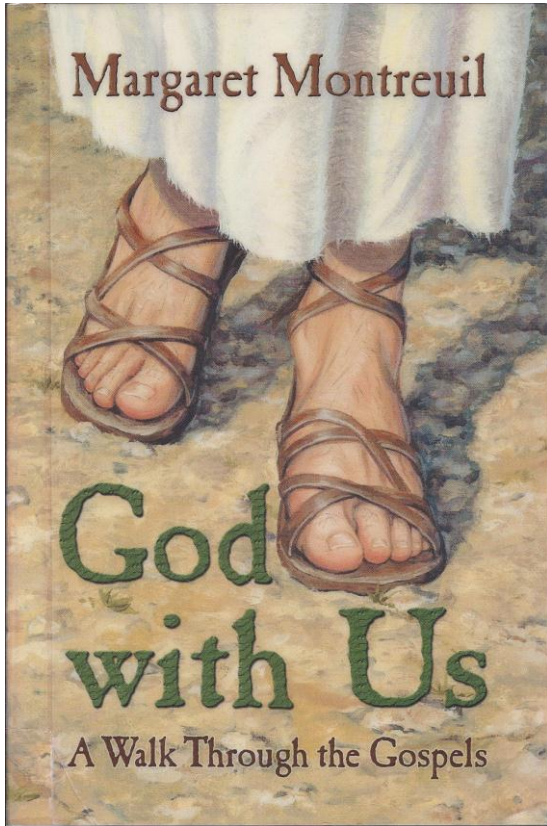


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SEVEN SAMPLE CHAPTERS

19 – Kingdom Love in Action

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*When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t
cry.”
. . . the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to
his mother.
Luke 7:13, 15*

*Simon, I have something to tell you . . .
Do you see this woman? . . .
from the time I entered,
[she] has not stopped kissing my feet.
Luke 7:40b-45*

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

Mary Magdalene, a devoted follower of Jesus . . .

Jesus –

Jesus – they say you gave a dead boy another chance
And that you made a lame man leap and dance
The people here in town all say
You are the one to take our fears away

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Jesus – they say you have a gentle, loving face
And that your words are full of truth and grace
Yet to a storm you shout, commanding peace
Stilling waves, and making wind to cease

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6 Jesus – they say you sang a joyful song
to an old deaf-mute who sang along
Your love, they say, had found a way
To end his silent, lonely days

Jesus – they say you call the sinners and the meek
And that your arms are opened wide to those who seek
I have never known a man to love for free
And so, I hope that what they say is true for me

Jesus – they say you've come to Magdala today
To heal the sick and cast our sorrows far away
I hear your voice . . . to me you're coming straight-away
As though you know how much I've waited for this day

Mary Magdalene . . .

For months, I had heard stories about Jesus, the healer from Nazareth. All of Israel talked about him. I knew a crippled boy Jesus had healed.

And, I wondered, what could he do for a person like me?

But I was afraid to meet him. I was quite certain a man like him would hate a woman like me. And everyone in town talked about what a good man he was. I'd never met a good man. I was sure there weren't any. Men took what they wanted from me or else they treated me like I had leprosy. It was one way or the other.

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When Jesus of Nazareth came to Magdala, I thought perhaps he was the first man I might be able to trust. I saw this in his eyes, in his caring, in the way he walked, touched, spoke . . . in the way he . . . loved. I watched him an entire week and listened to him teach by the lake. I watched his hands heal. Saw his joy.

Page |

7 I found myself, every day, wanting to be near him. If he was gone somewhere, I missed him. He made me feel good. He made me feel good to be alive. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was meant to be alive.

When we met each another face-to-face, it was an awful scene for me. He saw me on the road in town. I flirted with him. What did I know? I was drawn to him . . . had seen how kind he was. I knew no other way. Giving myself to him was all I wanted to do! The only way I knew how to love a man was to . . .

I soon found out, he wanted nothing to do with my body or my charm.

He looked at me and knew at once—my charm was not really me. Within moments, he named the hurts and sins of my scarred existence, calling my demons out by name. Seven had found their home in me. Jesus cast them all away.

Afterwards, he took my trembling hand and said, “My daughter, you are free.”

And I knew by the way he said it and how he looked at me, he surely cared for me, the real me!

When he turned and walked away, I heard him say: “Rejoice! Truly, a daughter of Israel has come home.”

It was from that moment on that I would forever follow him—all the way home to heaven.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

Page | 8 Jesus cast seven demons out of a woman named Mary from Magdala, a town situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee not far from Capernaum. She was a striking and memorable Gospel figure, known mostly for her wholehearted devotion to Jesus.

Jesus was a man of *love-in-action*. Mary returned his love—love for love—by her actions. He transformed her life and deeply touched her soul with his love and mercy. She, in turn, wholly adored him. Right after he set her free, she found him and showed him the extent of her gratefulness. She came to see Jesus as he reclined at a supper with the religious men of her town. Surprising everyone, she anointed the feet of Jesus with perfumed oil and tears—in heartfelt worship.

At the table, Pharisee Simon sat in judgment of both the woman and Jesus, so Jesus gave him an earful of a lesson. “Who loves more?” Jesus asked Simon, “the one who is forgiven little or the one who has been forgiven much?”

Her display of affection captivated Jesus. Paying careful attention to the next verses of Scripture in Luke’s telling of this Gospel story, we see that Mary immediately became one of Jesus’ inner circle. We can read in between the lines to see that Jesus and Mary wanted to be close to each other from then on!

“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out . . .” Luke 8:1-3.

Mary showed Jesus her love when she anointed his feet with perfume, mixed also with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. To say the least, this was a worshipful, humbling, adoring expression in

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body language. Such a dramatic display is rather hard for us, in our culture, to even imagine. Perhaps she had intended to anoint him only with her fragrant ointment but, upon seeing him, broke down in tears.

Page | Why the tears? Did she feel remorse for her sins? Was she
9 extremely relieved over something? Gratefully unfettered at being in Jesus' presence? Was it deep joy because she had found freedom and received forgiveness from him? Was it worshipful love? Most likely, it was all of these things. What we know for certain is that Jesus responded positively to her actions. He accepted her display of affection and he said so.

