

# The Unexpected Gift

October 4, 2020



## Daily Devotionals Introduction

As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you might see some things that perhaps you weren't expecting. For this 13-week series, we'll open the Book of Mark together and study the life of Jesus—The Unexpected King. During this series, we will gain a better understanding of who Jesus is and what it really means to be his disciple.

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Mark, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing more about the life of Jesus.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

## Day 1

Every year at Christmas time, we have a family celebration at my grandparents' home. To simplify gift-giving among the adults, we draw names and purchase a gift for that relative. At the beginning of this tradition, someone, probably my mom, set a limit on the amount we **could** spend on gifts. In reality, it was an expectation of what we **should** spend on the gifts.

This tradition has never been enjoyable for me, for several reasons. First, I love to give gifts. Putting an expectation on the amount spent often becomes a distraction and diminishes the joy I feel when selecting the gift. Second, this Christmas gathering is the only time each year I see most of these relatives. We have never developed relationships, so the event and the gift-giving feel like an obligation. Third, since we don't really know each other very well, we have no idea what to buy for each other. More often than not, the gift giving turns into an exchange of gift cards (in the appropriate amount of course) or an item chosen from a carefully curated list. More than once I've told my husband we might as well pull out our wallets and just pass around cash.

The tradition often leaves me feeling empty and a little disappointed. The gifts given to me rarely bring me joy because I already know what to expect. And in giving to each other, we all give what is **expected**. No more. No less.

In the sermon this week, Dan talked about the extravagant gift that was lavished upon Jesus in his anointing at Bethany. In that time, it was customary in Jewish culture for a host to anoint a guest with oil to show honor and respect. There were different ways of going about this, but Mary's decision to break open the jar and pour ALL the expensive oil on Jesus' head was unexpected. It was not typical. It was extravagant.

This week in our devotions we are going to examine our own challenges with extravagance in different contexts.

### Read through Mark 14:1-11.

- Close your eyes and picture yourself at the meal.
- How would you have responded? Would you have been uncomfortable with Mary's act? Or would you have been inspired? Would you have rebuked her or celebrated her? Be honest.
- When it comes to how you live out your life in Christ, what do you feel is expected of you? Do you often go beyond what is expected of you as a follower of Jesus?

**Prayer:** Ask God to reveal to you where you are striving for what is expected of you and nothing more. Where is God calling you to be extravagant?

## Day 2

Yesterday in our reading of Mark, we reflected on how the guests responded to Mary's anointing of Jesus and then thought about our own feelings about the gesture of love and worship. If I'm honest, I think in response I would have felt convicted in how my gifts, worship, and love measured up to Mary's. I don't know if I would believe that what I have to give is enough. In the scripture Mark describes the anger, indignation, and outrage the guests demonstrated – it was too much! It was a waste of money! It went against what was expected.

In yesterday's devotion, I shared about our family Christmas gift exchange. There's no room for extravagance in the system we have created. One year, however, I was on the receiving end of an extravagant gift. It was generous beyond the confines of our gift exchange. I remember it well, not because of the monetary amount spent, but because of the meaning and care behind it.

My aunt had drawn my name and I opened my gift – new sneakers. This was not a big surprise as they had been on my wish list. In the shoebox was a card. I opened it and several large bills fell out with a note that said, "Hire a babysitter and go out on a nice date". I was deeply moved, not because of how much she had spent, but because I felt seen. I felt known. The fact that she saw a need that wasn't on my Christmas list and provided for it, meant the world to me. The gift felt extravagant. By definition it exceeded what was appropriate, but it was exactly what was needed that Christmas.

The guests at the meal in Bethany had no idea of the significance of Mary's actions. Her act was prophetic. As Jesus confirmed in his response, she had prepared his body for burial, before his death. They did not understand that there would not be opportunity to anoint his body after his death. Mary had done what she could while she could and lavished Jesus with her most expensive perfume, as an act of kindness and love. In her extravagance she met a need she didn't even know about.

- Think about opportunities in your life when you could choose to give beyond what is expected. What gets in the way of you being extravagant?
- Who or what in your life influences what is appropriate and reasonable and what is extravagant? (friends, family, pastor, scarcity, obligation, debt, vulnerability...)
- Does your mentality change at all when you know a person is going to die?

**Prayer:** Ask God to reveal to you where you are striving for what is expected of you and nothing more. Where is God calling you to be extravagant?

## Day 3

At the end of the devotion for yesterday, there's a good chance your heart and mind examined areas where you can release yourself financially. Today, we are going to take the same concept and flip the lens as we examine obstacles to extravagant worship.

