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# THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2023

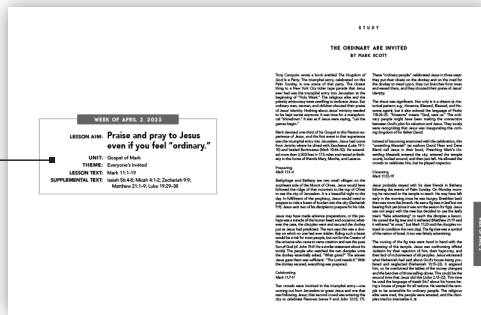
## Unit: Gospel of Mark

### Theme: Everyone's Invited

**Overview:** Reading the Gospel of Mark is like preparing for the arrival of company. The fast-moving Messiah of Mark's Gospel was getting his house (kingdom) ready for a wide assortment of guests. Jesus wanted everyone in his kingdom—the ordinary, the nations, sinners, the hurting, and even you. Students will want to give Jesus their RSVP.

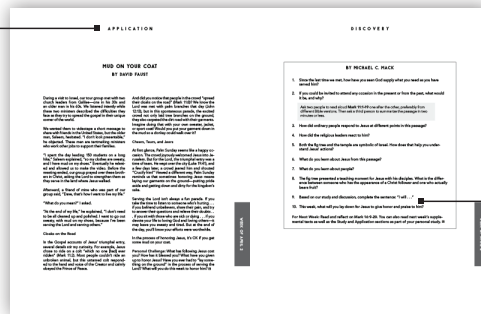
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF APRIL 30, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** **Express your gratitude  
for your relationship  
with Jesus through  
extravagant worship.**

**UNIT:** Gospel of Mark

**THEME:** Everyone's Invited

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 14:1-9

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 26:2-15; John 12:1-8; Revelation 19:6-9;  
Matthew 22:1-14

## STUDY

### YOU ARE INVITED

BY MARK SCOTT

Can the worship of God ever get too extravagant? At first pass the answer is probably no. God deserves all creatures in heaven and earth ascribing to him his supreme worth. But in every church board meeting there is some “practical person” who wants to know, “How much will this cost?” That is not a bad question—the disciples essentially asked that question in our lesson text—it is just not a good first question. God invites all of creation to worship him. How extravagant should that worship be?

The Passion Week of Jesus began in Mark 11. But the Passion event began in Mark 14. Jesus’ march up Calvary was only hours away.

#### Extravagant Worship Rejected

Mark 14:1-2

The Passover lamb was killed on the 14th day of Nisan. That began a weeklong festival known as the *Festival of Unleavened Bread*. The text says this date and festival were *only two days away*, so Judas would have made plans with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus somewhere in the middle of Passion Week (Mark 14:9-10).

The *chief priests* (notice the plural, which probably means that Annas still had some clout with his son-in-law, Caiaphas—John 18:13), who were Sadducean, and the *teachers of the law*, who were Pharisaic, were *scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him*. The Gospel writers spared no words in telling the motives of the Jewish leaders. Their true colors were shown when they gave some restraint to their plans lest there be a *riot* among the people (cf. John 11:47-53). In rejecting Jesus, the religious leaders were rejecting his invitation.

#### Extravagant Worship Displayed

Mark 14:3

In contrast to the Jewish leaders, Mary displayed extravagant worship toward Jesus (John 12:3). Part of it, no doubt, was her gratitude for Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). Mary is unnamed in Matthew and Mark, and the event is not recorded in Luke, though some think that the penitent woman of Luke 7 is this woman. There are some similarities in these anointings, but the differences outweigh the similarities. Mary lived in *Bethany*, and the penitent woman probably lived in Galilee.

Jesus was reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper. Simon might have been married to Mary or Martha or he

might have been a leper Jesus had formerly cleansed. Without fanfare, Mary entered the room where the men were eating; she had with her an *alabaster jar* (vessel) of *very expensive perfume*. This perfume was spikenard, which originally came from India. Spikenard was extracted from small, thin straws (plants); it was very expensive—maybe representing Mary’s life savings. She broke the jar (probably snapped it at its neck), which meant it could not be used again, and anointed Jesus’ head and feet (John 12:3). It was extravagant in every way.

#### Extravagant Worship Questioned

Mark 14:4-5

Mary’s act of devotion not only was questioned, it also was criticized. The disciples thought she had gone “overboard.” The negative chorus, led by Judas (John 12:4), believed what Mary had done was wasteful. They tallied the loss in their heads and told one another the perfume could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. At the least, their reaction indicated Jesus had taught them to care for the poor (Luke 12:33-34).

On the surface, smug self-righteousness can sound pious and spiritual. But in the end, it simply shows a shrunken heart. The disciples *rebuked her harshly*. The word for “rebuke” has some heat in it. They were angrily indignant toward Mary. But Jesus quickly came to her defense.