There is a lesson to be learned here and it is not one we can easily wrap our intellectual minds around. We must let go of our logic just enough to let our hearts have the binoculars for a minute.

We see this event from a “distanced” viewpoint. It happened a long time ago in an ancient culture. Can you imagine someone kissing the feet of anyone in our day? Who’s to say that it was something their culture was used to? The second time it happened, with Mary of Bethany, could have been due to Mary Magdalene’s influence. We don’t know whether it was an expression typical of that day or not. Even if it was, think about what an amazing, dramatic experience this was for Jesus and for Mary Magdalene. The soul at the feet of Jesus was a woman, but what if she had been a man? This was not a sexual encounter. It was a “spiritual” one. Mary truly adored Jesus. And Jesus loved her much more than she could have known.

The religious leaders at the dinner gathering must have been terribly shocked. The woman snuck into their gathering from “the streets.” She came in, uninvited, and made a dramatic display of affection towards a dinner guest, the notorious preacher, whose reputation was already in question with them.

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No wonder Simon thought it wrong and strange. Anyone would have. But he had no idea where Mary was really coming from. It's where we all come from when we come to Jesus.

Page | 10 In our spiritual lives, what this woman did is exactly what our souls most long to do. We want to kneel and kiss his feet. We want to cry and tell him how much we love him. It is a natural response to someone who has discovered the real Jesus. He is the Divine Bridegroom who is in love with us—and his love is like a flame that jumps from his heart to ours. Just like that. It is *Love in action*. After the discovery of Jesus' personal and tremendous love, all we want is to be with him, and all he wants is the same. That is what it means to "abide in the Lord," and have "the Lord abide in us." It is experiencing loving union with him. Mary showed us the way.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Choose one of the Gospel scenes from this chapter's Scripture readings to meditate upon. Use it as a springboard into prayer. Imagine being there. What would you think of Jesus after witnessing the things he does? Imagine Jesus coming to you; you see him and you have a chance to ask him for something, or to tell him something, or to do something for him.

It's okay to imagine more than the exact recorded happening of the event. Let God and his love draw and lead you during this time of reflection. Jesus longs to manifest himself to you in ways you may have never seen before. This will be a special, spiritual "place" to be with him. It's all right to be creative with your prayer. Jesus enjoys it.

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JOURNAL

Write about your thoughts and experiences with the Lord.
Page | Returning love-for-love can take many forms and ways. The prayer of
11 love, of adoration, is just one way. But it is one of the ways Jesus truly
delights in. Be like Mary.

21 – What Kind of Man is This?

*They were terrified and asked each other,
“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”*

Mark 4:41

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

Matthew, one of the apostles of Jesus . . .

My rabbi had exhausted himself. The morning held harassing confrontations from the local Pharisees and other rabbis, and the middle of the day brought his mother and brothers. They were critical of him and wanted to take him back home with them. Their coming had weighed heavily on him, but had greatly angered me, for I was a tax collector and had lived a sinner’s life longer than the other disciples. A quick judge of people, I saw how his brothers looked at him with disdain. I was relieved to see them leave us.

The rest of the day Jesus had tirelessly preached to the pressing crowds in a new method of his which he, from then on, used to mystify his accusers but to teach those with “ears to hear”—as he put it. We listened carefully, but even we, his own disciples, found it necessary that he explain the meaning of his stories to us.

Later that day, when we were alone with him in the house, he explained to us the meaning of his parables, so that we could learn from him and one day teach others. Immediately following this, Jesus said that he must take us away to a solitary place for some rest. And so, leaving the people behind, we set out in our boat to cross the lake to an

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area where there would be very few Jews. The eastern shore was not as inhabited as our western side and was peopled by those who were not Jewish. This, then, would be a place of refuge and relief to our rabbi—and us.

Page |
13 But as we were crossing the lake late that afternoon, a violent tempest arose against us and we were terrified. Because of his trying day, Jesus had fallen asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat and knew nothing of our plight until we woke him.

I will never forget the sight of him. He had been sound asleep, without a care in the world, as though his Father had rocked him to sleep. But how he could continue undisturbed through the tumult of thunder and lightning, the boat heaving and being tossed about, not to mention our cries to one another, I cannot guess. When he finally heard us call his name, crying for him to save us, he awoke with a start and, seeing the situation, came quickly to his feet. At once, he raised his hand and rebuked the waves, telling them to be still and the wind to cease. They obeyed him as quickly as he said the words and we found ourselves sitting in a vessel upon a sea as calm and smooth as glass. He turned to us with a look of disappointment, telling us that we should not have been so afraid, rebuking us for having such little faith.

But we would surely have perished without him.

Afterwards, in a low voice, one of us voiced all of our thoughts for us: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.”

Those of us who lived with him and walked beside him, we who witnessed the miraculous things he did, never grew accustomed to him. We feared him and loved him equally. He sometimes terrified us by his goodness. We knew he was a man just like us, but he was also very much unlike us. He walked in such wisdom and authority, we never knew what to expect. He had God’s power in his fingertips, in his words, and in his breath; we began to believe in him not just as our

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rabbi, or a prophet, or the Messiah, but as the only Son of God. We became men who would do anything for him, even die for him. We knew how dangerous it was to be with him, for he had strong enemies set to get rid of him. Yet, for the most part, we felt safe with him. After all, if he could command the elements of nature and the powers of evil, who or what could stand against him? and us with him? We could trust this man with our strongest fears and highest dreams.

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WONDER JUST A LITTLE

Jesus illustrated the power of God when he turned a wild storm into peaceful sailing. A hush of awe fell upon the hearts of his men.

During the storm, notice how Jesus is compared to the others in the boat. He is asleep. They are terrified. We see that Jesus was unaware of the situation, so he is not afraid. Do you think that Jesus, even for a moment, would have been afraid?

He had power over the forces of nature. Also, he knew where, when, and just how he would die—it would not be at sea.

But is there a part of you that feels Jesus was a little unreasonable to think that his disciples shouldn't have been afraid? Faith is one thing, but having the good sense of self-preservation is another. Why was Jesus so disappointed in their fear, in their lack of faith? Surely, he must have considered that their reactions were normal. If Jesus was disappointed in his disciples, it is easy to ask the question about ourselves. How often do we disappoint him with our lack of faith? Where does natural, common-sense leave off and faith take over?

