

# Be Like Mary

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**Bible Text:** John 12:1-8  
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I'm going to suspend our study through 1 Timothy to look this morning at John 12. Would you go there? John 12 and we will look at verses 1 through 8. The Gospel of John, chapter 12, verses 1 through 8. I simply entitle this exposition "Be Like Mary." Be like Mary. John 12, beginning in verse 1.

1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" 6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. 7 Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

Now in this day like in our day, there were basically four types of people. First of all, there were those folks who hated Jesus from the beginning, primarily typified by the religious authorities of Israel. From the beginning as Jesus did his miracles and taught with authority, they saw him as an enemy, a rival, someone who might steal away their control over the people.

So first of all, there are those who pretty much disliked him, rejected him from the beginning. Secondly, there were those folks and a lot of them early on, who admired him and followed him and to some degree called themselves his disciples but primarily for the free food and the wonderful miracles. I mean, they were getting their bellies full and the sick were being healed and the dead were being raised. It was fantastic and as long as the show continued and the blessings kept flowing, they were in on it but they were not true disciples. As Jesus nears the cross, they begin to fall away.

Then there was a third group, I believe genuinely converted disciples of Jesus Christ but shallow in their understanding. They loved him, they believed he was God's Messiah, they were following him but they just didn't get it yet.

Then there was the fourth group, also genuine believers, genuine disciples, loved Christ but had begun to grasp what he was about. They began to get it, that is, they understood the cross and were not offended by it and did not stumble over it.

Be like Mary. Mary was one of the fourth group. Mary loved Christ. She was a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ like Lazarus and like Martha, but I think unlike them she grasped what this time in history meant. She understood what he was about to do. She saw his body as the literal guilt offering for her sin and the sins of his people.

Now first of all, let's notice in our text, I., Jesus' total devotion to give his body or in giving his body to build his church. I want you to notice the emphasis here on the body and here's where the liberal theologians and the liberal pastors miss it. They begin to emphasize Jesus as a good teacher, a moral crusader, the highest example of unselfishness. Well, he was certainly that but he was far more than that. Jesus was God in a literal human body, a literal, pure, righteous, sinless body that would literally and actually be crucified and literally and actually receive the wrath of God in his body in our place. If you lose the literal death of Christ for our sins – listen to me – you lose Christianity.

The cross. Jesus came dedicating himself to that. He has left his retreat at Ephraim. He's begun his march to Jerusalem and to the cross. The Passover begins in about a week and he chooses to break his journey here at Bethany. Now it's interesting, he's ending his ministry in this narrative and we look back, he begins his ministry at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and it was an occasion bright with anticipation. Jesus turns the water into wine. There he proclaims to Mary, his earthly mother, that he must be departing from her and his loyalty to her as his mother and yield himself fully and wholly to his heavenly Father's will for his life. That was necessary because she yet could not understand that, "My boy has grown up to be crucified."

The common folks are convinced he's the Messiah come to usher in a promise of a new Israel. As one scholar said, quote, "He's bringing the new wine of the kingdom into the tired, insipid waters of Israel." But this feast day in Bethany at Mary and Martha and Lazarus' house has a much different tone than the wedding at Cana of Galilee. Dark clouds are amassing on the horizon and there is a burden on the heart of Jesus. The celebration is muted. The talk now is not of new life and a new kingdom but of his coming death and his burial. The cross is just a week away.

You see, the cross is the reason he came. Revelation 13:8 reminds us that he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. His sinless body was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary so that he could one day yield up that body as a guilt offering for sin. John 6:38, Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Isaiah prophesied of the Father's will concerning Jesus.

Isaiah 53:10, "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." The cross is not an ambulance sent to the scene of an accident. The cross is the purpose and intention of Almighty God from the foundation of the world to save his children. And how did he do it? Through this precious body. 1 Peter 2:24, and he, "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross."

