

# Lessons from Mary of Bethany

by Annie Poonen

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His word, and valuing intimate fellowship with Him. It highlights the comfort and sympathy Jesus provides when we are in trouble, encouraging us to run to Him in times of sorrow. The sermon also focuses on the significance of true worship as a daily sacrifice to the Lord, offering ourselves completely to Him. It concludes with a call to be devoted disciples, willing to deny ourselves, follow Jesus, and find joy in the midst of trials.*

**Scripture:** Luke 10:39, John 11:32, John 12:1, Romans 12:1, Matthew 16:24

**Topics:** "Intimacy with Christ", "True Worship and Discipleship"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Let's have a word of prayer. Our Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for this evening, and we can gather together in your presence. We pray that you will open your word to us, Lord, and speak to each one of us.

You know our need, and we come humbly at your feet, waiting for your word. Speak to each one of us, and we pray, Lord, that your name will be glorified in everything that we say and do today, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen. Good to see you all.

Hope you all had a good summer break, and sometimes I think it would be so good if we were living in the time of Jesus, when Jesus was on earth in Israel, and he met different women with different needs, and all of them could freely come to him and tell them what they were going through, and he didn't send away anyone empty. He met their need, and he spoke to them, comforted them, gave them some hope, gave them healing. Whatever was their need, he met their need, and we all, all of us have come from different backgrounds, some from Christian, some from non-Christian, some godly homes, some homes which are not so godly, a lot of violence maybe, maybe broken homes, sorrow, maybe we were not treated well, and we sometimes we suffer because of our childhood memories, and we can come to the Lord, and whatever state we are, whatever we've gone through, we can be sure we can come to the Lord, and he'll meet our

need.

Right now he's here in our midst, and he can speak to us and comfort us. I was thinking of some of the women who came to Jesus when he was on earth. One of the studies earlier, we were thinking of Martha.

Today I want us to meditate a little bit on Mary, her sister. I mean, it's the story of two sisters. So Mary was very different from Martha.

Imagine if we were that type of person, like Mary was, growing under the shadow of a very dominant sister, a sister who is very efficient and good at everything, can plan things and invite people over, cook meals, take care of everything, and Mary grew up under her shadow. Can you imagine some of us may be like that, having grown up under a strong mother, right now working for a strong boss, or some strong relative is controlling our lives. And Mary must have often felt like, why am I here? What should I do? Must have felt dejected, must have felt like, I'm treated so badly, how will anyone ever be able to understand me? Where can I go and get comfort from? Living with such a dominant person has many challenges.

Sometimes it's good to have a sister like Martha who will come and help us and support us and take the initiative. But sometimes we feel like we are pushed down, we are dominated by somebody. And Mary must have been a person like that.

And she must have been tempted to talk back or complain to somebody or go to some person and get some comfort from someone, tempted to argue or even get depressed. But Mary did the right thing. We know what she did when Jesus and his disciples came to visit their home in Bethany.

Bethany was just three miles from Jerusalem and Jesus and his disciples would often walk that way. And Martha took the initiative to invite Jesus. And when Jesus came, Mary thought, this is the opportunity for me to sit and listen to what Jesus had to say.

And she sat down and listened. And, of course, she had to get the good scolding from her mother, from her sister, Martha, who said, told, even complained to Jesus and said, tell her to come and help me. But, you know, when we are in such a position like Mary and we are controlled by others and we have nowhere else to go, we can be confident that Jesus will take up for us.

And you know what Jesus said, Mary has chosen the best thing. She has chosen the right thing. And that good thing will not be taken away from her.

Dear sisters, that is the best thing we can choose, to spend time with Jesus, to wait at his feet, whatever our situation is, spend time with him. And that will never be taken away from us, Jesus said. If we value that sacred time, if we want to spend at Jesus' feet, that will never be taken away.

And I wonder what Jesus must have even helped her with. Sometimes I think like there are words of wisdom Jesus can give. If you look at James 3, verse 17, you read these words, that the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good foods, good fruits, impartial, with sincere.