In truth, faith should always take over; no matter what. Jesus had the right idea, resting in faith, calm as a sleeping babe in his Father's arms.

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God can still the storms of our lives, or be with us as we ride them out. Either way, Jesus is always with us. If he hadn't awakened to quiet the storm, do you think he and the disciples would have drowned? The answer to that question is what Jesus knew and had wished the disciples had believed. The same goes for us. He knows the plans and purposes he has for each of us; they are for our good! Just for fun sometime, do a global word search in the Gospel stories and see how many times God's message to people is "Don't be afraid."

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WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Enter into this particular Gospel scene and ask the Lord to show you what he wants you to see.

Perhaps your life right now feels stormy. Can you transfer your present circumstances to the wind-tossed Sea of Galilee and imagine crying out to Jesus? Perhaps you are battling a sickness that feels impossible to live through so you've resigned yourself to it. Maybe your children are in need of Jesus to bring them to Life. Are you struggling with something too frightening and overwhelming to believe that Jesus can fix and calm everything with one word from his mouth? Remember, Jesus is in the boat with you. As you read and meditate, let the images flow freely and allow yourself to play an imaginative part in the events of the Gospel to let Jesus' love and words find their mark inside of you.

JOURNAL

What things are significant from your reading and time of meditation? Have you been able to see the real, human Jesus a little

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more clearly? We know the Lord more truly when we get to know what he was like as a human being. That is why he came. He wanted to make himself touchable and real to us. Listen for his voice. This same Jesus is with you at this moment. He communicates himself to us within our hearts. Sometimes it is with words, images, or thoughts. Sometimes it is a sense of peace from his presence. After you've finished journaling, stay quiet and share a time of closeness with him.

22 – “Do as You Have Seen Me Do”

*When Jesus had called the Twelve together,
he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons
and to cure diseases, and he sent them out
to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

Luke 9:1-5

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

Simon Peter, the “rock” . . .

Among many things I’ve come to love about Lord Jesus, the most endearing one is his trust in me. One of my favorite memories is the time I briefly walked on water.

You might think that my walking on water had nothing to do with his trust in me, but rather was a sign of my trust in him. Yet here, beloved of the Lord, lies the puzzling truth. You see, it took trust on *his* part to receive me onto those dangerous waves. His faith in me was strong enough for him to know that I could, like him, walk on water. That, I tell you, amazes me. You see, my faith in him often failed me. As everyone knows, I sank after a few steps only because I stopped believing I could do it.

When I saw him coming to us on the waves, I was thrilled. I called out to him, full of faith, asking that if it were he on the waves, that he bid me to come to him. And, to my own amazement, he called back, “Come!”

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I will never forget his look of delight in me before I began to sink. Even though my walk lasted only briefly, I have never felt more exhilarated in my life.

Page | The others in the boat could not understand what caused the
18 preposterous thought to come into my head. Although such a foolhardy idea as climbing out of the boat seemed sudden, let me explain how it gradually came about.

Prior to my walking on the water, Jesus told us we were ready to minister to people in his name. This is what he said on the mount in Galilee, as he touched each one of us: “I give you authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim God’s kingdom. Do as you have seen me do.” Then he immediately sent us out, two-by-two. According to his word, we did signs and wonders, and returned to him full of excitement, and with testimonies of having done all he said we could do.

Shortly after, Herod beheaded John the Baptist. After learning of this tragedy, Jesus wanted to be alone. But the crowds watched him where he went in his boat, and ran ahead to meet him when he landed. The twelve of us, seeing this, also joined him.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds and healed and taught them until it grew late that day. He miraculously fed all of us with five loaves of bread and two fish. We gathered up twelve basketfuls of leftovers after he had fed five thousand people. Next, he sent us off in our boat to cross the lake; he sent the crowds home, with their stomachs full. He wanted to have time alone with his Father while we put out to sea. In the middle of the night, seeing that we were struggling against the wind and waves, he came to us, walking on the water.

He could do anything. The fact that he had no boat was not a problem for him, we soon discovered.

Because of Jesus, I had faith to do impossible things. If he told me I could heal the sick, I could, and did. If he told me I could preach the

kingdom in his name, I did so. If he said I could walk on water with him . . . Well, why not?

Page | Since then, I’ve had countless occasions to “walk on water.” I still
19 | have the boldness to do the things he’s done or asks me to do—and I’ve learned to keep my eyes on him all the time. Otherwise, I sink. And I did something worse than sink. It nearly destroyed me when I betrayed him. But, as it was on the water, he reached down to me and pulled me up out of the threatening depth that could have taken my life. I’ve learned from these experiences. He trusts me to trust in him.

“Do as you have seen me do,” Jesus said to us. He says it still.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

Jesus had found, in Peter, a man willing to believe and do the impossible for, and with, him. In Peter’s letter to the churches in 64 A.D., he wrote, “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Peter saw himself and every believer as *a living stone*. Considering Jesus’ nickname for him, the Rock, Peter was certainly that. He became a foundational stone placed directly upon the chief Cornerstone. It was his faith that earned Peter a key place in the Lord’s heart and in his Spiritual House—the Church.

What was it about Peter’s faith and personality that so endeared him to the Lord?

Let’s look closely. Peter, spontaneous and emotional Peter, was honest, authentic, and full of devotion to Jesus. What did Jesus look for in the man to whom he would hand over the “keys to the kingdom?” He looked for a person who had bold faith.

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Peter was always outspoken about his feelings toward Jesus. He was the first to proclaim that Jesus was “the Son of God.” He was the first to preach Jesus publicly, only minutes after the Holy Spirit fell upon the believers during Pentecost. Peter was a man of faith-in-action, and his action was based on one thing: his devotion to Jesus.

Page |
20 Bold faith is doing the works of Jesus, and trusting your God-given gifts, with your eyes on the one who enables you to “walk on water.”

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

What has God been calling you to do in, and for, him? His gifting or calling may take many forms. He begins giving you desires, but sometimes we don’t realize those are the very callings he has for us. Maybe you feel inadequate or doubtful about something you’ve dreamed of doing, not knowing whether it’s his will or not.

