



2024 Q3 The Book of Mark

Lesson 11: Taken and Tried

by Eve Knight

SUNDAY

In Sunday's lesson, it tells us to read Mark 14:1-11, which is the story of Jesus' anointing at Bethany. So, let's take a quick look at those verses.

¹ It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, ² for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

³ And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii^[b] and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Mark 14:1-11, ESV)

Starting with the third paragraph, the lesson then says, "Who the woman is here is not revealed by Mark."

Is it true that Mark doesn't reveal who the woman is? Yes. Is it true, however, that we don't know who the woman is. No. Why? Because this isn't the only place the story is found. How many of the gospels include this story? They all do. So, if we want to truly understand this story, it would make sense to look at all four accounts. So for today, we're going to look at it for ourselves and take some time to study it.

Before we start, what does it actually mean to study the Bible? What does it mean to study anything? What is the difference between studying it and reading it? Think of driving on a highway that has several places where the scenery really opens up and suddenly there's a beautiful landscape visible. How much of it do you see if you blast past that spot at 80 miles per hour? How do you go about studying that beautiful view? Maybe pull off at an overlook spot, get out of the car, and really look at it. If you do that, what will you see differently than just driving by it? You'll start noticing details,

right? What if you were looking at that landscape with the goal of painting it? Would that change how you view it? You'd notice more details, look at overall shapes and colors, maybe even take some reference photos to look at as you paint? Maybe take some notes on things of particular interest that you'd like to include in the painting?

If we think of studying the Bible, this is what we want to do. We want to slow down. So how do we do that? How do we slow down? We have to spend some time looking at the details. We can do that by asking some basic questions, like Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How. We don't have to go in that order, of course, the point of asking those types of questions is simply to slow us down so we can observe more.

It's important, however, to pause for a moment, and ask what might be our goal to keep in mind while we study? That depends a little on what we're looking at, right? But some general goals or purposes that we could keep in mind, what might those be? To understand who God is, and understand His character. Why is that important?. Are we just looking for intellectual knowledge? No, we study so that we might grow closer to Him, love Him more, become more like Him. What else might we look for? Perhaps ways to understand what's happening in the story, and discover truth that we can apply to our own lives? In other words, we study for the purpose of transformation, not just information. We want to ask, "How can God use this story or passage to change me?" With this understanding of why we study, what should be our very first step, every time we study the Bible? Recognize that we aren't alone. We can ask the Holy Spirit for His guidance while we study.

So coming back to our passage, where do we begin with studying this story? First, by looking at all the accounts of it, right? Our story is found in Mark 14:1-11 which we've already read, John 12:1-8, Matthew 26:1-16, and Luke 7:36-50. For the sake of convenience, I've provided a handout for those here with each of the accounts. These will also be in the notes for today.

Mark 14:1-11

¹It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, ²for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

³And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

John 12:1-8

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it ^[c](or she intended to keep it) for the day of my burial. ⁸For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

Matthew 26:1-16

¹When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, ²“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

⁶Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. ⁸And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? ⁹For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” ¹⁰But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸and

standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” ⁴⁰And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

⁴¹“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” ⁴⁴Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” ⁴⁸And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹Then those who were at table with him began to say among^[a](or to) themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Notice that each writer provides a different perspective, each one provides slightly different details. We’ll start our study, our “slowing down” by identifying some answers to some of the basic questions of Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. We’ll start with the easiest question of where. . . where is this story taking place? Bethany, first, and then the home of Simon for the feast.

Now we’ll look at When. . . when does this story take place?

Two of the accounts say two days before the Passover, Luke doesn’t mention timing at all, and John’s account says six days before the Passover. What do we make of those differences? Can we figure them out in a way that makes sense? Could it be that they arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover, but the meal at Simon’s house doesn’t happen until two days before?

What’s the significance of the timing of this story?

It’s the week before the crucifixion. Because of this timing, what is Jesus trying to help His disciples understand? Matthew tells us the answer to that: That He’s going to be handed over and crucified.

Let’s look at the simple “What” for this story. What are the actual events that happened, and can we try to put these events in an order that they are likely to have happened in?

1. Jesus and the disciples arrive in Bethany and stay with Lazarus.
2. Jesus tries to tell the disciples what is coming.
3. The Jewish leaders secretly plot to kill Jesus.