He became man that this holy and sinless body might be treated as if he were sinful, as if he were a traitor to God, as if he were the greatest of transgressors. He was treated that way because he bore our judgment and his heart was fully devoted to this purpose of his Father, therefore his body was fully dedicated to serve the purposes of God in building his church.

The time set from the foundation of the world has now come. Now he resolutely sets his face like flint toward Jerusalem, but of all things, first he must stop at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Something's going to happen here to this precious body of his, preparing him for his coming death.

Now look at verse 2, if you will, for just a moment in John 12. "So they made Him a supper there, Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him." What a symbol this setting is of Jesus' divine authority and of hope. Lazarus is reclining at the table. It's a wonder that all who are present are not on their faces worshiping him and honoring him. Lazarus just a few days ago was dead, I mean graveyard dead, and Jesus brought him back from the dead. Now they're just sitting around eating at the table. What more evidence would anyone need to convince them that he was the Messiah, the Son of God?

That reminds us that during Jesus' earthly ministry, he brought in his trail a stream of miracles, miracles which are typical of the future kingdom he will one day establish on the earth. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He raised the dead. He spoke the wisdom of God. But now's not the time for the final and full establishment of the kingdom on the earth. That's coming later. The miracles and the wonders and the glories and the signs Jesus performed, if you will, were just a preview of coming attractions of what will be commonplace in the earth when he returns to rule and his scepter reign over all of the globe.

By this time, certainly there could be no doubt who he, that rather he was who he claimed to be but now it is time for his sacrificial death for sin. This is his Father's will and he has totally devoted his body to the cross to fulfill his Father's purposes to build his church.

Now let's come to Mary and let's notice Mary's total devotion to Christ's body for the sake of building the church, and we see Mary's devotion come out in two ways, or at least I would like to describe it in two ways. Number 1, first of all, we see Mary's lavish gift. An incredible gift.

Look, if you will, at the text there and the Bible says in verse 3, "Mary then took a pound," that was a, a, a, a, Roman pound of the day which would be about 12 ounces

today, "of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Now this was not just any perfume. This was a very special exotic perfume, and in those days they would always mix the fragrance with an oil and that's the way it was anointed on the body. It was called a very costly perfume. The text bears out that it was the equivalent of about 11 months' wages for the average worker. Can you imagine almost a year's salary in this perfume and she pours it on the feet of Jesus.

Judas exclaims, "Why is she doing this? Why, we could've done so much good for the poor!" Then the narrative tells us he wasn't concerned about the poor, he was the treasurer of the disciples and he used to pilfer money out of the treasury box. But you understand this is not a perfume you could pick up down at the Bethany Walmart or even the Bethany Dillard's. You might get it at the Village Shop but they'd have to special order it and take a retainer upfront. This is expensive stuff. It shows the lavishness of her gift. I believe with all of my heart that Mary knew this day what was coming and she had been working and saving and doing all she could to give this gift to Christ, to anoint this precious body with this extravagant gift of perfume.

So it was an, a lavish, even extravagant gift. Secondly, notice it, the love she has for God's purposes. Now I use "God's purposes" because I think that's vitally important, certainly a love for God, but you can't love God and not rejoice in and love his purposes, and if you truly love God's purposes, you love the God whom the purposes flowed out of because his purposes match his character and his attributes. You can't love one without the other and that's what I'm telling you about Mary. I believe she was one of the few that loved him genuinely but was beginning to understand the purpose of God through the cross and in that great love she did what she did.

Look at verse 7, if you will, as she's pouring this perfume on and Judas Iscariot is rebuking, Jesus rebukes Judas and says, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial." Now I'm convinced Mary undoubtedly, of course, knew Jesus' death was near and many other loyal followers had stumbled over that truth. Remember, ah, when Jesus first told the disciples about his coming death in Jerusalem, Peter, the Bible says, takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him, and then Jesus in return rebukes Peter and says, "Get behind Me, Satan, for you're setting your mind on man's interest and not God's." In other words, "Peter, you don't get it yet. I believe you love Me, Peter, but right now you're thinking like a worldly man. You're trying to serve Me like the world would want to serve Me. You're thinking the way Satan would have you think. Peter, you don't yet understand what I'm about."

