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“Ways to Worship”

[John 12:1-8](#)

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Some people think that singing is the only way to worship the Lord, but in John 12, Martha, Lazarus, and Mary (adult siblings) invited Jesus to their home and demonstrated three different ways to worship Him. They model for us the diverse ways that we can honor and thank the Lord for who He is and what He has done.

1. [John 12:1-8](#) – *“Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.’”*
2. A dinner party in Jesus’ honor
  - a. Jesus’ friends Martha, Lazarus, and Mary gave a dinner party, most likely to thank and honor Jesus for raising Lazarus from the dead
    - i. [John 12:2a](#) – *“There they made Him a supper...”*
  - b. In addition to Jesus and the three hosts, Judas was present, and possibly all twelve of Jesus’ disciples
3. Judas—a hypocrite and a thief
  - a. Judas criticized Mary’s use of an expensive oil to anoint Jesus
    - i. [John 12:5](#) – *“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”*

- b. John provided commentary on Judas' critique
      - i. Jesus and His disciples received donations to support Jesus' ministry—Judas managed the money box and regularly stole from it
      - ii. Judas claimed to be concerned for the poor, but in reality, he only cared about the money he might have gained had Mary sold the bottle of oil and donated the profits to Jesus' ministry
- 4. A model for worship
  - a. Worship happens out of the overflow of a grateful heart for who God is and what He's done
  - b. Martha, Lazarus, and Mary each modeled a different way to worship
- 5. Martha served
  - a. Martha had a gift for service
  - b. Jesus had previously corrected Martha for becoming overzealous with her gift
    - i. [Luke 10:40-42](#) - *"But 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.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.'"*
    - ii. She was serving in a frantic way
  - c. In [John 12](#), she appears to have taken Jesus' words to heart and was serving out of a heart of love
  - d. One of the ways we can thank Jesus is to serve other people
  - e. [Colossians 3:23](#) - *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."*
- 6. Lazarus sat
  - a. Lazarus was enjoying the presence of the Lord
    - i. Many of us neglect doing this
  - b. "Practicing the presence of God"
    - i. [Psalm 16:11b](#) - *"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*
    - ii. [James 4:8a](#) - *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."*
  - c. If we want to have a good relationship with God, we should take time every day to sit in His presence and listen to His voice
- 7. Mary sacrificed
  - a. Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a bottle of oil

- i. A prophetic gesture, as Mary either knowingly or unknowingly was preparing Jesus for His burial, as He would be crucified at Passover six days later
- ii. A tender gesture
- iii. A costly gesture
  - 1. Spikenard was an expensive oil imported from India
    - a. Worth three-hundred denarii, the equivalent of a year's wages
  - 2. Mary lived in Bethany, which translates "House of the Poor;" she was likely not wealthy
- iv. God does not care about the size of the gift, but rather the sacrifice of the gift
- v. Judas criticized her gift as wasteful, but Jesus defended her
  - 1. [John 12:7-8](#) - *"Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*
  - 2. We must not over-spiritualize; we should be generous with God and ignore critics who think giving to the Lord is not a worthy investment

- 8. The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil
  - a. Everywhere we go we should spread the fragrance of our devotion to Jesus
  - b. [2 Corinthians 2:14](#) - *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him."* (1984 NIV)

### Discussion Questions

- 1. Read [John 12:1-8](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
- 2. Why did Martha, Lazarus, and Mary give Jesus a dinner party? (See #2a above)
- 3. Why did Judas criticize Mary's use of an expensive bottle of oil in anointing Jesus? (See #3b above)
- 4. Worship should be an overflow of what? (See #4a above)
- 5. Read [Colossians 3:23](#). What can we learn from Martha's service to the Lord? What does this type of service look like in our own lives? (See #5d and #5e above)
- 6. Read [Psalm 16:11b](#) and [James 4:8a](#). What can we learn from Lazarus? Why is it important to "practice the presence of the Lord?" How can we make sitting with

the Lord a priority? (See #6b and #6c above)

7. What can we learn from Mary? What is God's main concern in relation to our giving? (See #7-iv above)
8. Read [2 Corinthians 2:14](#). What is the significance of the fragrance of the oil filling the house? How does this apply to our lives?
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)