I grew up in the church and over the years I've seen countless worship practices and "trends". I've witnessed (or taken part in) everything from the burning of candles and incense, praise dancing, kneeling, arms raised, eyes open, eyes closed, spontaneous corporate prayer, liturgical prayer, hymns, modern worship songs, smoke machines, lights, and confetti.

All of these experiences are geared towards creating an environment that invites authentic expressions of worship. But as I think of each one individually and how they enhanced the depth of my own worship, I realize that there are a lot of constraints put on my expression of worship by myself and frankly, those around me. I have to imagine that throwing handfuls of confetti in praise to the Lord would not only make me unpopular among the facilities team but would likely land me on some kind of watch list with the local authorities. The thing is, sometimes I really want to throw confetti. To me, that is the embarrassing, extravagant act of worship that truly conveys my gratitude and love for Jesus. But I know it would be unacceptable. I would probably feel embarrassed. And in my shame of making a scene, I would probably restrain my worship even more.

Truth is, it's never a good time for an embarrassing display of worship and adoration. My fear of the consequences of extravagant worship aren't totally unfounded. On a number of occasions throughout my life, in a variety of worship settings, I've witnessed people worship in their bold way who are later asked to contain their boldness because it's disruptive. If I want to worship in a way that's going to make others uncomfortable, it's up to me to discern how to go about it.

- How often does your love of Jesus bubble over in embarrassing adoration?
- Who or what in your life influences what is appropriate and reasonable and what is extravagant when it comes to worship?
- When is the last time you found yourself engaging in an embarrassing display of love for Jesus?
- If you would be assured that there would be no social or legal consequences, what extravagant act would you do in your love and adoration of Jesus?

**Prayer:** Ask God to reveal to you where you are striving for what is expected of you and nothing more. Where is God calling you to be extravagant?

## Day 4

The last few days have been primarily focused on what we *do* in worship and that's often where we get stuck. Romans 12:1 in The Passion Translation says: Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God's marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship.

We are called to live lives that reflect our love of Jesus. THIS is our genuine expression of worship. God wants us to bring our whole self to him in worship. He wants us to pour ourselves out in worship like Mary poured out the fragrant oil. Why should we pour ourselves out for him? Because he first poured himself out for us.

Let's use the verse from Romans to invite God to reveal his desire to us. Find a translation you like and a quiet spot and begin.

**READ** Romans 12:1 out loud.

- Listen for any phrases, images or words that jump out.

**REFLECT** while reading the verse again.

- Focus on what stood out to you in the first reading.
- Sit quietly to reflect on what God is saying in the passage.

**RESPOND** to what God has revealed to you in this scripture.

- Read the verse again, slowly.
- You may choose to journal and pray

**REST** in God's presence.

- Read the verse a final time (you may have it memorized by now).
- Close your eyes and enter into stillness and silence
- Allow God to minister to you in this space.
- If your attention drifts, return to the silence

**PRAY**

- Ask God to reveal to you where you are striving for what is expected of you and nothing more.
- Where is God calling you to be extravagant?

## Day 5

Through the week we have examined how we respond to the worship of others. We have thought about what dictates how we worship. Finally, in mediating over Romans 12:1, we have invited God to reveal to us through scripture his desire for our worship. We are going to wrap up the week with an exercise meant to challenge us to grow in our expression of worship.

Not too long ago a woman passed away. She was special to several of my friends, but I had never had the opportunity to meet her. In sharing about her life, I could get a real picture of her love of Jesus and how her life reflected that love. I understood how she lived her life as a sacrifice, quietly caring for others. Their memories of her left an impression on me. I wish I had known her. Yet, without knowing her, I am still encouraged by her life. The impact she had on those close to me ministered to me because she brought her whole self as a genuine expression of worship.

In the Mark passage, the guests rebuked Mary for her wasteful and irresponsible act. Her expression of worship was not appreciated at first. Yet, Jesus responded by praising Mary and declaring that whenever the Gospel is told, so will the story of her anointing of his body. And here we are – having spent a whole week learning from her extravagant gift.

As a reflection today, think about what others will say about you after you're gone.

- Will they say you surrender yourself to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices?
- Will they say you live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart?
- Will they say you were extravagant in your worship of Jesus?
- Will you be remembered for what you did or for how you loved?

**Prayer:** Lord I accept your invitation to give of my whole self as my sincere act of worship. Please show me where I am exercising unnecessary restraint and, in your kindness, help me grow into a follower whose life is a genuine expression of my love for you. Amen.