



CALVARY MURRIETA WOMEN'S MINISTRY

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

R&R BIBLE STUDY 2017-2018



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

A Bunch of Marys: Mary of Bethany: Lesson 4

Have you ever seen the Bob Newhart Show? (Or if you're too young, maybe the reruns?) There were three brothers in the show named "Darrell." They'd always introduce them by saying, "This is my brother Darrell, Darrell, and my other brother Darrell." This study on the "Marys" sort of reminds me of that! "Marys" have played significant roles in the New Testament, that's for sure. Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany and sister of Martha, and Mary Magdalene all have unique relationships with Jesus. They all played a key role in revealing the love He had for women. Jesus was not simply a "man's man" like some suggest. He had a tender heart towards women. He broke the cultural mold in how He treated them, and He allowed them to be who they were rather than force them to "fit" some cookie cutter definition of a woman. I love that His mom was a teenager when she became pregnant, and although it was an immaculate conception, she would have been the talk of the town. He was extremely good friends with Mary of Bethany, even allowing her the privilege of sitting at His feet which was usually only allowed for men students. And she appears to be single. And Mary Magdalene was a woman who definitely had a past, yet was allowed to be one of the first to see the risen Lord! Yes, I'd say these women were unconventional, to say the least.

I pray that as we journey through the Gospels and study their lives, we would see them as women who faced cultural struggles, various obstacles, and judgment from others, but overcame them by finding their identity and worth in Christ and His love for them. May their stories bring you strength and hope as you follow Christ, and may they help you find purpose in the life He has called you to live!

Since we will be doing character studies, we will spend time piecing together what we know from the Scriptures about each of the women. (This will be a bit different than our usual verse by verse, inductive method.) We still need to understand what the facts are and what the text is saying so we can correctly apply it. Before you begin, make sure you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, open your eyes of understanding, and be your teacher! He has so much to show you about Himself through His Word, as well as how His Word applies specifically to you. Sometimes our tendency is to focus more on how it relates to us, though, rather than what the text is revealing about God Himself. Don't miss that part! He is an amazing God who desires to

be known by us, and to know us. But although He's knowable, we can't know everything. We agree with the Apostle Paul when he said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33) He is intimately close to us, while He is supremely in charge! "He is the One who can meet us where we are yet assure us of the hopeful ending to come." (Max Lucado) My prayer for each of us is that we will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18) as we study His Word together. And that our relationship with our Lord will be deeper and richer as a result.

First Day

If we were going in chronological order of appearance, we'd begin with Mary the mother of Jesus. But, as I began to write today, my heart was really drawn to Mary of Bethany. Since she is known for her extravagant worship, I wanted to begin with her. Perhaps my soul needed to focus on worship; costly, risky, amazing worship. There are really three snapshots of Mary in the Gospels. One is at a festive dinner, one at a funeral, and one turns out to be an unforgettable night. Let's get started!

1. Read Luke 10:38-42. Jesus is taking a break from His travels and stops in the home of some friends. List some facts from the story.

We know she is from Bethany, a few miles outside of Jerusalem (John 11:1). Other than her hometown, Scripture doesn't tell us much about her background, except that she is very close to her sister Martha and brother Lazarus. Jesus really loved this family. It's interesting to me that rather than stay with any of His blood relatives, He stays with this precious family. For those of us who don't have a lot of family, how sweet it is to be able to have a deep bond of friendship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, who become like family.

2. There are some interesting family dynamics going on. Are the sisters similar in any way? How are they different? Discuss their personality traits.
3. Was Jesus reprimanding Martha because she was serving? What was the underlying problem?

It's commonly thought that Martha was the oldest sister and probably the owner of the home, because verse 38 says she welcomed Jesus into "her" home. Being the oldest, perhaps she shouldered most of the responsibility of the household duties. Notice the text says that Martha was "also" sitting at Jesus' feet before she jumped up to cook. (vs 39) Many fail to see that key word. Herbert Lockyer, in his book, *All the Women of the Bible*, said "Martha also studied in the college of Jesus' feet."

