means “weighty,” “important,” and the Greek word for glory means “radiance,” “brilliance.” Glory is the visible manifestation of the character of God. What Mary, Martha, and the others saw here was the power of Jesus Christ over the grave. They saw His glory displayed in bringing Lazarus back to life. In Joh 11:45, another glory is recorded: many people—having beheld what Jesus did—“*believed in Him!*” Lazarus had to die; Mary and Martha had to cry; but what was the fruit of their suffering: the salvation of many souls! That is glory!

Now let's consider something: I have a brother who died; Jesus didn't bring him back to life. I know marriages that have failed with no hope of healing, I know paraplegics who will never walk again and blind persons who will never see. I know these people cried out to God for help and deliverance, and still they are lonely, broken, lame, or blind. But God's design is not always to fix our problems; sometimes His design is to take us **through** our problems. When we see a person in a wheelchair, praise God for His faithfulness—the glory of God is there. When we see a divorced woman pick up and move on with her life in the grace of God—the glory of God is there. When we see a person who has lost a loved one declare with hope in their heart, “I will see my loved one again”—the glory of God is there. When we see a shattered heart smile again, we see the glory of God! Suffering, loss, and affliction surround us in this world, but so does the glory of God! The glory of God shines brightest in the darkness of suffering. Darkness flees from the light, and Jesus is the Light of the World. His glory is bright and heavy and brilliant, and He wants us to manifest His glory in each and every situation. If we have a song of God's glory in the midst of our suffering, others will want to know a reason for the hope that is in us, and maybe come to Jesus Christ (1Pe 3:15).

But all of this takes a surrendered heart and submission to His plan and purpose. Submission is not the dirty word the world makes it out to be; submission is the response of a soul to love. Submission is living at the feet of Jesus. When we realize how much Jesus loves us, submission is a natural faith response.

Let's look at how these principles were displayed in the life of Jesus Christ. Consider Joh 12:23, "*And Jesus answered them saying, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'*"

What is the context of this bold Messianic statement? These words are spoken toward the end of His life on earth, shortly before all of the traumatic events of the Passion Week. What is interesting about this statement is what Jesus says and what He doesn't say! He doesn't say, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be deserted, betrayed, arrested, beaten, scourged, stripped, mocked, shamed, crucified, and pierced through with the sins of the world." No, Jesus only says, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" He focuses only on the imminent glory! It's as if there was a deep valley of suffering before Him but He looked beyond that valley to gaze on the mountain of glory! We need to learn to have that same perspective. Jesus is our forerunner in the faith.

We are living in trying times. We have the daily tests and trials that come with life in a fallen world, that come with our roles as wives, mothers, servants, workers, and women of faith. In addition, we face an uncertain future as a nation. I am not a prophet, but I am quite certain that there are greater tests, trials, and sufferings ahead of us. We need to look to the future and not focus on the valley of suffering, but on the mountaintop of glory that awaits us when we walk by faith! God cares about our circumstances, but He cares more about our character; and He is pleased when our character reflects His own! Let us strive to manifest His character in the calm and in the chaos, in the peace and in the pain, that He might be glorified!

Since we are speaking about dealing with a broken heart and bringing glory to God in the midst of that hurt, I would like to close this section with a look at Isaiah 61, one of my favorite passages of Scripture:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" Isa 61:1

In the context, this is Isaiah speaking about himself, but in the prophetic sense it is Isaiah speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One anointed by God to bring Good News to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners! We are not talking about people enslaved behind bars in a jail; we are talking about people who are captive to their circumstances and the pain of a broken heart. They cannot set themselves free. Jesus is the One sent to set us free.

When the verse says "*sent*," it is the Hebrew word *shalak*, meaning "to shoot forth as an arrow." Jesus the Savior, whose heart was pierced through with our sins, is now saying to us, "I can shoot an arrow deep into your heart, that healing may begin." We pierced His heart with sin, but He pierces our heart with comfort. What a Savior! His job description is to bind up our wounds. Years ago, my husband and I went through EMT training, and we learned the first thing to do with a severe wound is to apply pressure to stop the bleeding. As soon as our heart is broken, Jesus is there to come in and bind up our wounds to begin the healing process.

