



Walking in the Light

John 12

John 12 – What does the story of Mary anointing Jesus’ feet with nard tell us about our service to Him?

All who know Jesus Christ as their Savior have been given a great gift and should feel compelled to give back to God by their service. John chapter 12 tells the story of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus’ feet with a pint of nard, an imported perfume worth 300 denarii, a year’s wages for a working man. We have the opportunity to render similar honor to Jesus in whatever work God has given us to do. Faithful, honest, diligent service done so that Christ may be glorified in our work is a gift to God that is costly. Associates often think the extra effort is wasted because it seems to make no real difference. But what others consider wasteful, God considers to be like the fragrant aroma that filled the room when Mary poured the nard on Jesus’ feet.

12:1-8 – What can we learn from Mary about when we should serve Christ?

We should do everything we can to avoid missing opportunities to honor Christ. The secular environment in our society makes it easy to put off showing Jesus that we love Him. However, the actions we take today usually bring greater glory to God than if we take the same action later. Jesus was certainly so impressed with Mary of Bethany when she anointed Him with expensive perfume in John 12:1-8 that this event was included in God’s Word for our eternal contemplation. Mary did not wait until Jesus was prepared for burial to use the perfume; she used it while He was still with them. We should always be ready to take advantage of the opportunities we get to honor Christ. It could make an eternal impact.

12:1-8 – What was the problem with Judas’ criticism of Mary?

It is common for people to criticize others in our society. But followers of Christ should not contribute to the culture of criticism. In John 12:1-8 Judas complained that Mary wasted expensive perfume on Jesus when it could have been sold to help the poor. But despite Jesus’ sharp rebuke, there is no evidence that Judas ever gave to the poor. Judas’ objection was an attempt to cover his own selfishness. People who criticize others working for the Lord are usually attempting to mask their own shortcomings. But attitudes always result in behaviors that reveal a person’s real priorities. And the norm is for people to look at things from a selfish perspective. So we stand out as being extraordinary when we don’t join ranks with the critics. And God will use that to attract people to Him.

12:6 – How can our strengths become weaknesses?

God gives us skills matched to whatever He wants us to do but we shouldn’t let our strengths become a weakness. God’s plan for us is to have work to do that is in line with our strengths. John 12:6 tells us that Judas was the “keeper of the money bag” for the disciples of Jesus so he must have had some competency that enabled him to have that role. But, as Judas demonstrated, we can fail when we let down our spiritual guard. Our strengths can become weaknesses if we settle for poor preparation, shortcuts, and acting as if we own what truly belongs to another. If Christ is truly Lord of all we do, we should be on our guard against greed, self-service, and taking moral shortcuts.

12:9-10 – When are we an danger of murderous jealousy and how can we avoid it?

We all like to believe we are above petty jealousy. Unfortunately our behavior often proves the opposite. John 12:9-10 tells us that the religious leaders of the time were so jealous of Jesus that they planned to kill both Him and Lazarus. While this is an extreme case, we essentially have the same mentality when we secretly desire the power or position of someone else thinking we could do a better than them. The best way to deal with such murderous jealousy is to focus on serving God wherever we are and avoid comparing ourselves to others. God has placed us where we are to serve His purposes. We can overcome jealous tendencies when we remember that God is in control and has our best interests in mind.

12:16 – Why should we look back on what God has done in our life?

God arranged for us to be where we are to serve His purposes. John 12:16 says that the disciples of Jesus did not understand why certain details of Jesus’ ministry happened the way they did until He was resurrected. When we look back at how we got to where we are, we often see the hand of God at work. There are no coincidences. God arranges for the right opportunities to come our way to lead us to take the path that will enable us to fulfill the purpose He has for us. Certainly we often make the wrong choices but God is patient with us and gives us new opportunities to take corrective action. The closer we grow to God, the more clearly we can see His involvement in our life.

12:19 – How is it to our advantage to get on-board with what God is doing?

We will be more successful at whatever we do when we work with God rather than against Him. Success in life is a simple matter of getting on-board with what God is doing. In John 12:19, the religious leaders opposing Jesus became exasperated that nothing they did kept people from following Him. God's plans will get executed whether we are working for Him or against Him. So, the closer our activities can be aligned with what God wants done, the more we will be successful at what we do. We should be on our guard against thinking that God is limited to working in the ways He has done in the past and be open to His working in new ways.

12:24 – How may we experience true prosperity?

Expecting God to prosper us materially is a goal that misses the eternal blessings God wants for us. To involve God, it is necessary to die to ourselves. John 12:24 says, *“unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds”* (NIV). Jesus literally died to Himself in obedience to the Father by going to the cross. His sacrificial death paid the price for our sin so that we may have an eternal relationship with Him. Thus Jesus lives through us to bring even more people into God's family. As Jesus died to Himself in our best interest, success with God requires setting aside our own agenda in the best interest of our associates.

12:25 – Why should we hate our life?

We need to question our commitment to Christ if our following Him is not evident. Jesus wants us to be so committed to living for Him that we “hate” our life by comparison. Jesus said in John 12:25, *“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”* (NIV). Loving our life means living only for our own pleasures and purposes. In contrast, hating our life means consistently using our time and resources to follow Christ. This world provides plenty of opportunities to encourage people to follow Jesus. We miss out on great blessings if we aren't setting aside our own agendas to see Christ glorified in public.