4. Simon offers a feast in Jesus' honor.
5. Mary anoints Jesus with an extravagant act of devotion.
6. Judas publicly complains and tries to shame her.
7. The disciples join in on the complaining and shaming.
8. Simon quietly & inwardly thinks poorly of Jesus because of who she is.
9. Jesus tells Simon a story about forgiveness, quietly rebuking Simon.
10. Jesus rebukes the disciples publicly (including Judas, perhaps specifically him).
11. Jesus commends Mary publicly for her act, and says it will always be remembered.
12. Judas goes out to collude with the chief priests to betray Jesus.

If we look at this series of events, we can start understanding how all the stories tie together. Using a method I've seen while working through the book, *The Harmony of the Gospels*, I created a story timeline using all four accounts. This will also be available at the end of the notes for today.

We won't be reading these out loud again, but as you refer to the story in the handout, you'll want to focus on the bold text. This was my way of trying to understand how the story occurred and how the pieces from each of the accounts might fit together.

Ok, now we'll look at the Who for this story. Who are all our characters? Jesus, the disciples as a group, specifically Judas, the pharisees/chief priests/elders, Simon the Leper/Pharisee (who could possibly also have been Judas's father – see John 13:2, although the name Simon was fairly common, so this is not conclusive), Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

Does it matter that we identify the participants? Yes. Why? Knowing who they are can give us insight into what's happening in the story. So now we take the answers to Who, and ask some more in depth questions about them. We'll be looking at the following questions for each person or group:

What do we know about each of the people or groups in this story? Why might they have behaved the way they did? (Note: leave these questions on the screen during this whole piece until we get to Mary*)

This will start us in the direction also of answering part of our bigger "why" question.

Jesus – is moving toward Jerusalem, and He knows what's coming. He's trying to prepare his disciples for what's coming. He's stopped in Bethany, likely staying at the home of his friends, possibly for support and fellowship. At the feast, He doesn't complain about the lack of hospitality. In response to Simon's inward judgment, He quietly provides a story for Simon to reflect on instead of rebuking him openly. He does respond openly to Judas and the disciples. Why?

Perhaps because they were making Mary feel ashamed for her act, and there was no need for that?

The disciples as a group – have they understood what Jesus is trying to prepare them for? No. Does this open them up to misunderstanding? Does this affect how they act in the story? Does it explain

how they are so easily distracted by Judas whispering his censure of the woman, and their joining in on the shaming of her?

Judas, specifically – We know he kept the moneybag for the group, and we’re told he habitually dipped into it for himself. What does this tell us about him? What was he practicing? Selfishness, ignoring his conscience—likely also ignoring the prompting of the Holy Spirit, stealing, possibly creating a much more exalted opinion of himself as a result. Most likely rationalizing frequently for why his stealing was ok for him to do.

What was that doing to his heart? Hardening his heart to the prompting of God, resisting healing.

Did it make him more or less likely to understand Jesus’ mission?

Did this make it easier for him to betray Jesus? The pharisees, chief priests, and elders

What are they focused on?

What are the methods they are using?

Why do they want to kill Jesus?

Notice that they plan to take him by stealth (the Greek word there can also mean deceit), and not openly. They’re also willing to pay for betrayal. These are not the methods of God. They are so focused on keeping their own power and authority over the people, so stuck on the “rules” that they become willing to break those same rules and work to try to kill someone. They later rationalized it away as doing a “good thing” for their nation. Were their actions, in fact, at all “good” for their nation. No.

Simon – He’s identified as both Simon the Leper and Simon the Pharisee. How is that possible? In order for him to be known as a pharisee again, and be able to have a feast at his own house, what had to have happened sometime previously? He was healed of the leprosy. How do you think that happened?

What does this tell us about him and his possible motivations for having this meal? As a pharisee, do we have any indication that he’s still kind-of undecided about Jesus? The things Jesus points out that Simon didn’t provide for him, no water for His feet, no greeting as a friend (the kiss), and no anointing oil.

Lazarus – a fellow guest at the feast, and Jesus is staying at his & his sister’s house. He was raised from the dead. The Jewish elders are targeting him for death as well. Why? Because he’s living proof of Jesus’ power to raise the dead.

Martha – serving at the feast. Why is this significant? What does it imply? That their family has some degree of familiarity or closeness with Simon.

