

BRMC Small Group Study: John 12:1-11

Leaders Guide

Please note that the suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study. Feel free to adapt the questions for your group.

Leader's Notes:

Context:

At the end of John 11, we see the final Passover before the crucifixion. The narrative of the festivals has come full circle. This marks a turning point in the Gospel of John. John 11 explored the last of seven great miracles Jesus performed (resurrection of Lazarus) before his own resurrection. We now move to a new narrative that brings us toward the crucifixion and resurrection.

Introduction:

In this study, we will read the account of Mary using expensive perfume and her hair to wipe Jesus' feet. John contrasts the actions of Mary and Judas and we will study how it applies to us today.

Lesson Objectives:

- To learn what it means to give our best to Jesus.
- To reflect on the motivations behind our giving.

Observation

1. What are some observations that you can draw from this passage (John 12:1-8)?
 - *We encourage the leader to select 5 people (Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, Judas Iscariot) to re-enact the scene.*
 - *This helps us to perform a close reading of the passage.*
2. Read Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. Compare the similarities and differences between these passages with John 12:1-9.
 - *Refer to appendix for a table showing the differences.*
 - *There is also one more account in Luke 7:36-50. However, scholars consider this to be a different story, and the lessons learnt are also different. Another thing to note is that although the house was owned by a man named Simon (similar to the other passages), the Simon in the Luke passage was not a leper. Furthermore, Simon was a common name back then.*

Interpretation

3. What is the significance of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus and why did she use her hair to wipe Jesus' feet (John 12:3)?
 - *The anointing of Jesus with the perfume signifies the embalming process of Jesus. The author chose to include this account to remind readers that the funeral process would soon be beginning.*
 - *By anointing the feet of Jesus, it reflects Mary's humility and devotion to Christ. Mary takes on the position of the lowliest slave and attends to the feet of Jesus. It was common for one's feet to be full of dust and dirt from walking around, and it was usually the slave who would fetch the water and clean the master's feet.*
 - *It is possible that Mary used too much perfume and was using her hair to wipe off the excess oil. But by doing so with her hair suggests personal involvement on Mary's part. Moreover, a Jewish lady*

would usually not show her unbound hair in public - one could be seen as a woman of loose morals. However, Mary was not concerned at how others would view her as she was devoted to giving her all to Jesus.

- *It is mentioned that the fragrance of the perfume filled the house, and this is a tangible measure of Mary's affection and devotion for Christ that others became aware of.*

4. What does John 12:6 reveal about Judas' heart?

- *Despite being a disciple of Jesus, spending a great deal of time with Jesus and witnessing many of Jesus' miracles, Judas was not transformed in his heart. Instead, his identity was still that of a keeper of the money bag and he was focused primarily on satisfying his own gains.*
- *This verse is full of irony as the one who takes from the money bag that is meant to serve the poor and needy, objects to Mary's act stating that she should have given it to the poor. The passage presents this contrast between the extravagant service to Jesus and the selfish hoarding of Judas.*
- *As followers of Christ, it is possible to identify with either Mary or Judas in this story. There are times for us to be extravagant in giving and worship, and there are times for us to be extremely prudent in our stewardship. We can be mindful when our desire to save resources hinders the worship and work of Jesus in the world.*

5. What was Jesus trying to convey in John 12:8?

- *Here, Jesus emphasizes the urgency to come to him and to give their all to him like Mary did. Jesus also suggests that he will not be with them physically forever, prophesying his impending death.*
- *However, it is also important to note that Jesus is not discouraging us from giving to the poor and needy. This statement is made at a very specific point in time - right before Jesus' death. In fact, Jesus plainly states that the poor and needy is always among us and this is a call to action to reach out to this group, just as Jesus consistently did in his earthly ministry.*

6. What was significant about Lazarus' presence in Bethany (John 12:9-11)?

- *Lazarus was a testimony of Jesus' power and identity as the resurrection and the life, the conqueror of death.*
- *Lazarus was also a representation of everlasting life with Jesus.*
- *Lazarus stood as a counterpoint to the Sadducees' disbelief in any resurrection. The Sadducees' theology does not include belief in resurrection unlike the Pharisees. From the previous study, we learnt how the Jews believed in resurrection as they believed that the spirit of a dead person would wait 3 days before departing the body.*

Application

7. How can we give to Jesus and worship him with the same spirit of Mary's giving and devotion?

- *Mary's pouring of the pure nard led the house to be filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Lead the group to think of the various aspects of their service and consider its impact on the people around them.*
- *Remember also Mary's attitude towards Jesus.*

8. In our day, Jesus is not physically with us. What we do for the poor, we do unto Jesus (Matthew 25:36). How can we be extravagant in caring for the poor?

Appendix - Comparison of the following passages (ESV)

	Matthew 26:6-13	Mark 14:3-9	Luke 7:36-50	John 12:1-9
Date	In Matt 26:2, Jesus said that ‘after two days the Passover is coming’	In Mk 14:1, it was two days before the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread	Not mentioned	Jesus arrives at Bethany six days before Passover
Location/ Host	In Bethany; House of Simon the leper	In Bethany; House of Simon the leper	Not mentioned. In Luke 7:11, Jesus was at a town called Nain; Went into house of a Pharisee whom Jesus called Simon (v40)	In Bethany; House owner not mentioned
Who was present	Jesus, disciples, a woman, Simon the leper	Jesus, some people, a woman, Simon the leper	Jesus, a Pharisee named Simon, some guests, a woman	Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, disciples
Woman	Not named	Not named	Not named, “a woman of the city who was a sinner”, “for she is a sinner”	A woman named Mary (probably Martha and Lazarus’ sister)
What she did	Poured ointment on His <u>head</u>	Poured ointment of pure nard on His <u>head</u>	Wet his <u>feet</u> with her tears; Wiped his <u>feet</u> with her hair; Kissed his <u>feet</u> ; Anointed his <u>feet</u> with oil	Anointed Jesus’ <u>feet</u> with oil; Wiped His feet with her hair
What others said	His disciples saw and were indignant, “Why this waste ?” Ointment could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor	Some who were indignant said, “Why was this ointment wasted ?” Ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor	Pharisee said to himself, “If this man were a prophet , he would have known who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner .” “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt” “Who is this, who even forgives sins ?”	“But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples said, “Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor ?”

<p>What Jesus said</p>	<p>“She has done a beautiful thing to Me.” “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” “In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.” “Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”</p>	<p>“She has done a beautiful thing to Me.” “For you always have the poor with you...but you will not always have me.” “She has anointed my body beforehand for burial.” “Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her.”</p>	<p>Story about debtors owning 500 denarii and 50 denarii “When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both.” “you gave me no water for my feet... no kiss... did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” “her sins, which are many, are forgiven...”</p>	<p>“She may keep it for the day of my burial.” “For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”</p>
<p>General keywords</p>	<p>Bethany, oil, head, money for poor, burial</p>	<p>Bethany, oil, head, money for poor, burial</p>	<p>Oil, feet, sins, forgiveness</p>	<p>Bethany, oil, feet, money for poor, burial</p>