Meet Jesus during a time of meditative prayer. Is there anything you desire to do for him? Maybe you’re not sure if it’s the Lord. Imagine being Peter. Ask him, “Lord, is it you?” Find out what he says about it.

JOURNAL

Describe what thoughts you’ve had during this chapter. Perhaps from the Scripture reading you’ve gained new personal insights. What was your time of imaginative meditation like? Did you sense Jesus calling you to have the faith to do something for him? Or did you sense his pleasure in you for having already taken faithful steps towards him on the water? Record your experiences and give Jesus your assurance

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that you will be faithful and believe in yourself—because he does. Ask him to keep you aware of the times we live in, and that you will be obedient to his voice.

23 – Hard Words

“You do not want to leave too, do you?”

Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

John 6:67-69

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum . . .

Jesus snatched my daughter away from the angel of death and returned her to my arms, alive, healed, and full of kisses for me.

Since the days I first met the carpenter from Nazareth, I have been like the wind, changing with the seasons. I’ve mistrusted him, admired him, praised him, and now I cannot allow him to set foot in our synagogue again.

What is the truth? I now beseech the God of Israel.

How can Jesus tell us he is living bread come down from heaven?

Oh, I know, he is a man of imagery and illustration, using stories to teach. This is his particular method. And so, I’ve tried to understand him. But he’s gone too far. He says that unless a man eats the flesh of the Son of Man and drinks his blood, that man will have no life in him. He said it three times to be sure we heard him. Furthermore, he claims that he will raise to life, on the last day, only those who do so.

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I had come to think of Jesus as the wisest, most compassionate, generous man I'd ever known—until now. As the ruler of Capernaum's synagogue, I have, before God, the responsibility to protect the congregation from deceivers.

Page |
23 People hold differing opinions of the Nazarene. Some say he is crazy, and has power that comes from his madness. Others think he is possessed by the devil and intends to destroy our faith—and us. And there are a few who still hold that he is the Messiah. But if he is, how can he claim such things, or use such a gruesome riddle? Such words seem devilish. What madness is this that falls from his lips?

Some of the officials from Jerusalem are staying in my house. They have enough evidence to bring him to trial. And when they do, they will kill him.

What do I do about a man whose claims are intolerable, yet who seemed to have come to us straight from heaven? For, if I search the bottom of my heart, I find that I want to believe in him. How could anyone bring my daughter back from the dead, unless he was from God? I pray, then, for this man if he is of God, for I cannot tell for certain.

God have mercy on us and give us wisdom.

Judas from Kerioth, one of Jesus' twelve apostles . . .

I was excited when certain important Jews came into the synagogue in Capernaum, having journeyed directly to us from Jerusalem.

I carry our money, and Jesus trusts me with many of the details of our group's itinerant life: what we eat, where we stay, helping the poor, caring for the needs around us. He confides in me. I told him recently

that he needs to gain the approval of the Sanhedrin. He answered me with a thoughtful but doubtful look. The second time I mentioned it, he said, “Things are not what you think, Judas.”

Page | I had hoped that he would soon come into his destiny and take his
24 place of leadership in Jerusalem. I wondered if he would overthrow Herod or the High Priest, or try to get their support. Being the kind of man he is, I thought he would want the support of Israel’s religious rulers.

I can’t imagine him fighting anyone for a throne. Of course, many men would fight *for* him. All he needs to do is ask and thousands would come from all around, multitudes, and they would crown him king. Perhaps there will be no battles at all. With the sheer numbers behind him, he could take his place as Israel’s righteous ruler, the Messiah. He’s the Son of David, never denying it whenever someone calls him by that name.

Often, I’ve imagined Jesus coming into his kingdom reign. When he is in power, life for us, his disciples, will be much different.

When the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem came, Jesus purposefully made enemies of them with one short speech. I realize now that he would more likely start a revolution than try to gain their approval. However, we cannot compare ourselves to Gideon’s army, for we who are left are so few. It is only the twelve of us now. Things are volatile. I cannot tell what the future will bring; but, for now, I will stay.

Simon Peter, one of Jesus’ twelve apostles . . .

I am the man who walked on water, ever so briefly, but long enough to know that my Master has the power of God in him. I will ride out this storm, this storm of tossing thoughts, for the things my rabbi has said to us are unreasonable.

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I mentioned to the others that he must be teaching us another parable. Surely, he doesn't intend for us to eat his flesh and drink his blood. In saying that he is the living bread from heaven, this must certainly be the key to the parable's meaning.

Page |
25 Usually, Jesus takes us aside and explains his parables to us. But this time he did not.

All we had to go on, which was his only explanation, were his words: "My words are spiritual and they are life."

Perhaps that is his only meaning! It is enough for me. Whatever he says I know is true, whether or not I understand him now.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.' He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum." John 6:56-59

In the mind of Jesus, the most needful thing of the hour was to bring spiritual life to those who looked to him for the wrong reasons. After the miracle of the loaves and fishes, some of the men wanted to make Jesus king. They hoped he would meet their earthly needs, which may have included freedom from Roman oppression. The hard words Jesus spoke were directed to them and to those who came to spy on him from Jerusalem. The delegation from the Sanhedrin came for spiritual reasons. They believed Jesus to be a false prophet.

Jesus also spoke his hard lesson for the sake of his disciples, knowing his words would shake their belief in him to the core.

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He was right. Many of his disciples left him, saying, “This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?”

Page | 26 Scripture records: “Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life . . . This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.’”

Jesus sifted their hearts. Many turned away from him. It was even hard for his Twelve to stay. Seeing many of them go, Jesus said to his chosen apostles, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (Refer to John 6:60-70.)

Jesus was experiencing heartache. Truly and deeply. It is a wonder that he risked so much at this juncture. Would his apostles remain steadfast in faith? Who would remain through the painful sifting, emotionally painful to Jesus? Only pure faith would survive this sifting. He had to try them, had to purify them, had to turn their faith into gold. He knew that what lay ahead would be even harder for them.

Today, we have the benefit of knowing what his words meant. Although they were shocking at the time, we can appreciate the layers of wondrous theology in them. We see the symbol of the Lord’s Supper—Holy Communion—God’s new covenant with us through the body and blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. We understand that Jesus himself is our “spiritual food”—because he comes within and gives us his *Life* moment by moment. We are in communion with him; abiding in him, and he in us; walking in the Spirit. He is, just as he said, the “true bread that came down from heaven.”