#### Extravagant Worship Defended

Mark 14:6-9

Jesus criticized the disciples, commended Mary, and went on to teach about true kingdom values. The Greek word translated as “*leave her alone*” is the word normally used for forgiveness (as in letting go). “Mary did a *beautiful thing to me*.” First, Mary chose “what is better” (Luke 10:42), and then she did this *beautiful thing*.

Caring for the poor is a central mark of the gospel (Luke 4:18). When Jesus said the poor *you will always have with you*, he was not offering an excuse for never caring for them. Jesus’ time on earth was limited. Mary acted decisively. In fact, Jesus likened what she did to burial customs of the day (John 19:39-40). Mary likely did think in those terms, but worship takes us beyond understanding in the present. Worship of Christ connects us with the real world above us (Revelation 4–5). Jesus defended Mary’s extravagant worship of him by saying that what she did would be told in her memory. Our lesson text is evidence of that. ■

## APPLICATION

### GIVE THE LORD YOUR MVP

BY DAVID FAUST

To sports fans, MVP means Most Valuable Player. Football's Peyton Manning holds the NFL record with five MVP awards. Basketball's Bill Russell and Michael Jordan each won five MVPs, while Kareem Abdul-Jabbar won the award six times. Baseball's Barry Bonds won seven MVPs, but the legendary Babe Ruth won it only once—in 1923, when he hit .393 with 41 homers and 130 runs batted in. (In the 1920s, professional baseball players were allowed to win the MVP title only once.) Hockey great Wayne Gretzky holds the record for the most MVPs. He won the NHL's Hart Trophy nine times in the 10-year span from 1980 through 1989.

With a little twist, what if those letters stood for Most Valuable *Possession*? What do you consider your MVP? Is it your car? Your house? Your bank account or retirement savings? Is it an heirloom, like a cherished piece of furniture passed down by a relative?

#### Worship . . . or Waste?

Would you give your Most Valuable Possession to the Lord? That's what Mary did for Jesus. She "came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard" (Mark 14:3). That perfume wasn't Chanel No. 5; it was more like Chanel No. 20—the really good stuff. Nard comes from plants in the Himalayas, so this rare perfume had been imported all the way from India. Even the packaging was pricey. Alabaster looks like onyx or marble, but it's soft enough to be carved into a jar or vase.

In those days, a generous host might sprinkle a drop or two of perfume on an honored guest. But Mary broke the whole jar and emptied the perfume onto Jesus' head, wiping his feet with her hair and filling the house with the fragrance (John 12:3). It was the gift of a lifetime, worth about a year's wages—an extravagant outpouring of love.

Not surprisingly, some bystanders considered Mary's act wasteful. Whenever you go all out for the Lord, you will be misunderstood and criticized. A high school guidance counselor warned me not to waste my time by going to Bible college, but I'm glad I ignored his advice. Professor Lewis Foster earned graduate degrees from Harvard and Yale, but no one who studied under him would say he wasted his career by teaching in a Christian seminary.

Do you know what is truly a waste? Hanging onto a bottle of perfume when you have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something incredible for Jesus! It's a waste to withhold your talent instead of using it for the Lord, squandering your Father's inheritance instead of investing it in his kingdom.

#### A Beautiful Thing

Jesus didn't criticize Mary. He defended her. "She has done a beautiful thing to me," he said (Mark 14:6). "To me." That's what made her generosity beautiful. To honor Jesus, Mary poured out her MVP—her Most Valuable Possession. "She did what she could," Jesus said (v. 8). God doesn't demand what we cannot do, but he takes whatever we offer him in faith and multiplies it a hundredfold.

Sometimes love makes us do things that appear extravagant and unconventional—so lavish that others might consider them reckless. But since Christ "poured out his life unto death" for our sake (Isaiah 53:12), doesn't it make sense to give him our best?

**Personal Challenge:** Do something extravagant to honor the Lord. Give away something you value or make an extravagant, sacrificial, larger-than-usual donation to a ministry or mission. **■**

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## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the last week, with whom did you talk about what Jesus has done in your life?
2. What would you consider your most valuable possession?

Ask two people to read aloud **Mark 14:1-9** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What contrasts do you see between the religious leaders (chief priests and teachers of the law), the woman (Mary, John 12:3) who poured her perfume on Jesus, and the others who were gathered (vv. 4-5)?
4. This passage focuses on four individuals and groups: the religious leaders (vv. 1-2), the woman (v. 3), the others who were present (vv. 4-5), and Jesus (vv. 6-9). For each group, discuss these two questions:
  - What do you think they were thinking or feeling as this event happened?
  - How would you describe their motive for their actions and/or words?
5. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? What does he value?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Jesus said about the woman, "She did what she could." What gift, ability, interest, passion, or resource do you have that you can use to do what you can for Jesus and his kingdom?
8. What "beautiful thing"—an extravagant, lavish act of worship—will you do for Jesus this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What words can you use to express your gratitude to Jesus for your relationship with him?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Lamentations 4:1-22** as we begin a new unit called "God-Given Grief." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■