* Before we talk about Mary, let's look at what the lesson says about her act of anointing Jesus in the fourth paragraph of Sunday's lesson, "No specific reason is given for why she does this, but the guests at the dinner are appalled by what they consider a grand waste of close to a year's wages in pouring out the perfume on Jesus."

With what the lesson says in mind, let's consider Mary.

What do we know about her?

Simon identifies her as a sinner. John is the only one who names her. What previous stories come to mind about Mary?

Perhaps the story of her sitting at Jesus' feet, learning from Him?

Is she likely to have done the same thing during His visit this time?

What would she have heard Him talking about?

Is it possible that out of all Jesus' disciples there was **one** who heard what He was saying about what was coming?

We already know Martha and Lazarus are at the feast, isn't it likely Mary is there?

Is it likely she notices the lack of typical hospitality that Simon overlooked?

She's heard Jesus say he's soon going to be handed over to be crucified, and she wants to do something for Him. Mary may have felt this was her last chance to thank Jesus before He dies. So perhaps she leaves to fetch her alabaster box, and comes back to break it open for Jesus' sake. She performs the tasks that Simon didn't.

Is it true, then, even if we're looking at just this story in Mark, that "no specific reason is given" for her actions? No. Jesus Himself tells us why she did it. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. Do we have any other evidence that supports Jesus' statement of her reason for anointing Him? She uses nard – a perfumed ointment from the spikenard plant, used to anoint and for burial rituals. What other evidence do we have for her motivation? She's weeping. Why would she be weeping? Perhaps because she believes what He said, doesn't understand why that would happen, but wants Him to know right that moment how much she loves Him and to show her appreciation for His forgiveness?

Let's look at another "Why" question. First, let's notice, the stories written by the actual disciples: Mark (which is thought to have been written by Peter), Matthew, and John all tell the story without including the conversation with Simon.

Why do you think they omitted that piece of the story?

Could it be because they were so busy complaining and shaming that they missed that piece of the conversation altogether?

Now that we've answered quite a few questions about the story, and examined it more carefully, we can shift to application... What can we learn from the story and apply to our own lives? Remember, our overall purpose is transformation, not information. I like to break this part of study into three parts:

1. What do we learn about God in this story, and how does that make a difference for us?
 - a. Jesus doesn't make any complaint about how He's treated by Simon and the lack of what would have been considered normal and expected hospitality. Why? Perhaps His own rights weren't so important as to be a reason to embarrass his host? Could this be a principle we also could live by? How often would we rather look for a reason to complain, especially about being treated poorly? Have you ever considered how you might be affecting the other person by the complaint? Or what the act of complaining might be doing in your own heart?
 - b. In response to the quiet, internal judgment of Simon, Jesus responds with a careful story, designed to help Simon see his own heart. Something that he could ponder both there and later. Do we know anything more about Simon or how he may have changed after this event? Who wrote this story? Who do you think told Luke this story to include in his gospel? Do you think if he remained hard-hearted against Jesus that he would have shared the story? So we have a glimmer of hope that Simon was indeed changed after this event. Healed physically previously, perhaps, and now spiritually. Ellen White seems to agree with this assessment:

Simon's coldness and neglect toward the Savior showed how little he appreciated the mercy he had received. He had thought he honored Jesus by inviting Him to his house. But he now saw himself as he really was. While he thought himself reading his Guest, his Guest had been reading him. He saw how true Christ's judgment of him was. His religion had been a robe of Pharisaism. He had despised the compassion of Jesus. He had not recognized Him as the representative of God. While Mary was a sinner pardoned, he was a sinner unpardoned. The rigid rule of justice he had desired to enforce against her condemned him.

Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart. Stern denunciation would have hardened Simon against repentance, but patient admonition convinced him of his error. He saw the magnitude of the debt which he owed his Lord. His pride was humbled, he repented, and the proud Pharisee became a lowly, self-sacrificing disciple. *Desire of Ages*, 567-68

What difference does this make for us? Perhaps that we can be gentle with others, consider their needs, remember that God wants healing for them, too? It's also a lovely illustration of how gentle God is with each of us as well, because He wants us to be healed in our own hearts.

- c. In response to Judas publicly shaming Mary, Jesus publicly makes a statement in her defense. Why do you think He spoke more plainly here than with Simon? What might have happened if Jesus hadn't spoken up? He would not allow Mary to be burdened by

their words or leave in shame because of their remarks, and instead pointed to how beautiful her act was. What difference does this make for us? Sometimes it is actually necessary to speak up for other people, particularly when unkind words of others can bring that person harm.