4. Imagine for a moment that you were Martha, and Jesus and all His friends were there for dinner. You were the only one cooking, doing the dishes, and cleaning. How would you have felt? Have you felt this way before?

Sometimes we can begin serving with a right heart and attitude, but when we start looking at others, our perspective can turn sour. We can become resentful, bitter, or "distracted" as it says in verse 40. Grumbling begins to happen. Our joy in serving turns into a heavy burden. I wonder if she was wondering why she, too, couldn't just sit and listen to His words? But if she did, who would do all the work? I must admit that I've had the very same thoughts! Martha was very gifted in hospitality, works, and helps, but she seemed to expect Mary to do the same. We all have different gifts and talents, which results in many forms of worship. Martha served by actions, while Mary simply wanted to enjoy being in His presence. Sometimes we think Mary wasn't pulling her weight in the chore department, but maybe she had done her work before He got there. Luke, the writer of the Gospel, noticed that Martha seemed distracted or cumbered. The word "distracted" has the meaning of "pulled apart" or "pulled away." Martha's concerns were "pulling her apart" and Mary didn't really seem to notice! Martha went from welcoming Jesus into her home to being worried about the responsibility of having Him there.

5. What did Martha choose to do about it?
6. What was Jesus' response?
7. What "could" have Martha done about it? What are some other options?
8. Did Mary say anything?
9. What is the "good part" that Mary chose?

10. Do you value being in His presence? Is being alone with Him, spending time with Him, a priority for you? Are you regularly choosing the “good part”?
11. Are you currently distracted or being pulled apart by the worries of this world? (When we worry, we get sidetracked from the purposes and plans He has for us.) Ask the Spirit to reveal anything that is keeping you from trusting Him.

Max Lucado said “We may find at times that the good work we began to serve Jesus with has become a way to serve ourselves. God is more pleased with the quiet attention of a sincere heart than the noisy service of a sour one. It’s the heart behind the service that matters to God.”

Patsy Clairmont said, “When I stop whatever I’m doing (working, worrying, or whining) and become still, I realize the Lord is with me – - not always because I can feel His presence, but because He has promised it.” In our first snapshot of Mary, we see her great desire to hear from her Lord, to listen to His words, to just be with Him. While Martha may have found her identity in her service, or felt obligated to be busy, Mary’s heart was in the right place, which created a right perspective and motive. She didn’t care what anyone else thought, only Jesus, who commends her for her worship. Let’s see if we see this same attitude in the next two snapshots of Mary of Bethany.

Memory Verse of the Week: “She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.” Mark 14:8

Second Day

Study your memory verse. Ponder it throughout the day.

Let’s begin today by looking at our second snapshot of Mary. As you read through the verses, pay attention to Mary’s responses and reactions. Are they consistent with what we learned about her yesterday?

1. Read John 11:1-44. Observe and list the facts from this wonderful story. What does it seem like they expect of Jesus? Are any requests or demands made?

2. When Jesus heard that His good friend Lazarus was sick, why did He wait to go there? Why didn't He heal him from afar? List the verses that answer this question.

3. Describe the scene and what was happening when Jesus did show up.

4. Describe the differences between how the sisters responded to Jesus. Are they any similarities? How do their responses seem to line up with their personality traits?

5. Why do you think Martha called Mary "secretly"?

It's so interesting to me to see that Mary takes the same position as before, at His feet. She is confused and heartbroken, overwhelmed with grief, yet she still falls down at His feet with respect and love. (How often have we felt the same at a funeral of a loved one?) She couldn't quite piece this whole thing together, yet she trusted the One who could.

6. Why does Jesus respond differently to each sister? Why do you think He cried with Mary?

To me, this might be the most endearing part of the story. We already know that Jesus loved all three of them (vs 5). He knew how different they were in their personalities, their temperaments, and their giftings. He knew they expressed emotions and grief differently. Because of that, He ministered to each of them differently, right where they were at. I absolutely love that I don't have to try to be someone else. I'm just me. And you're just you. Not that we have a license to sin, don't get me wrong. But He knows us, He created us, He loves us, while we are yet in our sins. (Romans 5:8) There is unity in the body of Christ, but not uniformity. I am free to be me and who He's created me to be. He didn't love Martha because she was more hospitable or Mary because she was more sensitive. He loved them both. Can I hear an Amen to that?

