

Mary of Bethany: Choosing Extravagant Devotion to Jesus (Lk. 10)

I. GOD'S FIRST PRIORITY: THAT WE LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

- A. The Spirit is restoring the first commandment to first place in the Church worldwide. By God's grace we must consciously cultivate the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love.
³⁷Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and great commandment." (Mt. 22:37-38)
1. Loving God with all our heart is the ***first*** commandment because it is the first priority to God. It is called the first commandment, not the "first option." Scripture makes it clear that extravagant wholehearted love for God is the highest and greatest lifestyle.
 2. Loving God with all our heart is the ***great*** commandment because it is great in its impact. It impacts God's heart, our life, and the life of those we love, in this age and in eternity.
- B. The church of Ephesus was one of the great revival centers in the early church (Acts 19-20). Yet, they did not sustain freshness in their love for Jesus. They became workers for God above being lovers of God. "Lovers will always outwork the workers."
¹To the...church of Ephesus write, ²"I know your works... ³you have persevered and have...labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember from where you have fallen; repent...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand... (Rev. 2:1-5)
- C. Serving God and others without a foundation of extravagant devotion to Jesus often leads to burnout and disappointment. Thus, our service is not sustained over decades. Without encountering Jesus' heart in love (intimacy with God), we often work as slaves instead of a bride who is refreshed as she labors. Loving Jesus in our work and obedience frees us from striving.
- D. In a desire to keep up with popular ministry trends, some regularly change direction in ministry. We must not get our ministry focus from the latest trends, but rather from God's Word. We are not left guessing as to what God delights in. He wants us to make the first commandment first.
- E. Satan's first priority against the Church is to lead us astray from cultivating the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love and extravagant devotion. If Satan leads us astray from the purity of devotion to Jesus, then our service and love for others will eventually fail.
³I am afraid, lest as the serpent [Satan] deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3, NAS)
- F. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Lord wants that freshness to be renewed in us over and over. This requires cultivating a responsiveness of love to God. We must not allow any substitute for the real thing, nor allow our experience to be reduced merely to the language of devotion.

II. THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY: FEEDING ON THE WORD

³⁸A certain woman named Martha welcomed Him [Jesus] into her house. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled [bothered; NAS] about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Lk. 10:38-42)

- A. **Sat at Jesus' feet:** The Spirit emphasized that Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear His Word (v. 39). Mary is described three times in Scripture. Each time the Spirit highlights her as sitting at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 10:39; Jn. 11:32; 12:3). Only as we feed regularly on His Word will we stay fresh in our relationship with God and fruitful in our ministry.
- B. **Distracted:** Martha was distracted with much serving (v. 40). Scripture calls us to serve much and to help to meet humanitarian needs in a practical way. Martha appealed to this legitimate call to meet people's real needs by serving in the kitchen. Jesus did not correct her for serving, but for serving with a wrong spirit. Brother Lawrence's book *Practicing the Presence of God* describes a man's heart preoccupied with God as his hands were occupied with service. Being distracted is common to all of us, but staying distracted is what the Spirit seeks to correct in us.
- C. **One thing:** Jesus told Martha that Mary did the one thing needed (v. 42). In other words, Mary took seriously the call to cultivate the ability to respond to God in love with extravagant devotion. This is the one thing needed, the only non-negotiable thing. Why? Having this in place gives us the necessary discernment and resolve to sustain love and obedience in every other area of our life and ministry. As we sit at the feet of Jesus, we position ourselves to receive God's help, which is indispensable in coping with and handling all the other aspects of our lives. If this issue is not in place, then our other decisions will be clouded.
- D. **The good part:** Jesus declared that Mary chose the good part (v. 42). Jesus settled the issue of how important this is by calling this lifestyle good. It is a godly and wise foundation for our life, for building relationships and ministering to others. Those who disagree, disagree with Jesus.
- E. **Choosing:** Jesus declared that Mary chose this lifestyle (v. 42). We must also choose it. No one can choose it for us. Cultivating a heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately; love does not just grow automatically.
- F. **Not taken away:** Jesus prophesied that Mary's heart of devotion would not be taken away from her (v. 42). What does this mean? First, that grace for a lifestyle of extravagant devotion could be sustained throughout Mary's life if she continued to choose it. Sustaining this focus for a lifetime is rare. Second, that at the judgment seat of Christ her life of devotion would be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14). Mary, a young single woman, was never mentioned in the book of Acts or in church history. She was not known in the courts of man for her ministry. However, she will be known forever in the courts of heaven for her extravagant love for Jesus.

III. SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS TO HEAR HIS WORD: PRAY-READING THE WORD

- A. It is not enough to study the Bible—we must talk to God as we study. Bible study is meant to lead us to conversation with God by giving us the “conversational material” for our prayer life. It provides the language we use as we talk to Him. Using the Bible and speaking the Word back to God makes prayer easy and enjoyable. It “turns up the volume” in our conversation with God.
- ³⁹You search the Scriptures [Bible study], for in them you think you have...life; these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰You are not willing to come to Me [talk to Me] that you may have life. (Jn. 5:39-40)*
- B. Jesus called us to abide in Him. The foundation of this reality means talking with Him. We do this best as we pray-read the Word, which is simply speaking its truths back to Him as we read it. (*Free notes: How to Meditate on the Word and How to Pray-Read the Word see MikeBickle.org*)
- ⁵He who abides in [talks to Me] Me, and I in him [I abide or talk to you], bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...⁷If you abide in [talk to Me] Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (Jn. 15:5-7)*
- C. Two broad categories of truth related to pray-reading the Word (meditating on Scripture):
1. Scriptures that focus on promises “to believe” (God loves, forgives, leads, protects us, etc.).
 2. Scriptures that focus on exhorting us “to obey” (walking in purity or serving others, etc.).
- D. We actively dialogue with God by praying promises from His Word that we are *to believe*.
1. First, *we thank God* for a particular truth. We turn these truths into simple declarations of thanksgiving or trust. For example, say: “Thank you that You love me, that you forgave me.” Or simply declare: “I trust that You will lead, provide, and protect me.”
 2. Second, *we ask God to reveal (release)* particular truths to us. Ask God to release a spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17). For example, pray: “Father, reveal to me the certainty of Your provision; how much You love me, forgive me; how I have ravished Your heart.” Or, “Father, release Your promised guidance, provision, and protection,” etc.
- E. We actively dialogue with God by praying truths back to Him that exhort us *to obey* His Word.
1. First, *we commit ourselves to obey God* in the specific way set forth in a biblical passage. Make declarations of resolve to obey the Word as you read passages about obedience. For example, declare: “I set my heart to love You and obey You with my speech, time, money, etc.” Or “I set my heart to love you like David, to endure hardship like Paul.”
 2. Second, *we ask God to empower us to obey* a particular truth seen in Scripture. Ask God for help to give you wisdom, motivation, and power to obey in specific areas. For example, pray: “Father help me to love You, to bridle my speech, to use my time and money in full obedience.” “Father, strengthen me by your grace to love you like David.

IV. THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY: “WASTING” HER LIFE

³*Being in Bethany at the house of Simon...as He sat at the table, a woman [Mary of Bethany; Jn. 12:3] came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard [perfume]. She broke the flask and poured it on His head. ⁴Some [apostles] were indignant...and said, “Why was this...oil wasted? ⁵It might have been sold for...300 denarii [a year’s wages] and given to the poor.” They [apostles] criticized her sharply. ⁶Jesus said, “Let her alone...she has done a good work for Me...” ⁹Wherever this gospel is preached...what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her.” (Mk. 14:3-9)*

- A. **Very costly:** The perfume was worth 300 denarii (a year’s wages). Jesus told His disciples that He was to be crucified in two days (Mt. 26:2). Mary seems to have been the only one who heard Him and thus she poured her perfume on Him (the fragrance was on both of them at the cross).
³*Mary...wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance... (Jn. 12:3)*
- B. Mary broke her most precious earthly treasure over the One who was her greatest treasure. The perfume was probably her inheritance, thus representing her financial security. I imagine her saying to her friends, “I have Jesus, He is good enough for me. My future is in His hands.”
- C. **Criticized:** The apostles appealed to serving the poor as their reason to criticize her extravagance; they appealed to a scriptural mandate to serve the needs of the poor. All who love Jesus like Mary will receive criticism from others who love salvation, but who do not deeply love Jesus.
- D. **Why this waste:** Anything above the minimum commitment is seen as an “unnecessary waste.” To “waste on Jesus” money, exceptional musical talent, or a brilliant mind with good career opportunities is regarded by some as an unnecessary waste of one’s life and talents.
- E. **Let her alone:** Jesus vindicated Mary just as He did John the Baptist (Mt. 11:19). Jesus will vindicate the lifestyle of extravagant devotion to Him in this age and especially in eternity.
- F. **A good work:** A year earlier (in Luke 10), Jesus had commended Mary for choosing the “good” part in sitting at His feet to hear His word; she developed her personal history in God in this way. **Principle:** Unusual acts of devotion come from cultivating a spirit of devotion as a lifestyle. Her lifestyle of choosing good by hearing the Word equipped her to choose good in other things.
- G. **Memorial:** Mary’s extravagant devotion is remembered by others because God remembers it.
- H. **What are you wasting your life on?** People seeking to live with extravagant devotion to Jesus are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation. Rather, they ask, “What is the most that God will empower me to give Him?” Or, “How far will You let me go in devotion to You?” They give themselves to God without regard for cost. Wealthy people obtain what they want without regard to its cost. They do not have to look at price tags when buying clothes or cars, etc. **How do you waste your life?** Make it your life vision to pour yourself out on Jesus like Mary did. J. Hudson Taylor said, “**Only one life will soon be past, only what is done for Christ will last.**”