2. Are there any principles or design laws evident in the story, and what can we learn from these?
 - a. Judas' habits moved him away from Jesus and away from healing. He consistently hardened his own heart by stealing, being judgmental, and thinking highly of himself.

Consider the following paragraphs from the *Desire of Ages*:

“The Savior reproached him not, and thus avoided giving him an excuse for his treachery. But the look which Jesus cast upon Judas convinced him that the Savior penetrated his hypocrisy, and read his base, contemptible character. And in commending Mary’s actions, which had been so severely condemned, Christ had rebuked Judas. Prior to this, the Savior had never given him a direct rebuke. Now the reproof rankled in his heart. He determined to be revenged. From the supper he went directly to the palace of the high priest, where he found the council assembled, and he offered to betray Jesus into their hands.” *Desire of Ages*, pp 563-564

“Judas had naturally a strong love for money; but he had not always been corrupt enough to do such a deed as this. He had fostered the evil spirit of avarice until it had become the ruling motive of his life. The love of mammon overbalanced his love for Christ. Through becoming the slave of one vice he gave himself to Satan, to be driven to any lengths in sin.” *Desire of Ages*, pg 716.

“Judas reasoned that if Jesus was to be crucified, the event must come to pass. His own act in betraying the Savior would not change the result. If Jesus was not to die, it would only force Him to deliver Himself. At all events, Judas would gain something by his treachery. He counted that he had made a sharp bargain in betraying his Lord.” *Desire of Ages*, pg 720.

What can we learn from this? (Design law of exertion...you get better at the things you practice.) Perhaps that we need to consistently seek God and ask Him if there are any habits that we have that He needs to work on? And then let Him work on it? Do we have any habits that could lead us away from God? Do we have any that move us out of the design for life and health?

- b. Mary consistently listened to Jesus, sat at His feet, and learned from Him. Her heart was changed and healed as a result. What can we learn from this? (Design law of worship...you become like the one you worship. 2 Cor. 3:18) Perhaps that we need to spend more time with God, learning from Him? How do we learn to really listen to God? By spending time becoming accustomed to His voice, perhaps? In His Word? Is worship something we do only once per day? Or is worship something we do all day?
- c. Do the actions of the religious leaders show us how they could think they were doing the “right thing,” yet were using the methods of Satan. What difference does this make

for us? Perhaps that we should be careful about focusing too much on power, rules, or outward behavior, and that we should try to remain aware of the methods we're practicing? (Design law of exertion & design law of worship) Perhaps that we should become more knowledgeable about God's ways, His designs, His character, and allow Him to move us back into harmony with His design? Also that we should be aware of what Satan's methods are so that we can avoid using them?

3. What do we learn about other people, and how does that make a difference for us?
 - a. The actions of the disciples demonstrate how easy it is to follow someone else's lead to complain about another person. And by doing so, they missed out on Jesus' words to Simon. How does that make a difference for us? Perhaps by understanding that when we allow ourselves to be critical and judgmental of others that we can close ourselves off from hearing God?
 - b. Judas complains and twists Mary's act of devotion to make it seem like a selfish act. But what was his motivation for doing this? He was upset that the money hadn't come his way to use as he wanted to. And so he tried to shame Mary. What difference does this make to us? Perhaps that if we find ourselves personally offended by someone else's actions, we should question our own hearts to try to understand why. It is possible there is a hardness in our own hearts that is prompting that feeling of offense. If we find a hard spot, then we can take it to God for healing.
 - c. When Judas is rebuked and Mary commended, he takes such offense that he seeks revenge and rationalizes away his betrayal of Jesus. What difference does this make for us? Perhaps that we should remain open to God's rebuke? What about potential rebuke or criticism from others? Can we learn even from these? Can we learn to examine criticism thoughtfully to determine if there is any truth to it, and then take appropriate action? Perhaps also that we should never allow our own hurt feelings to cause us to step outside of God's design and methods?
 - d. Mary's heart was driven to do something for Jesus, to demonstrate her love for Him while He was still present. It is very likely that the ointment poured out on Him was still fragrant throughout the following week, a constant reminder of her love for Him.

