CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
SEPTEMBER2025

Scripture Story: Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 7:36-50; John 11:55-57; 12:1-11.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 62.

the alabaster jar



Photo by Jacqui Janetzco

keytext

"A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. . . . She began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."

(Luke 7:37, 38, NIV)

flashlight

"Christ delighted in the earnest desire of Mary to do the will of her Lord. He accepted the wealth of pure affection which His disciples did not, would not, understand. The desire that Mary had to do this service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the precious ointment in the world, because it expressed her appreciation of the world's Redeemer. It was the love of Christ that constrained her. The matchless excellence of the character of Christ filled her soul. That ointment was a symbol of the heart of the giver. It was the outward demonstration of a love fed by heavenly streams until it overflowed" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 564).

what do you think?

Personalize the following prayer of thankfulness by filling in the blanks:

Dear God,

I worship You because You are _____. I know that You created me. You knit me together and nobody else in the universe has my unique _____. Thank You for the blessings You shower upon me. Thank You for _____. Thank You for _____. Thank You for _____. When I think about what an awesome God You are, all I can say is _____.

I am grateful. I love You.

Your child, _____.

did you know?

Did you notice that Matthew and Mark put this story of Mary in a different place chronologically than John does? In Matthew and Mark it occurs before the Last Supper. In John it happens before the triumphal entry. Most scholars believe that John orders the event correctly. Keep in mind that the main purpose of the Gospel authors was to preserve an accurate account of Jesus' teaching, not necessarily to give the exact chronological order of His life. Scholars surmise the reason that Matthew and Mark place this story where they did was to show the stark contrast between the devotion of Mary and the deceit of Judas. In both Matthew and Mark the story that follows is of Judas agreeing to betray Jesus.

INTO THE STORY

"When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

"When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.'

"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.'

"'Tell me, teacher,' he said.

"'Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?'

"Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.'

"'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.

"Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'

"Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

"The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

(Luke 7:36-50, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What does this story teach us about the importance of humility?

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What does this story teach us about thanksgiving?

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What does this story teach us about the gospel?

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Contrast this story from Luke's perspective (Luke 7:36-50) with Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-11; and John 11:55-57; 12:1-11. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What does this comparison study tell you about each author?

Write one word to describe the following characters in the story:

Jesus: _____

The Pharisees: _____

Mary: _____

Judas: _____

punch lines

"The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught'" **(Isaiah 29:13, NIV).**

"We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" **(2 Corinthians 10:12, NIV).**

"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. . . . She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy" **(Proverbs 31:10, 20, NIV).**

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" **(Colossians 4:2, NIV).**

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" **(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV).**

further insight

"Until time should be no more, that broken alabaster box would tell the story of the abundant love of God for a fallen race."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 563

"When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568

Sabbath

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Reflect on the blessings you enjoy while others your age are suffering of sickness, crisis situations, and inevitable disasters. Are you expressing your gratitude to God consistently, every day?

Do you tend to think, *Why me?* Or do you think, *I have everything if I have Jesus in my life*?

Sunday

Read Luke 7:41, 42.

Read the passage from *Into the Story* and reflect on the following question (you can use the Notes section in the back of this study guide to write your answers):

- What do you think was Mary's motivation in doing what she did?
- What was the motivation of the Pharisees in scorning this woman?
- Why do you suppose Jesus told the parable of the grateful debtor (Luke 7:41, 42) before chastising Simon?
- Read Luke 7:44-48. After Jesus made these statements, how do you think Simon felt? How do you think Mary felt?
- Read through the story again and *underline* all the times in the story that you think would have been awkward.

Monday

Read Luke 7:37, 38.

Memorize the *Key Text* and then consider this commentary from Glynnis Whitwer:

This lovely child of God offered her absolute best to Jesus, in spite of the fears and doubts she might have had.

- Her fear didn't stop her: "What will they think of me? They know who I am."
- Her shame didn't stop her: "I'm not worthy to approach Jesus."
- Her feelings of insignificance didn't stop her: "It's only a small bottle of perfume."
- The crowd of important people didn't stop her: "I don't belong there. Those people can offer Jesus more."

Nothing stopped this woman from showing Jesus love and gratitude in thanks for the new life He offered her. Giving Jesus our best doesn't always mean material goods. I believe what pleased Jesus more than the gift of perfume was the giver's heart of love ("Giving Jesus Our Best").

Do you always give your best to Jesus? Or does He get the leftovers of your time, talents, and resources? How can you follow Mary's example and demonstrate outrageous love toward the Savior?

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Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.

Read this week's *Flashlight*. Note that Ellen White points out that "the desire that Mary had to do this service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the precious ointment in the world." In other words, what matters to Jesus is not the size of the gift, but the heart of the giver.

With that in mind, consider this story: The ornament on my desk this morning caught me by surprise. It wasn't the usual leftover bulletin. Or a piece of junk mail. Or a tattered *Insight* that someone forgot to take home on Sabbath. No, my Monday-morning surprise was a half-eaten graham cracker.

Pasted to the morsel was a Post-it from the head deacon: "Pastor Karl, this graham cracker was given by a 3-year-old boy for offering today. When I passed him the plate, he dug through his pockets and frowned. Then he looked around the seat—only to discover that he didn't have any money to give. He reached into his bag, took this out, and proudly announced, 'I give this to Jesus!'"

Wednesday

Read Psalm 16 and Psalm 17.

Write one word over each of the *Punch Lines* that summarizes the virtue that it teaches. For example, on Isaiah 29:13 you could write "authenticity" or "sincerity."

Thursday

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12.

With whom do you identify the most in this story? Why?

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Friday

Read Deuteronomy 6:5.

Ellen White offers this insight into the story of Mary: "Christ values acts of heartfelt courtesy. . . . He did not refuse the simplest flower plucked by the hand of a child, and offered to Him in love. . . . In the Scriptures, Mary's anointing of Jesus is mentioned as distinguishing her from the other Marys. Acts of love and reverence for Jesus are an evidence of faith in Him as the Son of God" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 564).

Given that "acts of love and reverence for Jesus are an evidence of faith in Him," what have I done lately that demonstrates my faith in Jesus?

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 62.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.