We must embrace this mystery. The words Jesus spoke that day in the synagogue in Capernaum became words of life to those of us who

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believe. It is a wonder, yet we who have tasted this *Bread* know—what he said is absolutely, gloriously true.

Page | **WHAT DO YOU SEE?**
27

We are so accustomed to what Jesus said, we don't realize how strange it was to his first listeners. Can you imagine hearing those words, spoken by Jesus for the very first time, that day in the synagogue? We have the benefit of knowing about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and they, at that time, did not. To better appreciate this event in Jesus' life, imagine yourself there with the disciples.

Watch the faces of the men while Jesus tells them to eat his flesh and drink his blood. How does Jesus look when he says this? What does his voice sound like? Is he pacing his words as he speaks? What happens after he is finished? What does he do when he is alone with his disciples? How is Jesus feeling? How are they? What do you suppose happened that made Jesus blurt out that there was a "devil" among them? Can you imagine this event in all its dramatic, emotional details? You can better know your Lord by this kind of "seeing"—be open to the Spirit's revelations. Jesus wants us to intimately know him through the many details, and things to ponder, about his life on earth.

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After your meditation, journal about the things you felt and learned. What do you feel now towards Jesus after having seen this event in a prayerful, meditative way? If you wish to express your love and gratefulness—and your faith—you may wish to end by sitting in

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silence with him. Simply be still and know his heart now and let him fill you with his peace and love.

24 – With the Cross in View

*From that time on Jesus
began to explain to his disciples that he
must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things
at the hands of the elders,
chief priests and teachers of the law,
and that he must be killed
and on the last day be raised to life.
Matthew 16:21*

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

James, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' twelve apostles . . .

“Who do people say I am?” Jesus asked us.

His question was unlike him. We looked around at one another, wondering how to answer or who might speak first. My brother John and I were usually not timid. We’d say anything and everything that was on our minds. “Sons of thunder,” Jesus had nicknamed us.

We said our minds, no matter how spontaneous or impulsive our ideas were. The twelve of us talked with him often and openly—while traveling on foot, by boat, when camping, or staying in houses. When you spend as much time together as we did, you see every side of a person: one’s habits, mannerisms; you know how the other will react to something; you can know one’s thoughts. That’s how it was with us. Although, we had a harder time knowing what was on our Rabbi’s mind than how quickly he knew what was on ours. And we couldn’t

guess what he might do next. But he knew us, and the twelve of us knew one another.

When the Master took us into the northern part of Galilee, a mostly heathen region full of idol-worshippers, he told us it was because we needed time away from the crowds and spies for a while. He wanted time just with us, he said.

We were sitting beside the rapids near the headwaters of the Jordan River when we had a conversation with him that we will always remember. We had been walking for days. Even though we had been among non-Jews, there were still many people who recognized our rabbi. He healed some people in the villages, and a few others living near Tyre and Sidon—both evil, pagan cities. Finally, we went far enough north that we were in an isolated area, and we stopped to rest.

He asked us that surprising question: “Who do people say that I am?”

No one answered him at first. Truly, the question seemed strange on his lips. Then someone said, “Some say John the Baptist.”

Jesus pinched his eyebrows together with a doubtful look.

The Baptist and Jesus had been seen together. And some of us had actually been disciples of the Baptist when we met Jesus. Someone else said, “Elijah.” And another added, “Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

Then, with that penetrating expression of his, he asked, “But what about you? Who do *you* say I am?”

After only a few moments of silence, Simon Peter, who up to this point hadn’t said anything, stood to his feet. And, in a full voice, he said to Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Moved by Peter’s proclamation, the Master also stood, took several steps to Peter, and embraced him. In a hushed, loving voice, but loud enough that we heard him, the Master said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my

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Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Peter was beside himself. Never had I seen him so stunned. Tears welled up in his eyes.

Page | 31 Jesus wrapped his right arm around the top of Peter’s shoulders, pulling him close to himself. Then the two of them stood side by side, facing us. Jesus, looking proudly at Peter, said, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Immediately after this, Jesus strictly warned us not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

We were terribly excited. But it wasn’t long before he revealed something else to us, something we could not understand, could not accept, could not think about. He told us that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, be killed, and on the third day he would be raised to life.

A few days after the time he admitted to us that he was the Messiah, he repeated that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem. Peter raised his voice to Jesus, saying, “Never, Lord! No! This will never happen to you!”

The Master rebuked Peter, telling him the devil had spoken through him.

Oh, things were happening too fast for us. We were in turmoil. The Master told us we would all have to take up our crosses and follow him, and that we would have to die to save our lives.

Jesus told us over and over that he would suffer many things and be rejected and killed. But he always ended by saying he would be raised on the third day. It didn’t matter how many times he told us, we blocked it out. It was as though our ears couldn’t bear the words.

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It wasn't long after Jesus had rebuked Peter that the Master took three of us—Peter, my brother, and me—up a high mountain to pray. While Jesus prayed, he changed into a radiant man in front of us—with the whitest white clothing. He shone like the sun. Then, a cloud enveloped him. Two figures also bathed in light stood and talked with him. We could hear their conversation. It was Moses and Elijah with him! The holy men of old encouraged Jesus and spoke of his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem. Then a voice sounded in the cloud, and it spoke to the three of us frightened men, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

And, so, for whatever reasons Jesus brought us up there, as I am his witness, he was a determined man coming back down that mountain. And, we—we were in awe of him.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

The end of Jesus' earthly life draws near and he takes time to be alone with his disciples. No doubt his heart is heavy, knowing what lies ahead of him—and them. Can you sense this? Look closely at his steps, the things he says, and how he says them.

Because we go from Gospel to Gospel, often reading the events out of order, we don't truly appreciate the unfolding of Jesus' days. But his gracious humanity is never more wondrously realized than during these days as he begins his final steps toward the cross. For the first time, Jesus affirms his identity as the Messiah. But, even more shocking to his men, he tells them that he will suffer, die, and rise again. This grave news is a shock to them. They can't understand it or believe it.

Is there a sense of relief when Jesus reveals his two-fold secret (his true identity, and his mission), a secret he has kept to himself all of his life?