The fragrant gift which Mary had thought to lavish upon the dead body of the Savior she poured upon His living form. At the burial its sweetness could only have pervaded the tomb. Now it gladdened His heart with the assurance of her faith and love. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus offered not their gift of love to Jesus in His life. With bitter tears they brought their costly spices for His cold, unconscious form. The women who bore spices to the tomb found their errand in vain, for He had risen. But Mary, pouring out her love upon the Savior while He was conscious of her devotion, was anointing Him for the burial. And as He went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, **an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.** *Desire of Ages*, pg 560

We can also think for a moment about what that means, "... her act was an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever." In other words, that's what He was thinking of while he proceeded through the trials and the cross. Does that bring to mind any other verses?

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne. Hebrews 12:2 (GNT)

We were what He was thinking of. Was it just about the love He would receive from us?
Or the joy knowing that He was providing the way so that we could be restored, healed, brought back into harmony with His design law of love and life?
What difference does that make for us?
Perhaps one simple application is that we could learn to express our appreciation of others while they are still with us?
Perhaps also that, like Mary, we can learn to be more responsive to God's love?
Perhaps that as we grow to be more like Him, we learn even more about how to give abundantly both to Him and to others?
And what might that look like?

¹⁴ But thanks be to God! For in union with Christ we are always led by God as prisoners in Christ's victory procession. God uses us to make the knowledge about Christ spread everywhere like a sweet fragrance. ¹⁵ For we are like a sweet-smelling incense offered by Christ to God, which spreads among those who are being saved and those who are being lost. ¹⁶ For those who are being lost, it is a deadly stench that kills; but for those who are being saved, it is a fragrance that brings life. Who, then, is capable for such a task? ¹⁷ We are not like so many others, who handle God's message as if it were cheap merchandise; but because God has sent us, we speak with sincerity in his presence, as servants of Christ. 2 Cor. 2:14-17 (GNT)

How do we become this kind of fragrance?

Several years ago, I bought a Bible from a local bookstore. Later, I noticed that throughout the day, I was noticing a particularly sweet smell. Then I realized it was coming from my hands. It became fainter and fainter throughout the day, as my hands got washed, but was noticeable. Eventually I realized it was coming from my Bible. The store I'd gotten it from also sold a variety of candles and scents, and the Bible had become infused with that sweet smell. As I studied it each morning, that fragrance was transferred to my hands, and then carried with me throughout the day.

This is exactly how the law of Worship works. As we spend time studying God's character, loving Him more each day, worshipping Him, we become more like Him. We are changed, we become the fragrance of the knowledge of God. And God wants to use us to spread that fragrance. And notice that it's not just a passive task...while it's certainly possible that people will take notice that we are different, remember the last part of the passage:

We are not like so many others, who handle God's message as if it were cheap merchandise; but because God has sent us, we speak with sincerity in his presence, as servants of Christ.

Could it be that we learn to be willing to speak, to share God's message whenever God provides the opportunity to do so? And we can do it for the same reason Mary poured out her gift; out of love for who God is, for what He's done for us, and offering our voices to Him as a fragrant gift, sharing His love with those around us.

MONDAY

The Last Supper

On Monday's lesson, it says,

Mark 14:12 notes that this is the first day of unleavened bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The meal was on Thursday evening. At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes a new memorial service.

Was Jesus actually instituting a memorial service? Or is it just a memorial? In other words, are we only supposed to do this once every 13 weeks? Is it something we're only supposed to do in a corporate setting or group? What was supposed to be accomplished by remembering Jesus in this way? What are we to remember? The wine represents His blood, which represents the life, the healing remedy offered to us, freely by God. The bread represents His body, broken for us. Both are taken into the body and become part of it. Would we be healthy if we ate only once every thirteen weeks? Could we heal from pneumonia if we took the remedy for it only once every thirteen weeks? Of course not. Jesus was telling them to remember every time they ate and drank? He tells us the same thing. Every time we eat and drink, we are to remember His actions, His life, and His willingness to provide the remedy freely. Daily, we are to internalize the remedy so that we're brought back into harmony with His design for life.

The last two paragraphs of Monday's lesson says,

Then, amid all this, Jesus predicts that His disciples will all abandon Him. ... But all this is too hard for the disciples to accept, especially Peter, who argues that everyone else may fall away, but he will not. However, Jesus continues with the solemn language and predicts that Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows twice.