Jesus was troubled and groaned in the spirit. The phrase "groaning in Himself" literally means "He breathed indignation." Why was He so angry when He knew the outcome? Perhaps

That's it for today. Tomorrow we'll look at our next snapshot, which is kind of my favorite. Well, at least this week. 😊

Third Day

Review your memory verse. Are you doing what you can do? That's all He asks of us.

1. Please read John 12:1-11, Matthew 26:6-13, and Mark 14:3-9. Briefly list the facts of this story using all three references.

Note that there is a similar incident found in Luke 7:36-50, but most scholars believe that to be a different Mary. In Luke, she is referred to as the "sinner" which doesn't seem consistent with how Mary of Bethany is known. Also, the apparent reason for the act of anointing was different.

2. The Mary referred to in Luke seemed to anoint Jesus to express gratitude for the forgiveness and cleansing of her sin. What is Mary of Bethany most likely expressing gratitude for?

Jesus returns to Bethany and attends this dinner which seems to have been given in His honor. The spikenard Mary used to anoint Jesus was a sweet smelling ointment made from an imported plant from India, which was very costly. It was worth 300 pence, about a year's wages. It would have been easy to get to His feet, since in those days, they would recline on couches, so to speak, with their feet out to the side. We sat like this a few times in Israel when we had particular meals to reenact this scenario. Yes, it was harder to get up than I imagined!

3. Did Mary say anything? What was Martha doing? Did she complain this time?
4. What words would you use to describe her act of worship? (Where do you think she got the money?)
5. Who criticized her, and why?

6. What did Jesus think about it?

7. It was 6 days before the Passover, the last week of Jesus' life. Why do you think this was significant?

This act of love was well calculated, planned out, and purposeful. She brought that alabaster jar with her to offer it as a sacrifice to Him, as a sign of love and devotion. She would've poured herself out if she could. She didn't say a word while everyone in the room watched this display of affection. She was criticized and judged for it. Her gift was probably misinterpreted by some. It was costly, risky, and generous. It was daring, impractical, and unusual. But the Lord commends her for it. Her silent act of worship will never be forgotten. I think the word "extravagant" pretty much sums it up. Her worship was extremely, completely, and without question ... extravagant!

8. Mary's love ran deep for Jesus, which was the motive for her extravagance. What are some ways that you can show this kind of love and devotion for Him? How would this look today, in your life?

9. What are some examples of acts of "risky love" for Jesus?

We can love Him extravagantly in many ways. Many times it's how we love others in His Name. By being His hands and feet to others, we are loving Him. So our extravagant acts are often manifested towards people. It's love that takes a chance, risks being criticized or made fun of; goes out on a limb for someone, shows generosity towards someone when the smarter thing to do is to save for your future. It's surprising, impractical, and unusual acts of love. Soon Jesus would feel the Roman whip, the crown of thorns, the beatings, the spitting and punching, the betrayal and rejection. How beautiful it is that this generous show of love happened right then. Perhaps He was reminded of it during His sufferings. Maybe He could still smell the amazing fragrance on His skin as it was torn. I'd like to believe that.

10. Time to ask yourself the hard questions. Are you generous towards God and others? Do you worry about what others think? Do you ever shower people with blessings, kindness, and other acts of love? Are you compelled by your love for Christ, to love others as He would?

11. Has your act or display of extravagant love ever been questioned, criticized, or rejected? What did you do?

12. How have others shown extravagant love towards you? How did it make you feel?

13. Who is the Lord asking you to show love towards today? A member of your family who hasn't been kind to you? A neighbor who continues to bug you? A stranger who simply needs some help?

John 15:12-13 says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Jesus showed this kind of love for us. It was very costly, a price we couldn't pay. He gave us this extravagant gift of Himself through the death on the cross. That's how He loved us. Can we, in turn, show this love to the world?