Page | 33 In the isolated hills of upper Galilee, away from the world, Jesus takes his twelve disciples away for a time of respite. But it is more than a break from the mobs and endless demands; it is a time of great revelation. Here he reveals himself to them, more than he has to anyone.

What tremendous love this is—the love that faces the cross, yet goes about daily life with his friends, preparing and teaching them, loving them, just being with them. On the sunset of his life, Jesus embraces the inevitable, knowing it is his main purpose for coming. He also begins to prepare them, saying, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Jesus’ words fall upon ears that cannot understand. Not yet. But he knows that one day, they will.

Jesus takes three of his disciples up a high mountain and is transfigured before them. It is a moment in Time that transcends physical time and space. Jesus is seen, resembling his former glory, and meets with two faithful followers—great prophets from the past. This event is such a mystery, the reality cannot be fully comprehended.

There are things we can ponder: Moses, when he lived on earth, had talked with God on a mountain, his face aglow after these encounters. This time, Jesus’ face is aglow. Two old friends transcend time and space, and meet with the Lord. Elijah, who had closely “walked with” God during his earthly days, comes to speak with his Friend once again. A true wonder, there is so much to ponder about this event.

It was part of the preparation of Jesus and his men for what lay ahead. Jesus faced the cross, ready to embrace his mission: the blame, the shame, the pain, the full weight of what it would take to save humanity.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read about the time Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” When you pray, imagine what it must have been like when Jesus asked his disciples that meaningful question.

Then close your Bible and your eyes. You are, in prayer, just as present to Jesus as were his disciples that day during their travels. He is with you now. It is a typical day in your life’s journey with him, and here you are, alone with him, and he has your full attention. He’s taken you aside for a time, like he did his disciples that day.

Jesus looks into your eyes and asks you, “Who am I to you?”

The wording is a little different from the question he asked his disciples. We already know his identity—that he is the Messiah, the Son of God.

How do you treat him? What do you think of him? What is your favorite image of God? Tell the Lord why you think of him as you do. Is your image of him as your brother, lover, parent, healer, provider, shepherd, or king?

Who is Jesus to you? What does knowing him mean to you? Tell him.

Have you heard him call you by a nickname—a name that maybe only he has for you? Listen closely, what is his own special name for you? You see, he also wants *you* to know *who you are to him*. “Listen to him.”

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Page | In your journal, record this chapter's thoughts and reflections.
35 Record your dialogue with the Lord, if there is one. End with what your favorite image of God is, and why. What answer did you give Jesus regarding who he is to you? What does he say about you?

34 – Things to Come

*Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down
with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life,
and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.*

*For it will come upon all those who live
on the face of the whole
earth. Be always on the watch and pray . . .*

Luke 21:34-36a

*At that time men will see the Son of Man coming
in clouds with great power and glory.*

Mark 13:26 and Daniel 7:13

- Setting of the Olivet Discourse for when Jesus speaks prophetically about the temple and his own second coming (From the temple to the Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7*
- Beginning of birth pangs (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:8-19*
- Abomination of desolation and subsequent distress (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24*
- Coming of the Son of Man (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27*
- Signs of nearness but unknown time (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:32-41; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:28-33*
- Five parables to teach watchfulness and faithfulness (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 24:42-25:30; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36*
- Judgment at the Son of Man's coming (Mount of Olives): *Matthew 25:31-46*

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- Plot by the Sanhedrin to arrest and kill Jesus (Mount of Olives and the palace of the high priest): *Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 21:37-38; 22:1-2*

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A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

**“A God too large to walk in
human shoes
Has outgrown every hope of
human use.
And heavy skeptics weighted down
with doubt
Can never rise to find what
God’s about.”***

*From *The Finale* by Calvin Miller, third book in the *Singer Trilogy*, published by InterVarsity Press, Copyright © 1975, 1977, 1979, 1990. Used with permission.

Andrew, one of Jesus’ apostles . . .

As one of his closest men, Jesus confided in me. I don’t know how I earned his trust, I didn’t do anything out of the ordinary for him—not like my brother Peter, for example, who made bold, spontaneous leaps and bounds for him on countless occasions.

As a reflective man, I was the opposite of Peter. I let my thoughts settle and steep inside of me. I pondered things I observed and heard—especially when it involved our Rabbi. About Jesus and the things I

learned or witnessed, I usually kept them—whether a treasure or a doubt—to myself. But I believe Jesus knew my heart and mind. Perhaps that is why he so often took me aside privately to talk.

Page | I was terribly unsettled as we trudged up the Mount of Olives
38 behind our Master the afternoon he last went into the temple. We left Jerusalem with heavy hearts. Jesus had just unleashed a torrent of scorching words there, ending with what sounded to my ears like a promise that he'd not return.

Our beloved Rabbi, in a matter of minutes, had dashed to pieces all my hopes and dreams in and for him. Here we were, it seemed, following him away from everything I believed in.

The temple was the central hub in the wheel of Jewish faith. And now, my faith in Jesus' identity was in question once again. How could he possibly fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah and yet not set foot in the temple until his enemies there believed in him? How would they ever know him? They certainly would execute him now. Since, at the same time, Jesus insisted that he would suffer and die, I could finally see his predictions coming true.

Nothing made sense anymore, not to my way of thinking. Why would our long-awaited Messiah die? Who was this man to whom I was giving my life?

We disciples were understandably distraught as we tagged along behind him. I tried to get Jesus to open up to us while we walked away from Jerusalem. I did this indirectly by asking him to look at what he was leaving behind. Truly, my words to him meant more than what was on the surface, for we all knew how much he loved the temple—"Look, Rabbi!" I said, while waving my hand across the panoramic view falling behind us, "What magnificent buildings!"

"Do you see all these things?" he asked, first looking at me, then at the view. He continued, with a stern look, "I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

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At this, my heart nearly stopped. He continued up the steep road.

When we came to the place on the mount where Jesus liked to pray, we left him alone, realizing he needed the solitude. We sat apart from him and talked among ourselves. We didn't know what to think.