Why was this all too hard for the disciples to accept? Because they were so settled in their misunderstanding about Jesus' mission that they couldn't accept His words here. They think they are committed to Him. But when it became clear that what they expected (for Jesus to conquer the Romans) that when He submitted to being taken, they all fled. Their expectation didn't meet reality. Peter, especially, thought he knew himself. Jesus, however, proves that He knows Peter better than he does himself.

Why do you think Jesus told Peter this would happen?

Was it just so he could prove He knew? Or is it more likely He was providing Peter with an opportunity to see himself in reality, while also seeing Jesus' love for him, and repent?

TUESDAY

Gethsemane

Tuesday's lesson suggests that we read Mark 14:32-42, which relays the story of the trip to Gethsemane to pray. He leaves the larger group of disciples a little ways away, takes Peter, James, and John further in, and asks them to stay and keep watch. This, literally translates to "stay awake, remain vigilant."

The last paragraph of Tuesday's lesson says,

When you face hardships, it is encouraging to have friends who support you. In Philippians 4:13, Paul talks about doing all things through the One who strengthens him. Many forget Philippians 4:14, where the apostle begins, "Nevertheless." It reads: "Nevertheless, it was kind of you to share my troubles" (ISV). This is what Jesus desired in Gethsemane. Three times He came seeking comfort from His disciples. Three times they were sleeping. At the end, He arouses them to go forth with Him to face the trial. He is ready; they are not.

Was Jesus really asking them to keep watch purely for His own sake? Or do we have evidence that there was more at stake?

Jesus Himself says, when He comes back to find them sleeping, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Mark 14:37b-38)

Could their keeping watch have been a comfort to Jesus? Absolutely. But clearly, there was another purpose to this request.

Is it possible, that if the disciples and specifically, Peter, James, and John, had done as Jesus asked that they might have received strength for the upcoming trial?

Might they have stayed with Him if they had followed Jesus' suggestion?

Could there have been another reason that Jesus specifically spoke to Peter when He woke him up the first time?

Could He have been providing Peter with the knowledge of what he would need to do after he denied Jesus?

"Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation." Isn't this exactly what Peter did? Isn't that also when his heart was converted?

Is there a lesson here for us?

What would it mean for us to watch and pray? What happens when we do watch and pray? What happens if we don't?

WEDNESDAY

Leaving All to Flee From Jesus

Wednesday's lesson suggests that we read Mark 14:43–52, and then asks, "What happens here that is so crucial to the plan of salvation?"

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. Mark 14:43–52

What part of this piece of the story is crucial to the plan of salvation?

Was it necessary for the plan of salvation for Judas to betray Jesus? Or is the piece that is crucial that Jesus offered no resistance?

While it is true that Judas' actions were predicted, and it was also predicted that Jesus' followers would flee, neither of these were crucial to the plan. Only Jesus' actions were crucial.

The first paragraph on Wednesday starts with this sentence:

"It is shocking that one of Jesus' closest associates betrayed Him to His enemies. The Gospels do not go into great detail about Judas's motivation."

While it is true that we are not explicitly told about Judas's motivations for his betrayal, if we study, aren't we given enough hints to guess at it?

We know he helped himself to the money intended for the poor. We know he complained about Mary anointing Jesus, and tried to make her look selfish when, in fact, it was his own heart that was full of envy and selfishness. We also know that he left swiftly after Jesus rebuked the complaining disciples, and sought out those conspiring against Jesus. All this paints a picture for us of his character.

The second paragraph in Wednesday's lesson says,

"Betrayal in itself is deplored by all, even by those who make use of betrayers (compare with Matt. 27:3–7). But Judas's deed is particularly nefarious because he seeks to hide his betrayal under the guise of friendship. He gives the crowd instruction that the man he kisses is the man to arrest. It appears that Judas wanted to hide his perfidy from Jesus and the other disciples."

Why do you think Judas wanted to hide what he was doing?
What's the point of hiding his actions right at that point?
Is it possible he didn't really think Jesus would let Himself be taken?
And then Judas would be the one who pushed Jesus into overthrowing the Romans?
Could it be that he thought he knew more than Jesus did about how to lead a rebellion?
Have you ever thought you knew more than God did? How do you re-wire that kind of thinking?

First thing to do is recognize it, then, as 2 Cor. 10:5 suggests, "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Second is to love the truth, and be willing to seek it, even when it's uncomfortable to do so.