Jesus must have given her those words of wisdom and said, be gentle, be open to reason, be sincere, be full of mercy, forgive, to love somebody. Jesus must have given her such words. And even if he may not have said that, she got that in her spirit.

Doesn't matter how, what I face in life or who I have to deal with, God, the Lord will give us the wisdom to deal with every situation. And he'll sustain us, spending time with the Lord is worth it. Let nothing rob us of the time we spend with the Lord.

And the word that we spend at Jesus' feet will be so precious. The word that we hear from Jesus will be so precious, it will sustain us through every trial that comes. So, the first part, when I think of Mary, I think of her three episodes in her life that we read of.

The first episode is in Luke chapter 10, where she sat at Jesus' feet and she listened to the words of Jesus. That's the first episode and that's what we need. We can learn from her and we need to spend time with Jesus and listen to his word and let not our busy life or the things which we have to do and which are undone stop us from that precious time which we can have at the feet of Jesus.

The second episode, which I thought of sharing was again at the feet of Jesus, but this time she wept at the feet of Jesus. If you read that, you can read the whole of Luke chapter 10, I mean, John chapter 11. We read that something happened to that family, their sickness.

They had a brother, Lazarus, and he became sick and they thought when somebody is sick, they must have felt like all of how we all feel the best thing we can do is call Jesus. Even if there's no doctor around, we can call Jesus and ask him to help us. And that's what these two sisters did, they sent for Jesus, Jesus, the one whom you love is sick.

Please come. Please come. And they had many instances they had seen when Jesus came and he prayed or he touched the person who was sick and healed them.

So they were sure that Jesus would come running, drop everything and come running to help them. But Jesus didn't come. We know that there was a purpose in that, but Mary and Martha didn't know.

I sometimes wonder which is more difficult, when we are facing sickness or when we watch someone else take care of someone else who is sick, which is more difficult, which brings more suffering to us. We suffer when we are sick or when we see someone else go through that suffering. I think seeing someone suffer for me, I think is greater suffering.

I think it's hard for me to watch a loved one get sick. Sometimes I think I wish I could get that sickness on myself and relieve my child of that suffering or my loved one of that suffering. And Martha and Mary must have felt like that.

They watched Lazarus getting sick, sink and get more and more sick and no sign of Jesus. They must have been looking out. I'm sure.

What happened? Why is Jesus not coming? Why isn't he answering our prayers? Every delay that the Lord gives to answer our prayers has some purpose. We should never doubt. Martha, Mary must have felt discouraged and forsaken.

And why isn't Jesus coming? Temptation to doubt must have come. But finally when Jesus came, it must have looked as if it was too late. Lazarus was dead and he was four days in the grave.

That's when Jesus decided to come. And can you imagine what the sisters must have felt? Mary must have thought, after all the time I spent at Jesus' feet, listening to his word and the meals we prepared and

gave for Jesus, he doesn't come when we need him. He comes when everything is over and Lazarus is dead and there looks like there's no hope.

And when Jesus came, Martha met him first, but she came and told Mary, the master has come. So she ran, ran to Jesus and this time instead of sitting at his feet, she fell down at his feet and wept. And Jesus understood her.

He wept with her. When we are in some, when we face some big trial in our life and when we come to Jesus, the place where he can find us is at his feet. And when we weep, he weeps with us.

He comforts us. He doesn't send us empty or scold us. No explanation.

He comes to comfort us. Even her sister could not comfort her at that time, but Jesus' comfort was there. Now if you read in Psalm 84, if you turn to that Psalm, you can read these precious verses.

Let me read that to you, Psalm 84, verse 5. How blessed is the man whose strength is in you. He knows heart are the highways of heaven. Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring.

In the Marjan, it says Baca means weeping. When we go through the valley of weeping and remember we are just passing through it. We're not going to live in that valley of weeping forever.

It's good to remember we are just passing through that valley. And when we pass through that valley, we make it a spring. There's a spring.

There's a pool there, not a pool of tears, but a refreshing pool of freshness. The pool where there's water from the Holy Spirit pours upon us and refreshes us. That's what the Lord has kept for us.