So many had stumbled over his coming death but Mary grasped it and Mary, I'm convinced, embraces it. This is not a silly, emotionally-charged woman losing all control and lavishing this extravagant, expensive gift on another. No, this is total devotion and this lavish gift is the result of one simple truth: Mary stayed at the feet of Jesus listening to his word, hearing his teaching. The Spirit enabled her to grasp the centrality of his work, the cross.

Now Luke 10 is another narrative of this same event and it gives an insight that I think is very interesting. In Luke 10 beginning in verse 38. I think it'll be, yes, it's on your screen. "Now as they were traveling along, He entered a 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," notice the personal pronoun "with all her preparations," "and she came up to Him," that's Jesus, "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," now when you get two Martha's, it's serious, "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." You remember, meatloaf Martha and meditating Mary? Jesus comes into the house and Martha I believe loved the Lord, a true disciple, but she was so busy in getting everything ready and getting everything right and getting everything proper and fixed, and Mary's out there doing nothing, sitting at the feet of Jesus. And Martha comes to the door of the kitchen and into the dining area, she's got a spray of flour on her cheek and she's got beads of perspiration coming out on her forehead and her face is red but not just from the heat in the kitchen but over Mary not doing anything. "Here I am doing all this service for God and Mary doesn't even care, not even helping. Lord, rebuke her." And Lord rebukes Martha. You see, Martha at this point in her shallowness was proud of her service for Christ and Mary was devoted to being with Christ.

Can I just say a side note to you ladies concerning hospitality? I, I talked to Pam about this, how when I was a little boy growing up we went to visit a family in another state and they were family friends, and all week long my mom fretted over the visit because she knew how much the lady of the house we were going to visit was fretting over us coming. She said, "She will be cleaning. She will be scrubbing walls. She will be cleaning out closets. She'll buy a new lamp to match the den better. She will just be..." And she would just do all this stuff and we were all a nervous wreck by the time we got there. The woman of the house was a nervous wreck, we were a nervous wreck. I don't know Martha's heart but make sure when you're entertaining guests it's about them and not about you. They just want to feel loved and welcome. They don't need a performance.

Well, we're kind of bent that way, though, aren't we? We all have some of the Martha, Martha in us. Don't get two Martha's from the Lord. You don't want two Martha's. No offense to any of you ladies named Martha, of course. But I want you to look at verse 39. Here's the key to the difference at this point in their spiritual pilgrimage between Mary and Martha. Martha's busy, busy, busy doing stuff, verse 39, "She had a sister called Mary who was seated at the Lord's feet listening to His word." It's the Scripture. It's the word that showed Martha what was important, or rather Mary what was important. Mary grasped these things. She was spiritually discerning. She was listening to the teaching of Jesus. She understands proper service for the Lord is always according to his word, not according to our emotions and our activities.

There's a whole lot of busy stuff. What if all of our churches got rid of everything that God didn't really need us doing? Now I do want to understand something in balance here.

The way the Greek is constructed, it doesn't mean that Martha's evil and Mary's righteous, it just means Martha or Mary's doing what is best and Martha's doing less than best at this moment because, by the way, there's a lot of hard work and perspiration in the kingdom but there's a time for everything.

So meatloaf Martha was serving Jesus in harmony and complete obedience to her own thoughts about how service ought to be. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus saying, "Thy will be done. What would You have me to do?" So Mary understanding God's word does what? Mary takes this lavish gift of extravagantly costly perfume and she anoints the feet of Jesus, cleaning his feet with her hair. Now it was the custom of the day to splash perfume on the feet of your guests. It was just a gesture of niceness and welcome but she goes way, way over and above that because I believe Mary understood something, I believe Mary understood this is the precious body of my atonement. Not just the idea of Jesus, not just his teaching as wonderful as it is, not just his example of unselfishness, and that is certainly true, but far greater than that and far beyond that, Mary said, "This is the body of the Incarnate Son of God given on a cross for my sin. There's not enough I can do for this body." Jesus actually in a kind way says, "Martha, you don't get it yet," but he says to Mary, "Mary, you get it. You understand that centers in this body being yielded up on the cross for sins."