In the last paragraph on Wednesday's lesson, it says,

"The disciples all flee, including Peter, who nevertheless will reappear, following Jesus at a distance and ending up getting himself in trouble. But Mark 14:51, 52 tells of a young man following Jesus, an account found here and nowhere else in the canonical Gospels. Some think it was Mark himself, but that is unprovable. What is remarkable is that he runs away naked. The young man, instead of leaving all to follow Jesus, leaves all to flee from Jesus."

While this is quite poetically stated, was the young man actually fleeing from Jesus? No. He was fleeing the people who were arresting Jesus. He abandoned Jesus, yes, but he wasn't running from Him. In fact, the reason the young man runs away naked is because the crowd took hold of his clothing. He was afraid for himself, for his own safety, and so took off.

What was the main reason all the disciples ran? Fear.
What could have prevented them from doing so? Only love.

Perhaps this is the strongest reason for them to have stayed awake to watch and pray?
To be filled with God's love to overcome their fear?

THURSDAY

Who are You?

Read Mark 14:60–72. Compare how Jesus responded to events in contrast to how Peter did. What lessons can we learn from the differences?

⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" ⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do

you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. ⁶⁸ But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. ⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” ⁷⁰ Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” ⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” ⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

What methods are the priest and the council using? Deceit, false witnesses, eventually also becoming violent. What was their motivation? They just wanted Jesus dead. They didn’t care how they achieved their goal, so long as it didn’t stir up the people against them. Fear and selfishness motivated them.

What method is Jesus using? Speaking the truth, in love, leaving them free to choose their own reactions. What is His motivation? Following God’s will, out of love. He knew His goal. He was not afraid.

What method is Peter using? Lies, deceit, deliberately acting in a way that a disciple of Jesus would have been unlikely to do (calling curses).
What is his motivation? Fear and self-preservation.

But Matthew tells us in 22:61 that just as Peter hears the second crow, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.” This look reminded Peter what Jesus had predicted, and he went out and wept bitterly. He repented. His heart became changed.

At the bottom of Thursday’s lesson, it says,

“It is at this point that a rooster crows a second time, and Peter suddenly remembers Jesus’ prophecy that he would deny his Lord three times that very night. He breaks down and weeps. Here is the striking irony—at the end of His trial, Jesus is blindfolded and struck and commanded to “prophecy!” The idea was to mock Him since He could not see who struck Him. However, at the very time they do this, Peter is denying Jesus in the courtyard below, fulfilling one of Jesus’ prophecies. Consequently, in denying Jesus, Peter demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah.”

Is the fulfillment of the prophecy what demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah? No.

By this logic, if anyone were to prophecy something and it came true, that person might be the Messiah.

Did Jesus even utter this prophecy to prove who He was? Or did He tell Peter what he was going to do for Peter's sake?

So that he would see himself clearly, and open the way for repentance.

“While the degrading oaths were fresh upon Peter's lips, and the shrill crowing of the cock was still ringing in his ears, the Savior turned from the frowning judges, and looked full upon His poor disciple. At the same time Peter's eyes were drawn to his Master. In that gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there.

The sight of that pale, suffering face, those quivering lips, that look of compassion and forgiveness, pierced his heart like an arrow. Conscience was aroused. Memory was active. Peter called to mind his promise of a few short hours before that he would go with his Lord to prison and to death. He remembered his grief when the Savior told him in the upper chamber that he would deny his Lord thrice that same night. Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was **unknown even to himself**. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 712, 713.

FRIDAY

Further Thoughts

For just a moment, we're going to go back to the story we started with, and consider the following as it relates to Christ's thoughts on hearing the disciples complaints:

The words spoken in indignation, ‘To what purpose is this waste?’ brought vividly before Christ the greatest sacrifice ever made,—the gift of Himself as the propitiation for a lost world. The Lord would be so bountiful to His human family that it could not be said of Him that He could do more. In the gift of Jesus, God gave all heaven. From a human point of view, such a sacrifice was a wanton waste. To human reasoning the whole plan of salvation is a waste of mercies and resources. Self-denial and wholehearted sacrifice meet us everywhere. Well may the heavenly host look with amazement upon the human family **who refuse to be uplifted and enriched with the boundless love expressed in Christ**. Well may they exclaim, ‘Why this great waste?’ *The Desire of Ages*, pg 565.

How do you see others refusing this amazing gift? How might we be refusing it in some of our own habits and thoughts? It is time to begin to extravagant in our love for God. How might we express that to Him?