Even in Psalm, there's another Psalm, Psalm 23, which says, when I go through the valley of shadow of death, you are with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. Many times when we go through suffering, the Lord is with us and his rod and his staff comfort us.

Instead of tears of sorrow, there'll be blessing springs from the Holy Spirit poured upon us. Praise God he doesn't leave us in our time of suffering. I remember the words of Corrie Ten Boom, when, not Corrie Ten Boom, her sister, you know, when they were in the concentration camp and they went through suffering after suffering.

And Betsy, her sister, was going through, very close to death, through all the beatings and the hardship they faced in the concentration camp, Betsy told her sister. And Corrie was so discouraged and she wanted to give up and she was tempted to hate these people who were persecuting them. But you know what Betsy said? Betsy said, there is no pit so deep where God's love cannot reach it.

There's no suffering, no pit so deep where God's love cannot reach it. Yes, sisters, let us, when we go through any type of suffering, let us remember, whatever, however deep that suffering is, there's no pit which is so deep where God's love cannot reach us. His love and his compassion, his goodness is there for us.

Praise God. Suffering doesn't last for always, but God has a plan for suffering in our lives. We read in 1 Peter that God allows suffering so that our faith will be tested.

It's a fiery testing, but when you come through that fire, our faith is tested and we come out as God. Remember the time, when we, remember the time when Daniel's three friends were put in the fire, who was with them? The Lord, and he sent an angel, or he himself, the son of God was with them when they went through that fiery trial. So when we go through fire and testing and sorrow, the Lord himself comes with us.

It's not that we are alone. He, someone is there. Sometimes when we go through this dark tunnel of suffering, and we think, Lord, is there an end? Is there no end to the suffering? And it's all dark.

And we feel we are alone. Then we realize, there is someone with us, the Lord Jesus, he's with us. And he says, my child, I'm with you, don't doubt, I'm here with you.

I have gone through this path before, that's the wonderful thing. I've gone ahead of you. I came to earth as a human being, just like you.

I came to earth and I went through this path of suffering. It's not that I was sitting in heaven and been sitting in heaven and as almighty God, I can understand your suffering. But more than that, I came down to your level and lived on this earth and went through suffering and I overcame.

And right now I'm with you and you can overcome. You can overcome with the power of the Holy Spirit, the power, the resurrection power. Though I died, I overcame and I've got that resurrection power to give you and you too can overcome.

What a comfort it is when you think that Jesus, he doesn't leave us alone. He comes running to help us and when we run to him, he's already there to help us. And he makes intercession for us, he's there to pull us out.

If we read those wonderful words in Hebrews, Hebrews 4, if we have time, we can go through those words. Hebrews 4, it says, he was tempted like us and he sympathizes with us, he runs to help us. After every storm, the sun comes out.

Sure, the storm is not going to be there forever. The sun will come out and then we can come out glorious and we say, Lord, when I went through the storm, you were with me, you led me through and you gave me words of comfort, you sustained me. And when I come out of it, those words I can use to comfort others.

Praise God, praise God that we can come to him. And in Matthew 11, verse 28, it says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I'll give you rest. Learn of me.

That's the rest that Mary learned when she was sitting at Jesus' feet. She came to him and she learned from him and so in her time of trial, she could find that rest. Jesus had already prepared her.

You know what Jesus told her? This is for the glory of God. This trial, this suffering, even this death of Lazarus is for the glory of God. Many times when I have gone through some time of suffering, ahead of that suffering, the Lord gave me some word to sustain me.

Sometime back, there was some intense suffering waiting for me and my family. And before that, the Lord gave me this word, this is for the glory of God. If you believe, you will see the glory of God.

And when I read that word, I felt like this is not the ordinary word, which I can just read. I felt that this is a prophetic word for me, God going to lead me through some experience where he can say, this is for the

glory of God. Only believe.

Like that, dear sisters, when we go through some trial, before that, if we are faithful like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, God will give us some word. The Lord Jesus will give us some word and he'll say, this is the word, keep it, keep it in your heart, treasure it. One day you will find need for this and that word will comfort us, it will sustain us.