Fourth and Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse.

Let's take another look at our story. There's sooooo much we can glean from it, so much we can take to heart. Go back and read the text again to refresh your memory.

1. Read Mark 14:3-9. How does Jesus commend her? What did He mean about the poor? Did He think they shouldn't be helped?

2. Why did He say she came to anoint His body for burial?

Some scholars think that Mary had been listening to Jesus as He spoke about His coming death and burial, so she had been saving and collecting the ointment to prepare His body.

3. I love our memory verse ... “She did what she could do.” What did He mean? And, may I ask, are you doing what you can do? Not what you “want” to do, but “can” do?

4. We all can “do” something, right? We are all called to love others; it’s a mark of being His disciples. (John 13:34-35) In 1 John, we are told over and over that if we love God, we will love others (1 John 3:16-18, 4:7-21).

We can never measure our acts of love and service with another’s. Since we are given different gifts and talents, are called and equipped for different ministries, and have been created for different purposes, how can we compare? But alas, we do, right? This reminds me of another favorite story of a no-name poor widow woman who puts two mites in the Treasury. (Luke 21:1-4 and Mark 12:41-44) Jesus was using her as an example as His disciples watched all the rich people trying to be noticed as they put their money into the box. The Lord commended her, saying that she gave more than they did because they gave out of their abundance, and she had given out of her poverty, putting in all that she had. Wow. That’s all I can say. He didn’t say this would be a memorial to her forever, like He did with Mary, but it is! This poor little lady will always be remembered because of her extravagant gift, which was nothing compared to some. But ... the Lord is looking at our hearts, and not the size of the gift. God looks at things differently than we do. He looks at the heart, the motive, the perspective, and the generous spirit of our gifts. And no matter how extravagant we are, we can never out give God.

5. Do you struggle with comparing your worship, your gifts, and your service to the Lord, to others? How does this story speak to your heart?

6. Do you have a grateful heart for all He’s done in your life? Mary’s heart seemed to burst with thanksgiving! Does yours? If not, how can you cultivate a grateful spirit?

I just have to quote a paragraph from Max again, it's so good. Read this carefully. "In the Old Testament, the law of God commanded the people to make offerings to the Lord at the Temple. A ram on the Day of Atonement, a farmer's first crop, a peasant's pigeon ... all of these were sacrificed on the altar of the temple. The sacrifices were a way for the people to express their worship to God and their gratitude for His forgiveness of sins. But most of all, the sacrifices pointed to the greatest sacrifice to come: the death of Christ. Mary's loving worship of Christ thus involved pouring an offering over the greatest offering ever given. She gave Jesus her most expensive earthly possession to anoint Him for the death and burial He would endure to pay for our sins. May we all worship like Mary. May we love Him so much that we put everything we own, every person we love, everything we are, at His feet." Can't say it better than that! Thanks Max!

7. Nothing is wasted on Jesus, especially a life fully consecrated and dedicated to Him. (Although the world seems to think so.) I like to think of it as a life not wasted, but a life "abandoned." What does that mean? Is He calling you to abandon some areas of self and flesh that still enjoy ruling over the Spirit?

Mary was obviously single, although we don't know if she is a widow or was ever married. Scripture doesn't say. But I love the fact that being single didn't stop her from pouring her life out for Him. No matter where we're at, we all have the same call to worship, and opportunity to pour out our lives for Him. Married, single, or widowed, He wants all of us.

8. Has something, or is something, stopping you from giving your "whole self" to Him?

I want to end with this, written by Herbert Lockyer. He said, "When Mary sat at His feet and heard His word she recognized Him as the *Prophet*; when in her grief she fell at His feet she knew Him to be the sympathizing *High Priest*; now as she anoints His feet she knows Him to be the *King* at whose waist could be found the keys of death and Hades. Had He not triumphed over death and raised her beloved brother? No wonder the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. The odor of Mary's loving service has filled the whole world."

9. Do you know Him as Prophet, Priest, and King? And does the odor of your service fill the whole world? Or your house?

See you next week, ladies! I pray you learned some lessons from this great lady!