III. Our devotion to Christ's body. Our devotion to Christ's body. I believe Mary's example in John 12 is a model of ministry for all Christians of all ages. Now you might say, "Well, how am I gonna minister to the body? Jesus is not here in Incarnate form?" Are you sure? Are you sure that he's not here in Incarnate form? Let me just give you a few verses. 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." Romans 12:5, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partakers of one bread." Ephesians 5:30, "We are members of His body." Colossians 1:18, "He is also head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." Ephesians 1:22-23, "He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The point: service to Christ's body is our service to the church body because it's the church's commission – now listen to me – to continual, to continue rather the purpose of God that Christ started and is continuing yet now through his body, his church.

My question to you is: "Martha, do you get it?" Do you get it? We must look at what the Scripture says and follow the Scripture. In a simple way, what are we to do, pastor, to show a real total devotion to Christ? You find a scripturally sound local church and devote yourself to service to God there. I can say to you after being pastor here for all these years, and I say it with bold confidence that if you will give generously to support the work of Jesus by giving through this local church, I believe you're walking in the Spirit of Mary in the sense that you get what God's about. He's about building his church now through the agency of his body, the church.

Where we are today at Grace Life Church of the Shoals has taken decades of hard work. We've endured many attacks and many critics, many underminings but isn't it wonderful that God has sustained us? And God has used the aggressions of those who tried to discourage us as nothing but spiritual fertilizer to grow us deeper and stronger. We have by God's grace fought the good fight. We've endured the long, hard grind to establish by God's enablement a spiritually, scripturally sound church. We've established a sound theology or a holding to sound doctrine in our church. We've established sound doctrine on what the local church really is, what it's to be about. We've established sound doctrine concerning what is true evangelism and what is true conversion. We've established sound doctrine about church membership instead of having hundreds even thousands on rolls that don't even come to church. We've established sound doctrine about body life in the church and that every member ought to be ministering through a small group. That's the reality of true regeneration. We've established the sound doctrine of biblical church discipline and accountability, always with love, of course, within the body of Christ. We've established the sound doctrine that the preaching of the word of God in the power of the Spirit is the centerpiece of God's work in the church and even in the world. We've established the sound doctrine of a biblically strategic and personalized world missions that, by the way, even in recent weeks God has blessed beyond my comprehension. Our influence today without exaggeration is numbered not in the tens of thousands but even reaching the hundreds of thousands.

God's blessing what we've been about and my point is just as a church family, like Mary, how thankful we should be but not just for your local church, let's just think about being thankful for a moment about everything. I'm just gonna speak of some things. We have the Scriptures. That's the word of God. How thankful we should be. The Savior gave his body over to the cross for us. How thankful we should be. The new birth which is a miracle gift of God to each of us. The Holy Spirit. The fellowship of our local church. What about our spouses? Our children? Our grandchildren? Our great grandchildren? How thankful we should be. The jobs we have. The vehicles. Our homes. Furnishings. Even our trials and hardships and I know some of you are there right now, trials and hardships that God always turns inside out and ultimately makes them a blessing for us. The Second Coming of Christ. Heaven. The country we live in. The simple joys. A pet. A hug. A kind word. A thoughtful deed. And I could go on and on and on and on. How thankful we should be.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that if the stars of the celestial heavens only appeared one night in a thousand years, one time every thousand years, if you happened to be alive on that night and saw those stars, you would be filled with thanksgiving that you got to experience that. Such gratitude would fill your heart, you'd never get over it. But as it is, we are flooded with so much abundance of blessings, we forget the marvel of what he's given us and the wonder of his blessings.