Page | Our hearts were in turmoil. Finally, four of us went to him and asked
39 him more about his prediction regarding his return which he said would happen after the rulers recognized him as “coming in the name of the Lord.” This is what troubled us. We couldn't imagine them ever believing in him in that way. His face brightened when we approached him with our concerns. He invited me to sit beside him. I asked, “Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

And so, on that occasion, he told us about many things to come.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

Jesus gave important, parting words to his disciples about what to expect after he was gone. He told them he was leaving his *Kingdom* in their hands and that it would grow until it covered the entire earth—and that that would happen before his return.

Seated on the mount, on that spring day during the week of Passover, Jesus told them many things that would come to pass. First, he spoke of the destruction of the temple (which would happen in 70 A.D). He also warned them about persecution and how they should respond.

The recurring Messianic theme in the Old Testament Scriptures was the deliverance and hope of Israel. Likewise, Jesus revealed specific warnings regarding the last days concerning Israel.

He gave signs for his second coming and said that they would be like “birth pangs” leading up to the climax when he would return.

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Beloved reader, many of these signs are escalating to that climax right now.

Page | 40
About his Jewish nation, he said, “There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luke 21:20-24

The Jews have always been hated, because Satan hates what is precious to God. God’s people are the brunt of the enemy’s most gruesome deeds; it’s been this way all throughout Jewish and Christian history. When Hitler’s terror ended, the Jews began to return to their land. This became the beginning of the end of the times of the Gentiles. Only one or two of Jesus’ signs have not yet happened: “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall.” Mark 12:24-27

And, the sign concerning Israel regarding “Jacob’s troubles” could be happening right now. Jesus said, “There will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—never to be equaled again.” Matthew 24:21

One day there will be national deliverance of Israel but probably not until the second coming of the Son of Man. About that day, Jesus said, “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Matthew 24:27

What is obvious in these signs of Scripture, given to us by God, is that Israel is at the center of end-time events. She is also at the center of our daily news. Jesus wants us to be alert and on guard, and not weighed down. He wants us ready. He said we would know the times . . . “When you see the fig tree sprout its leaves . . .” This could be the sign of prophecy being fulfilled in our generation. The nations that are gathered around her in hate, is another sign. We need to be well aware of these things, just as Jesus told us to be.

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As his bride we long for him, sober in faith, ready in hope. We are his beloved, waiting for him on tiptoe, straining our eyes and hearts for that wondrous glimpse of him. We have “oil in jars along with our lamps”—and we are prepared. He’s been gone a long time, his return has been delayed—just as his parable said it would be. But we want to be ready when he comes. “At midnight the cry will ring out, ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come and meet him!’”

Today, we look forward to his glorious return. He comes to us through his Spirit and readies us for that wonderful day when we will see him at long last.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

How amazing it would have been to have heard, for the first time, Jesus’ words, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Matthew 25:31-32

How the disciple’s hearts must have burned to hear such things. Surely the Lord lifted their doubting, troubled hearts at that time. The “throne” Jesus spoke of was the Throne of David, in Jerusalem, on earth. He clearly said that he would sit in heavenly glory upon that throne. He was that holy, eternal heir—the one to bring harmony and restoration to earth, bind up Satan, and renew God’s creation. His glory would fill the entire earth. Surely, their doubts lifted upon the hearing of his powerful, promising words!

His kingdom would be heaven on earth, not the earthly kingdom Jesus’ disciples imagined at that time. As Jesus sat with his men that day on the Mount of Olives, when he looked into their eyes and gave

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them words of hope and warning, it was also for us. At that time, Jesus knew his time to leave was approaching swiftly. He had outgrown his time to stay with us as a man.

Page | 42 Prayerfully imagine how Jesus might have felt after he delivered his impassioned, final words in the temple and during his walk away from there, up the Mount of Olives. Watch him as he finds a place to sit and pray on the mount. What is his expression as he gazes down upon that spectacular view he loved of Jerusalem? What do you suppose his prayer was? What do you think it was like for his disciples to be with him during that time? Read the things he said to them and try to see and hear him. What was his tone of voice? What was his body language?

Ask the Lord to reveal what his predictions mean today. Be open to what is on his heart concerning world events these days. What is he saying to you personally that he wants you to be aware of, or do, during these turbulent times?

JOURNAL

It is by no accident that Jesus' beloved Israel has survived and is a nation today, still awaiting the deliverance of her Messiah. Christians are grafted into that tree. Israel's eyes are blinded and it is our eyes that are opened. Can you sense the love Jesus has for his Jewish people? What message, sign, or words of advice meant the most to you in this chapter? Describe in your journal your feelings, or what has been revealed to you. Is there anything you wish to ask Jesus now? Record in your journal what the Lord wants you to know—about his love for you, or the times you live in.

35 – Love’s Anointing

She has done a beautiful thing to me.
Matthew 26:10b

So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.
From then on Judas watched
for an opportunity to hand him over.
Matthew 26:15b-16

A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

Mary, from Bethany . . .

I trembled most of the evening with my plan to anoint the Messiah as he reclined at a banqueting table at Simon the Leper’s house. Of all the houses in Bethany, Simon’s villa had the largest capacity for the crowd of people who came from Jerusalem, Bethany, and Galilee to honor Rabbi Jesus from Nazareth. Tables were laden with food for dozens of guests, and I was supposed to be seated with Martha in another room. Simon’s dinner became a spirited celebration. While Lazarus was someone everyone wanted to see and touch, most of the excitement came on the heels of Jesus’ kingly entry into Jerusalem for the week of Passover.

Most of us were convinced that Jesus was King David’s heir to the throne—Israel’s eternal King, without beginnings, come to us at last. I knew, since Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that Jesus was much more than a prophet. He astounded Martha and me, in the hour of

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our deepest grief, by saying that he was the “Resurrection and the Life,” and then proved it, bringing Lazarus back after four days in the grave. Oh, yes, our Messiah had come from God in heaven. And he is the Giver of life—our good friend, Jesus.

Page | I nervously watched while he reclined in the place of honor beside
44 my brother.

I tried to imagine how I would approach him and how he might react to my anointing him. But this gave me such nerves that I decided not to plan out my exact course of action, but simply wait for the right moment and let my heart show me the way.

There were three tables of Jesus’ closest followers and guests in the largest room. Hidden from view, I stood beside a tall planter filled with meandering vines near an archway. Even my green-colored clothing, by happenstance, helped me remain unnoticed. From here I could watch Master Jesus at his table, his back towards me. He turned my way a couple of times, probably because he could feel my gaze upon him. But if he saw me, he did not let on. I could not stop myself from reveling in the sight of him. He was like water to my thirsty soul.