12:27 – Why should we be ready to serve Christ at all times?

Since we have the potential to make an eternal impact every day, we should be ready for the opportunity. God is Almighty enough that He arranged for us to be where we are to serve His purposes. As Jesus anticipated going to the cross in John 12:27, He recognized that His primary purpose in being here was *“for this very hour.”* Likewise, we too should be ready for when God calls us *“for this very hour”* in the lives of others. God may have placed us where we are at to help an associate in trouble or to resolve a conflict that is keeping someone from growing close to Christ. Little

things we do can make an eternal impact if it attracts our associates to Jesus. So take advantage of every opportunity to be a blessing to others.

12:27-28 – How did Jesus model excellence for us?

Excellence usually requires us to tackle certain distasteful tasks ahead of our favorite activities. Jesus demonstrated this when He contemplated going to the cross in John 12:27-28. Jesus said no to His human desires in order to obey and glorify Father-God. Although we will never have to face such a difficult and awesome task, we are still called to obedience. Jesus modeled excellence in following through on the mission for which He was sent. Our own pursuit of excellence requires us to face head-on the challenges in our lives. It is human to avoid difficulty and pain, but it is Christ-like to obey the Father and endure tasks we would just as soon let someone else do. When we do this, we find that our greatest blessings come from our greatest challenges.

12:27-28 – How does adopting Jesus' attitude help us with our difficulties in life?

It helps to keep in mind why God put us on earth when we face difficult challenges. The purpose of our lives is to see God glorified. Jesus made that very clear in John 12:27-28 when He said, *“for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”* (NIV). God is glorified when people come to know Him on a personal level through Jesus Christ. Thus we glorify God when our excellence attracts others to Jesus by their coming to know we are motivated by Him. Our associates are watching to see how we deal with a difficult task or decision. Remembering that we are here to glorify God helps us to do the right thing. And fulfilling the purpose God gave us provides the satisfaction we need in life.

12:31 – What is the danger in exercising authority?

All of us need to beware of the corrupting influence of receiving greater authority. The cliché that power corrupts is biblical. Jesus referred to Satan as the *“the prince of this world.”* Satan is real, not symbolic. He is the leader of the fallen angels opposing God. People with authority draw the attention of fallen angels as targets of temptation because leaders are in a better position to do things that draw the most people away from God. But we can take courage from knowing how the battle with Satan and His minions will ultimately turn out. Jesus said in John 12:31, *“the prince of this world will be driven out”* (NIV). So be aware of the dynamics of spiritual warfare and resist the evil one when exercising authority.

12:35 – How may we be light bearers?

If we are making good use of our time, others will see Christ in what we do. Jesus said in John 12:35, *“You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have*

the light, before darkness overtakes you" (NIV). Jesus referred to Himself as the light that revealed the truth about God. When we walk in His light, we become "children of the light," revealing the truth and pointing people to God. As Christians, we are to be Christ's light bearers, letting His light shine through us. The more we apply God's principles, the more our associates will be attracted to Christ if they know we follow Him.

12:35 – Why should we have an urgency to do the will of God?

Opportunities are fleeting. Jesus said in John 12:35, "*Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you*" (NIV). Jesus expressed a sense of urgency in taking action because "*the light*" will not last; situations are always changing. Conditions may not be perfect, problems may be unsolved, and questions may be unanswered, but when our path is illuminated by Christ, we should follow His light. Even a small light can guide us through a darkened room. We only need enough light to see the way. Although we may not see everything clearly in life, we must act on the light we have. If we wait until everything is clear, we will never take action. The more we take advantage of the opportunities God presents us with, the more we will fulfill our purpose.

12:35 – What can we do to bring light to the world?

Our society is full of people who act like their life has meaning but are really without the light of Christ. Without Christ, it is impossible to fulfill our purpose in life. In John 12:35, Jesus said, "*The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going*" (NIV). People without Christ have no purpose, plan, or personal meaning in their lives. They sense no mission in their career, their family lacks unity, and their personal lives are empty. God has strategically placed His children where we can encourage our associates to let the light of Jesus shine in their lives. When our associates know we follow Jesus, we'll have opportunities to tell them about the Source of the light in our own life. So make sure people see the light of Christ in you today!

12:37 – Why shouldn't we be discouraged when people reject our witness of Christ?

Don't be discouraged when associates pass on opportunities to discuss spiritual matters with you. Some people have already made their mind up about Jesus and they will not be swayed no matter what proof they have for the truth. John 12:37 says, "*Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him*" (NIV). Likewise, many today won't believe despite all God does. The very existence of the creation and irreducible complexity of living creatures cry out that there is a Creator-God. World developments show the stage being set for events the Bible says precede the return of Christ. So don't be discouraged if your witness for Christ doesn't bear as

much fruit as you'd like. We're called to reach out to others, but people must make their own decisions.

12:42-43 – Why don't more people take a public stand for Jesus?

People will not take a public stand for Jesus because they fear rejection or ridicule. John 12:42-43 says many Jewish leaders wouldn't admit to faith in Jesus because they feared excommunication from the synagogue which was their livelihood. But Jesus has strong words for such people in Matthew 10:33, "*whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven*" (NKJV). The praise of people is short lived. We should be much more concerned about God's eternal acceptance than the temporary approval of associates. Pointing this out to associates who profess to be Christians but remain silent about Jesus may be all they need to be more transparent about their faith.