

Day 1
September 10



Pray | That God will help you act out of joy rather than obligation.

THE MOMENT WHEN YOU REALIZE THEY REALLY GET IT.

No, this is not another Lowe's television ad introduction, although it easily could be. Rather it is a commentary. For every parent, life presents rare moments where that introductory comment is inexplicably and gloriously publicly displayed by their child. There is no specific age or set milestones that lead to this place, and yet for most, someday they will arrive. The joy of seeing one of your children arrive at a family Christmas celebration... late because they were up working on finishing, wrapping, or completing every gift they had painstakingly selected, purchased, or hand-made with a specific person in mind. Well, that joy pales in comparison to seeing their joy when their little cousins opened those gifts, and you realize your child really gets it—they get that it is better to give than to receive. Whether or not you are a parent, a teacher, a coach, a mentor, or just a general observer of people, you have probably experienced a similar moment in your life where you realize...



Read | Acts 20:34-36



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Interesting note: The quote of Jesus in this passage is not directly connected to another Scripture. Rather, it appears to be a common saying of Jesus. Since it is in the Bible, it is reliable. When you hear new things about God or Scripture, do you believe blindly or verify it against Scripture for yourself?

Consider for a moment your motivations for the things you do. Is it because there are consequences for not doing them or maybe because you have to? Are you prioritizing what others will think about them or you? Do you do it because it brings you joy?

Have you ever eaten at Chick-Fil-A? If you have, you're familiar with the phrase, "It's my pleasure." You cannot eat there without hearing it... repeatedly. Employees may have to say those words, but the founder (a Christian) likely knew some would move on and realize that was exactly what it was: they were blessed to have a job and to serve others. Jesus teaches the same principle: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Is God telling you to give more? If so, where?

Day 2
September 11



Pray | Make me mindful of those who gave their lives for others.

“JESUS’ DEFIANCE OF SOCIETAL ‘NORMS’ SAVES EVERYONE!”

Newspapers use headlines to catch your attention and make you want to purchase one to “read all about it.” The question is would the above title better fit the New York Times or the National Enquirer? Just like a headline, the two key verses from today’s Bible reading pack in a lot of information. We are far removed from the exiling of lepers from society or of a woman interrupting a dinner where only men were allowed to attend and doing something which shocked and offended many. Yet in Jesus’ usual way, he does what he does best: he spends time with and shows an interest in those whom many of us would deem un-attractive, unqualified, or socially beneath us. Unlike Jesus, but very much like the Pharisees and even Jesus’ disciples, we are quick to judge and write off the very people we are supposed to be sharing Jesus’ love with. Are we so afraid of humiliation or ashamed of Jesus today?



Read | Matthew 26:6-7; John 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:45-46



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Leviticus tells how lepers were to be treated. Perhaps it was only a nickname after a miraculous healing, but dinner at “Simon the Leper’s” seems a bit outside the legal lines. What does Jesus’ presence at this dinner gathering tell us about with whom we are to share the gospel?

“Crazy Mary.” That is how the story would have been remembered had Jesus not set the record straight. Think about it. It was pure craziness sneaking up on the only Son of God, dumping expensive and likely overpowering-smelling perfume on his head and feet. Do you love Jesus enough to do something crazy to demonstrate your love publicly regardless of the consequences?

In the Bible priests, kings, prophets, and even the Temple were anointed with oil, setting them apart in their devotion to God. Mary, a friend of Jesus, shows her love by anointing him mid-dinner party. Likely she did not realize the import when she acted. In what ways have you been set apart for God, and are you fully living up to your set-apartness?

Day 3
September 12



Pray | Ask God to push you to love as he loved.

OPEN MOUTH. INSERT FOOT.

Proponents of indignant righteousness unite. They rush onto social media and, knowing only half the story or less, pronounce judgement on others. Have you ever said the first thing that came to mind only to realize as soon as you said it that you may have accidentally let your true, secret inner-self out for a moment? Today, many of us live lives where we try to filter everything before we let it out so that people only see the us we want them to see. Jesus' disciples it seems had no such delay between their thoughts and opening their mouths and inserting their sandaled feet. Until we know the full story through God's eyes (only when we are enlightened in heaven), we see only pieces of Mary's motivation, actions, and everyone's response. First we get a rebuke by a disciple, then a defense of Mary, and finally what really matters.