There was a lot of commotion, musicians playing music, people laughing and talking loudly. People glided past me continually, but no one cared anything about me standing there, except Martha. Once, while walking from one room to another, she stopped to look at me for a moment, long enough to shrug her shoulders. She did not rebuke me, for she knew that my desire was to be near the Teacher. I held the slender alabaster vial tightly and waited, ignoring Martha’s unsettling shrug.

My devotion towards the Rabbi had increased daily. I loved him more than life itself. Everything he said to me was fire to my soul. I felt that I was a favorite of his. If I felt that way, then it was *his* doing, not mine. I pondered his sayings long into the nights. It was more than his words. It was his manner too. It was everything about him: his tender

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strength, his compassion, his strong but gentle love—mostly, his purity and goodness. He lit up a room. He lit up the world. He lit up my life.

I have never known anyone with such wisdom and insight. His miracles proved he was from God. He was full of joy and smiled often.

Page | He made people feel accepted and special, no matter who they were.
45 He touched lepers without a thought for himself. He treated women as equals to men. Sinners enjoyed his company and found themselves changed just from being with him. Children adored him. The poor, beggars, even the most odious individuals, were unafraid of him because he treated them like his dearest friends.

Wherever he happened to go, a fragrance of joy and love went with him. I thought that when he stepped into Simon's house. Upon seeing his frame in the doorway, I had thought, *How can I thank him for what he has done for us? How can I show him how I feel? What gift could I possibly give him that would be worthy of him? What do I have worthy for a king—for God's Anointed?*

All at once came the idea to anoint him with my fragrant spikenard. Surely, this would show him how much I valued him. It would be perfect—a symbolic gesture—wouldn't it?

I slipped out of Simon's house and ran to ours to retrieve the keepsake. The idea to anoint him felt like the most wonderful, perfect expression of honor and love I could ever show him. It was valuable too—given to me by my father before he died. It was my dowry, to give to a prospective husband. From Persia, it was very costly perfume.

After eating the meal, the guests lingered at their tables and the musicians put their instruments down. Only the sound of low conversations hung in the rooms. The banquet was nearly over.

Jesus had not taught or shared stories the whole time. He was simply enjoying himself and the company of friends. When he stretched and repositioned himself on his pillows, I suddenly worried

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that he might get up and leave. The time had come—I must not wait another moment.

With my heart pounding, I left my hiding place and stepped up to where Jesus reclined at the table.

Page | 46 Lazarus looked up at me expectantly. I snapped and broke the seal of the vial. Jesus was caught off-guard, but he slowly turned to see me. My hand shook nervously while I poured out about a pint of perfume on his head. As the beautiful, heady aroma filled the room; everyone stopped talking.

I saw his hands folded . . . his eyes closed . . . his gentle face.

As I poured the perfume on his head, I was surprised that he did not stop me. He sat very still and received this gift of mine. I was so relieved. So glad. I wanted to call him “My King,” but instead, I said it only within my heart—over and over: *My King . . . My King . . . My King . . .* all the while slowly pouring the perfume on him.

He looked up at me. His eyes were watery and I wondered if he’d heard my silent praise.

The perfume had begun to run down his forehead, so I wiped a stream away from his eyes. Too much was already in his hair, soaking and dripping down thick, strands, wetting the back and sides of his head and his beard. The stream of perfume droplets soaked the neck, back and shoulders of his tunic. Had I overdone it? I hoped he wouldn’t mind that I’d soaked his whole upper body with the heady, fragrant spikenard.

I saw that I still had some left in my jar, so I removed my veil and bowed low to kiss his feet. On them I poured out the remaining pint of nard, wiping the excess off with my hair.

After I emptied the jar of its contents and remained bowed at his feet, I wished the moments could have lasted longer. I did not want to leave him.

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He leaned towards me, withdrawing his feet, bending over to me.
And then I looked at him. He didn't say a word, but his face surely did.
I had truly blessed him.

Page |

47 *Judas, from Keriath . . .*

I am outraged by this thing. How can Jesus sit there and allow such a waste? And in such a manner? This is an indecent show. The perfume could have been sold . . . how many poor might be fed with that much money? What kind of rabbi is he?

I rebuked her for such waste, and him for allowing it.

Lord Jesus . . .

Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you. You will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

WONDER JUST A LITTLE

One phrase in Jesus' response to Mary's lavish expression of love has affected countless souls throughout the ages. Listen to Jesus' response: "You will not always have me. She did what she could."

Souls in love with Jesus know . . . she did what we wish that we could do. Mary anointed him on behalf of us all.

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She expressed to him the love of his Church.

Mary anointed the Anointed One with the love that he died for.

This was only the beginning. Mary led the way, showing others how to love the Lord.

Page | Extravagance deserves extravagance. And, Jesus was the most
48 extravagant giver of all.

No wonder what Mary of Bethany did to Lord Jesus has been told all over the world, for two thousand years.

She expressed her deep love for him on behalf of all God's beloveds! She did it for you. She did it for me!

What a wonderful joy that Providence saw to it that Jesus tasted, at least once during his earthly life, that extravagant anointing of love he so richly deserved. Just as David and other kings of Israel had been anointed as kings, so Jesus was anointed king for his kingdom—the Kingdom of Love.

Mary poured great love upon the Beloved. Her love anointed Jesus for burial. Nothing could have been more appropriate.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Two people. Two choices. Night and day. Judas and Mary. After reading the biblical account of Mary anointing Jesus, close your eyes and imagine the scene. In your mind's eye, take part in the banquet and see the two of them in action. How can two people react so differently? What causes us to love or to hate? What is it about the freedom to choose that cost the Lord so much?

Imagine anointing Jesus. What would you say to him if you could? Try to imagine what Mary might have felt. What did it mean to Jesus? What does it mean in your relationship with him? How can we “anoint” him today?

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Page | What creative new way can you express your devotion to Jesus?
49 Write in your journal what you have learned or experienced from the
Scripture reading and your meditation prayer time. Since Jesus is no
longer with us in the flesh, is there any other way to lavish one's very
best on him? What form(s) might that take?