



An excerpt from Bruce A. Barkhauer's Community of Prayer, a 29-day devotional guide created to accompany God's people on the stewardship journey. We prepare for Christmas with the quiet anticipation of Advent. We prepare for Easter with the disciplines of Lent. There is another event in the life of the Church that requires preparation: making a financial commitment. If we want to be a full partner in the unfolding Realm of God around us, we cannot come to the moment of commitment with our best without being grounded in an understanding of stewardship.

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Day 21 | Extravagant Generosity

While [Jesus] was eating dinner, a woman came up carrying a bottle of very expensive perfume. Opening the bottle, she poured it on his head. Some of the guests became furious among themselves. "That's criminal! A sheer waste! This perfume could have been sold for well over a year's wages and handed out to the poor." (Mark 14:3–5, MSG)

What would you give a year's salary for? You may be able to name a few things for yourself or your family, but can you imagine simply giving away an entire year's worth of earnings? That, and much more, is the value of the gesture the woman in this story makes.

What could prompt such an action? The account is told in all four gospels, each with a bit of variance. Only in John 12:1–8 is she named, Mary, and there we are to assume she is the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus has raised from the dead. In the other three versions she is unnamed. In Luke, she is identified only as a harlot; in Matthew and Mark we know even less about her. The one detail they all agree on is the value of the ointment—and that she pours all of it on Jesus in an unprompted action of love and apparent gratitude.

If the value of the gift offered is to be understood in relationship to the depth of thanksgiving it represents, the story could be asking you to consider just how grateful you are for what you have received. When you consider your life with or without Jesus, how does the value of your offering reflect the profound nature of your appreciation for what God is doing in, through, and for you?

For Focus and Reflection: Does my life reflect what I am most grateful for?

Prayer: *God, may my gifts truly reflect the love I am receiving from you. Amen.*