Read | Matthew 26:8-13; Mark 14:3

Day 4
September 13



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Jesus says Judas missed the point by focusing on how Mary should have spent her money instead. He missed the significance of Mary's actions, but his focus on spending our resources to help those in need contained truth in it (even if spoken with secretly greedy intentions). We are all called to care for the poor in Jesus' name. What are you doing besides pointing out what others could be doing about poverty?

Mary's love, like Jesus', was all in. She did not use just a single drop of the perfumed oil. She broke the jar, pouring it out, committing everything. No doubt it burned his eyes and lungs as it flowed down over his head and face, just as his own blood soon would upon a cross. Her gift given in love was received without complaint or reprimand. Knowing what God was willing to do out of love for you, what are you doing to show your love for him?

Each of us has felt like a loser at some point; maybe we still do. Listen to the song "Losers" by Me in Motion¹ for a message of hope (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9vE0h9Ur3M>). Only those who don't accept the gospel message lose. If no one tells them how, can they make an informed decision to accept or deny God's love? What are you going to do?

¹ Me in Motion, "Losers," on *Me in Motion*, Centricity Records, March 23, 2010. Accessed August 22, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9vE0h9Ur3M>



Pray | Thank God for what you have; then ask him how to share it.

GOD LOOKS AT THE INTENT, NOT THE CONTENT, OF YOUR GIVING.

How is it the disciples were technically correct and still wrong at the same time? Look at the offering the widow gives in Mark and at Mary's opulent offering in Matthew. In both cases, the gifts were given with the intention that God was worthy of and capable of providing for their needs. Neither woman was showboating; as a matter of fact, Mary likely full well expected the criticism she received from the disciples, yet she acted anyway. God is never about the size of the gifts we give him but about the way we give out of love and show others his love. Scripture promises there will be poverty and war yet encourages us to give to the needy and to seek peace rather than simply accepting this as the way it will be and then doing nothing.



Read | *Matthew 26:8-13; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 4:32-35*



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Mary was neither seeking people's nor Jesus' praise for her actions, and yet Jesus says she would become part of Scripture as an example of devotion and love. Have you ever done things for the right reasons and had unexpected and unintended positive consequences as a result?

The Bible provides many examples of giving: King David in 2 Samuel 24:24, Abraham in Genesis 22, and the Macedonian Christians in 2 Corinthians 8. Genesis 4:1-7 recounts the tale of Cain and Abel's offerings to God. What are some reasons why is it important to remember God looks at the intention behind our giving as opposed to the gift itself?

Know what love is. See needs. Act; don't just talk about it. If you have the means to, then do something about it! Read 1 John 3:16-18. What does God want of you as summarized in this passage, and how will you choose to be transformed by knowing this going forward?

Day 5
September 14



Pray | That you will seek God rather than money.

WHAT NAME COMES TO MIND?

A biblical suicide? Thirty pieces of silver? Potter's field? Gain the whole world and lose your soul? Judas. The name is almost synonymous with betrayal. As much as we want to pretend he and we are very different, there is a nagging truth that none of us is very far from being another Judas. Christians in countries with hostile governments live this out when, with proper coercion, a fellow believer turns them in to the authorities to avoid their own similar fate. Judas, who led the assault on Mary's character, was merely letting out his true inner self with some help from the devil. Contrast, if you will, Judas and Mary. Judas would forfeit Jesus for wealth. Mary would forfeit wealth for Jesus. Now contrast Judas and Jesus. Judas would sacrifice others for his own gain. Jesus would sacrifice himself for others' gain. All those in favor of being like Judas?



Read | Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:2-6; James 4:1-4



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Think about characters in the Bible. Now be honest with yourself in considering which biblical character you most relate with. Does your answer re-assure or concern you, and why?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. What you find here is an antidote to becoming a Judas. Are you willing to take God at his word and give so that others may see his love through your life? If not, what things are holding you back?

The Bible promises a day is coming when we will need to choose either God or the world. Jesus pre-paid your salvation with his own lifeblood. If you believe this already, pray that your faith holds firm. If you do not, consider the price he paid for your salvation, and ask him what you need to do in response to his unwavering love for you.

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