We don't have to look to human beings for help. The word with God has given us in our heart, will strengthen us and sustain us like in our times of need, sustain us and we get fortified, we get strengthened to go through that trial. Praise God that he gives us strength for our every trial when we go through.

There is no sorrow, there is no pit that God allows us to go through. There's no tunnel that God allows us to go through. There's no darkness, no dark room where we feel we are locked in, where God's presence is not there.

God's love is not there. There's no room like that. Everywhere, every trial, every dark day, God's presence, God's love is with us.

We can only hear him if we open our ears and we don't doubt him anymore and we trust. He says, trials will come. We all have to go through trial in some way or other, but different ways for each one of us.

We go through the trial, but he'll sustain us and we'll come out purified like gold. Praise God for that. We don't have to be discouraged.

We don't have to be surprised. Oh, what's this terrible thing happening to me? Say, Lord, this is planned by you. This plan which you've given me, this trial is just like a wrapping paper.

It's your present to me. I open the trial and I go through it and open this wrapping paper. There's godliness.

There's virtue. There's goodness for me. There's a great gift for me that I'm going to be like Jesus.

That is the present, but this trial is just that wrapping paper. Dear sisters, let's not be taken up with the wrapping paper. Sometimes it looks ugly.

Sometimes it's just brown paper. It looks so unattractive. Sometimes it's full of thorns.

Sometimes it's shiny, but whatever it is, it's just a wrapping paper, this trial. When we go through it and we unwrap it, there's something valuable, the presence of Jesus, the glory of Jesus, the nature of Jesus, which he's going to give us. That's the gift he's going to give us.

So, when you go through any trial, even if it's death, but surely all of us are going to go through death. Corrie Ten Boom, when she was a child, she asked her father, Dad, what is it to die? How is it to die? And then her father told her, when you're going to some place, you buy a railway ticket or a ticket and you get into it. Just like that, when you face some trial, the Lord will give you grace.

Even if it's death, he'll take care of you. He'll give you some grace to go through that. So, let's not be discouraged.

In this case, in Mary's case, Mary and Martha expected a healing. But God gave something more wonderful. He made a miracle.

He raised Lazarus from the dead. And that was the testimony everybody around it saw. This is the living Jesus.

And before that miracle, Jesus taught them some wonderful things. He taught them about resurrection. I am the resurrection and the life.

If you believe in me, even if you die, you live. Those were words we don't find anywhere else, but in what Jesus told those two sisters. Believe in me, even if you die, you live.

You live with me forever and ever. And he shared with them the trial and he comforted them. He showed his glory.

He said, this is not, this is only for the glory of God. Believe in me. He taught them to have faith.

Believe in me, never doubt. You know, after that experience of Lazarus being raised from the dead, do you think Mary and Martha would have been the same, even Lazarus? Lazarus, of course, he had that experience coming back to life. Do you think how, do you think Mary would have been the same after such an experience? She wouldn't have bothered of being taken up with anything in this world.

She thought, what is more wonderful that I have come to see the spiritual value of Jesus. Eternity. I had a taste of eternity.

I had a glimpse of eternity when my brother was raised from the dead. Mary must have been quite a different person after that experience. And that's what brings me to the third episode of Mary.

The third episode of Mary is when we read that in John chapter 12, where we find they had a celebration for Jesus, a thanksgiving. When Jesus did something so wonderful, even if Lazarus was healed, he would have had a celebration. But in this case, Lazarus was brought from the dead.

They had such a wonderful celebration and here Martha was serving and Mary planned something so wonderful. She had, they had already spent so much money at the death of Lazarus. You know, in Israel, if somebody dies, they prepare for the funeral, the burial.

They buy a lot of expensive spices and they pack the body with those spices and they put linen around it, wrap the linen cloth around it. That's how they prepare for burial. So they must have spent a lot of money preparing for that burial of Lazarus and put him in the grave like that, all those spices and all that.