And then consider Isa 61:3, "*To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.*"

This verse is full of pictures and promise. This verse is full of contrast between what life does to us and what Jesus comes to do for us. In this world, we mourn as if with sackcloth and ashes, but Jesus gives the oil of gladness. In this world, we often feel like fainting, giving in, and giving up; but Jesus moves in with a mantle (coat) of praise. He wants us to stand in the suffering of this world as “*oaks of righteousness*” for His glory! That term, “*oaks of righteousness*,” indicates righteous conduct that issues from a new heart. Jesus is the One able to come in and exchange our suffering for garlands and gladness, strength and spiritual fruit for one eternal purpose—His glory! When you hurt, fall at the feet of Jesus!

At the Feet of Jesus: Service and Sacrifice

This is going to be our last look at Mary of Bethany in Scripture. We have seen her in Luke 7 coming to the feet of Jesus as a place of forgiveness. In Luke 10, we saw Mary at the feet of Jesus as a place of fellowship and learning. Then in John 11, we saw Mary surrendered at the feet of Jesus in a time of sorrow and loss to find His comfort and hope. Now we are going to look at living at the feet of Jesus as a place of service and sacrifice.

One of the places my husband and I work is the little village of Numba in the mountains of Papua New Guinea. Several years ago, we visited there shortly after a huge cyclone had hit and devastated the area. Some of the villages were swept away in the flooding; gardens and food supplies were destroyed through mudslides; homes and property were lost. This happened to a clan of people that struggle to survive at the best of times, carving out a simple living from the jungle around them. One weekend during this visit, we were invited to another village about three hours’ hike away. On Saturday, I taught the women while Gene taught the men; then on Sunday morning, we joined them in their regular service. At the end of the worship service, they gifted us with an offering. As they gave us the money, they said, “We know it has been very difficult for you to come here and we want you to take the money and do something nice for yourself.”

Now, my husband and I are supported and are able to do ministry because of the generous grace gifts of God’s people. But previous to this time, support had only come from the United States and Australia. Never before had the people we go to minister to, ministered back to us in a financial way. And considering their own poverty-stricken financial state, basic standard of living, and recent natural disaster, the beauty of this offering was stunning! It brought us to tears. The offering was mostly coins and added up to about \$38, but these people had given out of poverty from a thankful heart. We received their offering with appreciation but told them it would not be wasted on us; we would bring it to India to minister to the children there. So this little group of poor village Christians was then able to reach across the ocean to touch the children of India with the Gospel of God’s grace. This is one of the most beautiful examples of love and sacrifice that we have ever seen.

From there, I went to another part of that same village to teach a Sunday school class. When I walked into the bamboo church, the children were already gathered and singing a song that goes like this:

*“I’m free, I’m free, I’m free, I’m free; I’m free to be a servant of the Lord.
I’m free, I’m free, I’m free, I’m free; I’m free to be a servant of the Lord.
He taught me how to praise Him, He taught me how to sing a song,
He taught me how to loooooove; I’m free to be a servant of the Lord.”*

At that point in the song, they count to 10 and go around shaking hands and greeting the other children around them, and then start the refrain all over again.

It was just the cutest thing! Imagine this with me: a simple little bamboo church with dirt floor and board “pews” filled with raggedy little children, dirty faces, bare feet, unwashed second-hand clothes, stomachs distended from poor diet, and . . . big, bright, happy smiles! Together, they are passionately singing this beautiful little song. Throughout their lives, these little children will sleep in the cold, bathe in the river, eat what they can grow, cook over the fire, receive a minimal education, and probably never travel further than 50 miles from where they were born. But, they are free to be a servant of the Lord. Nothing restrains us from that opportunity!

With this story as an introduction, let’s look at the last story of Mary of Bethany, found in Mar 14:1–9. In the gospels, we find this same “anointing story” in John 12 and Matthew 26. We will look at the story from Mark 14, but make some comparisons with the other passages. Mark 14 happens just days before the crucifixion of Jesus, as He has just told the disciples that His end was near (Mat 26:1–2).

Let’s start with Mar 14:1–3:

“Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him; for they were saying, ‘Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.’ While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.”

Once again, use your imagination to fully picture this setting. Out on the streets of Jerusalem, there is plotting and scheming by men intent on having Jesus put to death. But within the walls of Simon’s home, there is a young woman intent on showing Jesus her greatest expression of love before it’s too late. This passage does not identify her, but John 12 tells us that Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus, Martha is serving, and it is Mary who brings the precious vial. John also includes that Mary of Bethany not only poured the vial of nard over His head, but also anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. Once again, she takes her place at the feet of Jesus.

