

“Following Jesus”

John 12: 1-8, 23-26

11/14/21

Discussion Guide

Read the passage to prepare for the discussion. Imagine you witnessed Mary's actions. What thoughts would have raced through your mind?

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then 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.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ “Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages” ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”....

²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Read over the questions and pick and choose the ones you want to discuss the most. You can't do them all so be selective.

1. This passage provides an example of and teaching on what it means to be a disciple. Of the four actions mentioned, which one is the most challenging for you: abandon your pride, discern his death, give to God everything, or give “in” to God?
2. What does it mean to abandon our pride? Mary humbled herself in a jaw-dropping way. Translate her action in today's terms. Make a list of all the menial tasks people consider nasty, disgusting and definitely not something a self-respecting person would do. Thinking in these terms, how amazing were Mary's act of humility?
3. Jesus never asked Mary to wash and anoint his feet. It's something she did spontaneously out of love for him. Have you ever been so moved by God that you responded in a way that was extravagant or that later you felt embarrassed by? Maybe you felt you went overboard but at the time, it was a genuine act of devotion.
4. Share a story of a Christian you heard of who gave a gift to Jesus that was similar to the gift Mary gave.

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5. It's stewardship time. Stewardship Sunday is the lowest attended Sunday of the year. Pledging is something fewer and fewer people do today. Why do you think that is?

Less than 4% of Christians tithe. We live in a very prosperous country and have far more than most countries. Yet we struggle to give generously to God and others. Why is that? If you are vulnerable enough, share your own struggles with giving.
6. What are ways we can show mercy and grace to others? What is grace and mercy as defined by the Pastor?
7. Why are you following Jesus? What is your motivation? Have you witnessed people following Jesus for one of the other reasons mentioned in the sermon: nostalgia, bargaining, and guilt?
8. React to this statement: *“Follow Jesus for any of these reasons and it'll wear you out, burn you out, or turn you off. If you follow Jesus as a way of bargaining with God, all that needs to happen is for God to fail you and you'll give up. You'll conclude that this religious stuff is just bogus. It doesn't work. All of these motivations for following Jesus are either too half-hearted or too crushing.”*
9. What kind of family did you grow up in, were they generous givers, moderately generous, or not givers at all? How did your family give? Did they give monetarily to God and charities? Did they give of their time and talents to the church or charitable organizations? To what degree did your family go out of its way to help one another? ... Others outside the family?

What have you decided in your own life when it comes to giving? What would it look like for us to be as radically generous as Mary?
10. Make a list of the treasures we have in Christ.
11. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: *“The hardest thing for people to give to God is “in”?* What has been the hardest area of your life for you to give in to God?
12. A growing trend today is for fewer and fewer people to be involved in the ministry of the church. More and more churches hire people to do the church's ministry for them. Is this trend healthy? Why is this the trend occurring? What can we do about it?
13. Read the following passage and discuss it: *“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (vss. 24-26)*

End by listening to the hymn: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. Take in its message. It captures well what a follower of Jesus is called to be and do.