And all their money must have been over, but I don't know from where Mary got it. All her savings must be, she must have taken it and bought this expensive, rare, ointment, spiced nut, sweet smelling ointment and she planned, she said, I'm going to anoint the feet of Jesus. Here we see again Mary at the feet of Jesus, but this time she anointed the feet of Jesus.

This time it was worship. This time it was sacrifice at the feet of Jesus. Thanksgiving and God appreciated it.

This act that Mary did must have been prophetic. Jesus understood. Even the disciples couldn't understand.

What is this waste of so much of money? And Jesus who came from heaven, money doesn't matter anything. Peter would have seen, the disciples would have seen, in no time they had plenty of fish to sell and their needs were met. Jesus could, money was no problem for them, but yet, and Jesus had told them, I'm going to die for the sins of people, of human race.

I'm going to be raised from the dead. They had been warned that Jesus was going to die, but yet they were so taken up with money. They couldn't understand this lady, she's offering something as an act of thanksgiving.

Instead of appreciating that, they scolded her. And they said, what a waste of money this is. But Jesus understood.

Jesus understood the spirit with which Mary had done that. Again, she said, she has done a good thing. Just like in the first case, he said, leave her alone.

She has done a good thing. She has chosen the best path. Here again, Jesus told, leave her alone.

She has done something which is going to be remembered for all generations. Because she has done something which no one else could do. Anoint me.

But you know, it was not just the act of anointing. It was a sacrifice that Jesus saw in Mary. That reminded me of what Abraham did.

That same spirit Abraham had. When Abraham, he had just one son whom he loved. And God told Abraham, we read that in Genesis 22.

Abraham, you love your son so much. He's an idol in your life. I want you to take that son, your only son whom you love, and take him and sacrifice him.

Slay him on the altar. I'll show you which place. And he said, and Abraham obeyed.

It was such a costly sacrifice. He took Isaac and put him on the altar and was about to slay him. Then God said, Abraham, now I know that you love me.

You're prepared to sacrifice everything. Your love is so great. You love me more than your son.

You love me more than anything else. Because of that, Abraham, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to bless you, your family, your children, your descendants.

There's no limit to which I'm going to bless you. There's no limit to the blessing I'm going to give you. Because God saw that sacrificial heart of Abraham.

Jesus saw that sacrificial heart of Mary. And that's why she did something which no one else could do, and Jesus appreciated it. That reminds me of that familiar verse which David said.

If you read in 1 Chronicles chapter 24, David said, 1 Chronicles 21 verse 24, where David said, when he was going to make an offering to God, he told Onan, Onan said, take everything free. And David said, I will not offer the Lord that which costs me nothing. In Abraham's case also, God saw previously, Abraham was willing to give up the best land to the Lord.

Abraham had that spirit of sacrifice, giving up, giving up, giving up. And that's why God blessed Abraham, and through him, we are all blessed. And Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice when he suffered for us on the cross, and gave up, gave his own life for us, so that we, who are scattered and lost in sin, can be brought into the family of God and become part of his kingdom.

Now, Jesus told, God told Abraham, now I know that you love me supremely. Now I know that your love is so great. And that's what the Lord saw, Jesus saw in Mary also.

Now I know that you love me. And what Mary did was something so remarkable, and we think, oh, I wish I could do something like that, what Mary did. If I had a chance to do something which blessed the whole room, everybody in the room got that part of that perfume on their bodies.

And Mary was praised in front of everybody. We would think, I wish we could be in Mary's place. But Mary did that just once.

One time she could make that sacrifice and anoint Jesus' feet. But you know, dear sisters, we can do something more than what Mary did. I'll tell you what, if you read in Romans chapter 12, verse 1, it says, I beseech you, brothers, I beseech you, sisters, offer your body daily as a sacrifice.

What a privilege it is. Mary got a chance to do just once. But we, dear sisters, we have a chance to do every day something.

Offer ourselves, offer our will, offer our bodies. The Lord looks at us and says, my child, you love this so much. Are you ready to give that up for me? This pleasure that you get, this hobby that you have, this thing which you love so much.