My habit on Sunday morning is not to listen to anything but preaching on my way to church. I got in my truck and begin to back out of the garage and the radio was on a sports station and literally I said to myself, "Oh, dear God, is there not more than that on Sunday?" And I like sports but there's something better than football or basketball or

whatever else it is. And almost every Sunday when I listen to some preacher, and I just find a preacher, sometimes I endure it but almost always he gives me something. This morning David Jeremiah was preaching and he told this story and he said there was a man that he knew who had just lost his oldest son to death, and he had been through a long, long process of struggle with his wife who had dementia, and at the end of it this man had almost lost his faith. So he got away to a remote place and took his Bible and a notepad and he began to pray and fast and somehow in the process he wrote down 10 things he was thankful for, and as he looked at those 10 things and thought over them and prayed over them, his heart was filled with new joy, new gratitude, and new hope. Two key words, two key words, two key words: cultivate thankfulness. Work at it. Cultivate thankfulness. There's so very very much to be thankful for.

I think if you're a member of Grace Life Church, you have a lot to be thankful for. We're still repenting, we're still learning, we're still growing but there's a lot of things on track here that are far, far, far too rare in churches today. We have much to be thankful for. So I'm gonna close with these two brief exhortations for us. This year at our Christmas love offering, I challenge you to be like Mary. 1. Let's all be like Mary in spirit. She gave out of a love for Christ and a love for the purposes of God that were being accomplished there right before her. She was like the saints mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Paul writes to the church at Corinth and says, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God," by the grace of God this was happening, "which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction," now notice this, "their abundance of joy," they're deeply afflicted, they're going through terrible trials and they're full of joy about it. Only Christians get that. "And their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints." These were local churches supporting another local church. It's all about the church. "And this, not as we had expected," now here he says, here's the key, "but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." That was Mary's spirit. She had given herself to the Lord. He's all that mattered. Nothing compared to him. So let's all give like Mary in spirit out of a love for God and a love for his Son Jesus Christ and a love for his purposes through his church.

Now for some maybe you need to purpose to give like Mary in quantity. In quantity. This is almost a year's wages in perfume that was poured out on his feet. Do you know what Mary did? Listen to me, Mary did not give by calculation, she gave out of adoration. Not calculation but adoration. Now I want to be balanced, this is not an absolute truth for the church for all ages. As far as we know, Mary never gave like this before and it's probable she never gave like this again. This was just a time in history. God was there Incarnate. She grasped, "This precious body has been given for my sins." She didn't calculate, "Well, if Martha gives this much and Lazarus will give this much, and by the way, he's raised from the dead, he ought to, and if I give this amount and then the 12 disciples kick in and give this amount, we can calculate that all that up and here's the gift we will give." No, no, no, no. No. No. No. It didn't matter to Mary if anyone else did anything else. She can't help it. What this Christ has done for her demanded everything she had.



I'm not saying that giving by calculation is always wrong but it often is. I challenge you to give out of adoration and maybe this year's Christmas love offering, there was one of you, there's some of you that will be like Mary and throw everything to the wind and say, "I want to give to show my deep love for my Savior and do something extravagant for His body like Mary did for the body of Jesus." And as always, well, let me say this: I don't look at what people in the church give. I'm not saying it would be wrong to, I just don't do it. I, I don't know what you give but last time I looked at giving, I was looking at the staff's giving and that was many, many, many years ago to make sure they were living what we profess to live before our people. I can say this, you're welcome to go to our elders and look at my giving anytime you would like but don't calculate my salary because it's far more than a tithe. I don't say that to be braggadocios, it's just the discipline Pam and I have developed. But make sure you give not grudgingly or under compulsion. As the Scripture says, God loves a cheerful giver. But maybe this year is the year some of you do that maybe once in a lifetime thing Mary did and do something extravagant just simply because you don't care what anybody else does or doesn't do, your love for the Savior compels you.

Be like Mary. This may not be God's will for you. I don't know. But it might be. It might be.