For Mary, to wipe Jesus’ feet with her hair is significant. In the culture of this day, only the immoral women would let their hair down in public. Yet, we know that when Mary first came to Jesus in Luke 7, she was the immoral woman. Now she has had time with Jesus to heal, to grow, and to move on from her former manner of life. Yet, in these last moments of worship between her and her Lord, she once again lets her hair down to wipe His feet. Perhaps she is again remembering the soul freedom she found in His forgiveness. We are always to live in light of our so-great salvation!

This vial of pure nard is also important in several ways. The value of the vial and its contents is significant, costing around a year’s wage. Whatever your income is for one year, think of investing that much money, not in the stock market, not squandered on a shopping spree or spent on the trip of a lifetime, but all of that money going into the purchase of one vial that would soon be broken. Significant? Amen! The size of the vial is also noteworthy as it did not contain just a drop or two of oil, but about a pint! As God lavishes His grace on us, Mary lavished the oil onto Jesus—not withholding

one precious drop. She poured it **all** onto Him! Finally, the effect of the pure nard is significant as John tells us that *“the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume”* (Joh 12:3). Remember, Jesus said to the Pharisee in Luke 7, *“He who is forgiven much, loves much.”* Mary demonstrates for us the truth of that statement.

Now, during this great act of service and sacrifice, there are other people in the room. While Mary is pouring out her heart in worship, some of them are pouring out a heart of complaint. In Mar 14:4–5 it says, *“But some were indignantly remarking to one another, ‘Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her.”* Our passage here in Mark does not mention the source of the scolding, but John tells us it was Judas Iscariot.

Jesus, on the other hand, speaks up in her defense for He knows the purity of Mary’s heart. He knows she has done this great act of sacrifice in preparation for His burial. Mary gets it! She was listening to the words of Jesus when He spoke of His imminent death. Everyone else was simply at a dinner party, but Mary was reflecting on the closeness of His death, knowing that there was little time left to pour out the passion in her heart! The Bible says, *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Mat 6:21). Judas’ treasure was the money bag, and his heart was in the money bag. But Mary’s treasure was Jesus, and her heart was poured out at His feet.

In Mar 14:6–9, Jesus speaks and says, *“Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”*

I love it when we see the truth of the Bible displayed in life today. As Jesus said, two thousand years later in a world far from Jerusalem, we are talking about this woman’s deed. Wherever we go in the world, we see women sacrificially serving in their home—lovingly serving their husband and children. We see them serving in the church and community through prayer, witness, giving, loving, and sharing. As diverse as the world’s women are, so is the diversity of their service. But it seems to me, that women love to serve. We looked at the rebuke of Jesus to Martha when she was serving in Luke 10, but in this passage we see His praise for **good deeds** of service, service done in the love of Christ. He expresses this praise in three pertinent statements that will encourage us:

First, in Mar 14:6, He says, *“She has done a good deed to Me.”* The Bible tells us that good deeds adorn a woman’s life. Each day, we normally do something to adorn our outer person; we wash and brush our hair, choose attractive clothes, and maybe put on some jewelry or makeup. But far more precious to God is our inner adornment. Good deeds adorn our inner life. In 1Ti 2:9–10, it says, *“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of **good works**, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness”* (emphasis added). So here, Paul tells us that good deeds are the beauty of a woman’s soul.

In Rev 19:8, we are encouraged with a description of our eternal wedding day. In that passage, we find that it is given to the bride of Christ to be clothed in *“fine linen”* garments, *“bright and clean,”* and

“the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” How encouraging to know that when we serve with the love of Christ, we are decorating our eternal wedding gown!

Now, is everything that we do a good deed in God’s sight? Well, as we saw in Luke 10, Martha was serving, but her soul was not in a beautiful state. Rather, she was *“bothered and worried about so many things,”* and Jesus rebuked her. The Pharisees were also rebuked for praying and giving just to be praised by man. Clearly, not every deed is called by God a *“good deed.”* If we serve for our own glory, in our own power, and without His love, our service does not qualify for God’s praise—but is as wood, hay, and stubble, and will only be burned in eternity (see 1Co 3:11–15). But if we serve for the glory of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the compelling force of the love of Christ, we can rest assured that our service is precious in God’s sight and rewarded in eternity.