Are you willing to give that up for me? The Lord asks us. And we say, yes, Lord, I'll gladly give it up. That's nothing compared to what you have done for me.

I'll give it up, Lord. Let that be our response. The Lord looks in our hearts and he shows us something, something which we love more than him, some habit that we have.

Maybe some pastime, maybe some entertainment, some relaxing, some food, some clothing, something. But the Lord says, you love that more than you love me. Are you willing to give that up? And our response is, yes, Lord, anything.

Anything I give up because you love me so much. And the Lord says, if you read in Matthew 16, verses 24 to 26, if you want to follow me and be my disciple, are you ready to be my disciple? You want to follow me? You have to deny yourself every day. You have to take up the cross.

You have to say no to your own will, just like I did. I did every day of my life. I said, not my will, Father, but let your will be done in my life.

That's what Jesus did. And he's asking us to follow him and says, are you ready to give up your will and die to yourself? Deny yourself and follow me. I think of discipleship with all the D's in it.

Are you willing to deny yourself? Are you willing to die to yourself? Are you willing to do it daily? Not just once in a week on Sundays or on some special occasion when we hear a moving sermon. Every day, daily, are you willing to do it? Then you can be my disciple. That's the searching heart.

That's the word the Lord gives us. Something which we can do more than what we did. Praise God.

Praise God for that, that he doesn't leave us. And he doesn't leave us in our wretched state. Even when we are in the depth of sorrow, in the depth of suffering, there's an answer for us.

There's deliverance for us. And there's a blessing which will follow. And our response is, Lord, I'll give up everything for you.

I want to be your disciple. I want to please you. And what Mary did was written in the Gospel of John.

What we do daily in our lives may not be written in any book. We may not even give a testimony of it because it's in secret. It's in our hidden life.

And nobody can see it. Nobody needs to see it or know about it. But, you know, it will be written somewhere in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And Jesus, who allowed it to be written there, one day he'll reward us for every sacrifice that we did, every self-denial, everything that we did for him is going to be recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. And when he comes, he'll say to us, well done, my child. Well done, my daughter.

I'm so happy with you. All those deeds of self-denial, those secret sacrifices, and hidden life where you didn't grumble or complain, I didn't look to human help, but you got strength from me. I'll reward you now.

Praise God for such a wonderful calling we have, such a wonderful life we can live, such a life of victory and joy in the midst of our sufferings. Those sufferings are trivial. It's momentary, Paul says, momentary light affliction, but the reward is eternal, eternal weight of glory.

Praise God. Our time is up, but I thought I'd just summarize what we have, just a few things. When we sit, the importance of sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to his word and the times of intimate fellowship with the Lord, that's a good thing.

It should not be taken away. Don't let anything take that away from us. Value that sacred time of fellowship with Jesus every day, many times a day, at least once a day, spend time with Jesus.

Guard it. Don't let anything take it away. Don't let anything rob us of that time with the Lord.

Second, when we are in trouble, we fall at the feet of Jesus and weep, and he weeps with us. He sympathizes with us. He is with us.

He will not let that sorrow overwhelm us. He will learn some precious lesson through that and will come out of it like pure gold. He runs to help us even as we are running to him to help.

So when we face trials, let us remember it's only momentary. Any time we face trials, let us be found at the feet of Jesus. Then thirdly, the value of true worship at the feet of Jesus.

I will not give that which costs me nothing. My daily sacrifice, Lord, it's costly for me. Daily I'm going to die to myself.

I'm going to be a devoted disciple of yours. And all that is done in secret, Lord, and you're going to see it, and you're going to be happy with my life. Praise God.

Shall we close in prayer? Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for the wonderful calling that is ours as sisters. Thank you for the good examples you've given in your word. Lord, we want to be your disciples.

We want to follow you. We want to be serious about our Christian life. We don't want to be taken up with the wrapping paper of our trials, but we want to value that golden thing which is inside us, Lord, the divine nature which you want to give us.

Please help us to be true and faithful and look to you, Lord, and be worthy of being your disciple. We ask these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

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