Then, in Mar 14:8, Jesus says about Mary, *“she has done what she could.”* This has got to be one of the most uplifting statements Jesus could make to a woman. As women, we often become very task oriented, take on too many jobs, and then beat ourselves up for not getting them all done. We try to turn our life into a list and become frustrated when we didn’t get enough items crossed off before bedtime. As women, we want to be a good housekeeper, present and active in the lives of our husband and children, and also serve in the church for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. In addition, many women today work outside the home. But we can’t always do everything! Jesus only asks us *“to do what we can.”* So if you are doing what you can to serve in the present circumstances of your life, take this statement of Jesus as an encouragement, and let your heart rest. But we also need to consider the flip side of this statement: are we doing what we can in sacrifice and service to Jesus? Or are we just living for self? That is something to be prayed about and considered between you and the Lord.

Finally, Jesus says, *“... wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”* History is *“His story,”* and He is still writing the saga of the service of His saints. He’s writing a story of our life, and those *“good deeds”* done on earth will stand as reward for all of eternity, bringing glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That’s motivation, isn’t it?

What an awesome God we serve! He notices our small acts of kindness; He is mindful and attentive to our actions as individuals—even the serving of a cup of cold water to a child! He does the work through us, and then gives us the eternal reward—for His glory! Isn’t it one of the great ironies of this universe that those who humble themselves at the feet of Jesus will be exalted for all of eternity?

So this is the sacrifice Mary made. If you have been picturing the activities of this dinner, I want you to now take everyone else out of the picture and leave just Jesus and Mary. She has poured this large amount of oil onto His hair until it was probably saturated, dripping down onto His skin and into His clothing, wetting His feet. Remember, this is just days before His crucifixion.

Here in Western culture, we bathe daily and wash our hair frequently as well, but in the days of Jesus that would not be the case. I doubt that Jesus washed His hair every day. So, two days later when Jesus goes to the Garden to pray and no one is able, or willing, to stay awake with Him, what fragrance followed Him into that Garden? When He was arrested, beaten, and scourged, and the smell of sweat and blood was upon His skin, what else do you suppose He smelled? Perhaps the fragrance of Mary’s offering. Then, as He took that long walk to Golgotha where His hands and feet were cruelly pierced

and He hung upon that cross, I wonder if the fragrance of that same spikenard lingered through the crucifixion.

Consider Eph 5:1–2, “*Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a **fragrant aroma***” (emphasis added). The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was “*a fragrant aroma*” to God the Father in Heaven; and as Jesus hung on the cross, Mary’s sacrifice was “*a fragrant aroma*” to Him. What does that have to do with us today? Consider 2Co 2:14–16, “*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?*” We are to be “*a fragrance of Christ to God among*” both the saved and the unsaved world.

As Mary poured out this ointment onto the head of Jesus, as she wiped His feet with her hair, the fragrance of the precious ointment engulfed them both. Because she was in such close proximity to the Savior, His smell became her smell. As we live at the feet of Jesus for forgiveness, for teaching, for fellowship, and for comfort, we begin to manifest the “*sweet aroma*” of Christ to those around us. His heart becomes our heart to show love and compassion to those around us. His feet become our feet to go and tell, and to make disciples of all nations. His hands become our hands to reach out with His love to the lost, the abused, the sick, and the forsaken. And His fragrance becomes our fragrance. Isn’t it a wonderful thought that the fragrance of Jesus Christ could live in us, and that His fragrance could reach to Heaven where God the Father is pleased?

In closing, I would like to share something that happened to me in India when I was there for children’s ministry. I was coming out of my hotel room one morning, and a Hindu woman—who worked as a cleaner at the hotel—approached me and fell at my feet, crying, touching her hand to her lips and then my feet as if to kiss them, and looking at me with desperation in her eyes. Her cries were mixed with pleas of some kind as she was poor, pregnant, and looked at me as someone who might be able to help. Of course, she was speaking Telugu, and I was not able to understand her words, nor was I able to communicate back to her. Every part of what was happening made me so uncomfortable because none of us are worthy for another human being to fall at our feet. But Jesus is. Let’s fall at the feet of the Lamb who is worthy!