

2. Mary experienced extravagant love from Jesus; she was forgiven of her sin, and her brother was brought back to life. Was Jesus' love for Mary unique? Did Mary love extravagantly because she was extravagantly loved by Jesus?
3. In what ways are you extravagantly loved by Jesus? How does this impact your worship? Is that worship sustainable? What prevents you from fully engaging your heart as an act of worship as we gather for corporate worship?
4. Could you ever conceive of giving a year's wages as an expression of love to God just for his good pleasure, without thought of appreciation, recognition, or accountability for the way the funds were used? What is your internal response to such an idea?
5. We are to love the Lord our God and not worship other gods. What idols often get in the way of true worship for you? How do we express our worship to lesser gods when we don't literally bow down to graven images?
6. "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me" (vs. 8). It sounds like a harsh statement. Why is it very appropriate for Jesus to make such a statement about himself?
7. God gave Solomon the plans for building his temple. Why would God ask for such a building, knowing the expenditure of resources it would require, and knowing that it would be eventually destroyed?
8. Consider our own Washington National Cathedral. It speaks of "otherness." Through architecture and beauty we are reminded of the awesome wonder of our great God. The building materials are brick and mortar, and are enhanced by gold, stained glass windows, marble, and other precious materials. Are they a waste of resources? In light of the needs of our own community and the needs around the world, is our own building lavish and a waste of resources? Why or why not?

John 12:1-11

Lesson 20
For February 15, 2009

Dori Sear and Dr. Jerry Nelson

LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion *following* the sermon on February 15, 2009

Mary Anoints Jesus

Exodus 20:1-5 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..."¹

We were created to worship! More specifically, we were created to worship God. He alone is worthy of our praise. Yet today, many, even believers, find their hearts captured by something other than God; the lesser gods of money, position, power and prestige, and ultimately (whether recognized or hidden), the love of themselves. Demanding a heart response, these lesser gods too often find participants willing to worship them. In today's passage we find love expressed in:

- Extravagance, humility and unselfishness²
- False generosity, lust and self-centeredness

This John 12 narrative of Mary and Judas is ultimately a story about love and worship. Mary loved Jesus. She embodied the first command. Her gift was an expression of love that was extravagant. This extravagance was not only because of the value of the nard, but it also expressed the epitome of "wasted" consumption. Her expensive gift went to no "good" use. It didn't help anyone, least of all Jesus (who didn't need anyone's assistance). Like many of the Old Testament sacrifices which were burned up or poured out, this sacrifice benefited no one. It was simply an expression of extravagant love from a grateful heart. In giving Mary wasn't looking for recognition, approval or reciprocal gratitude. If she was,

she surely wouldn't have found any of those things with her face to the ground. Her focus was all about Jesus. Her offering was an appropriately excessive demonstration of unbounded worship.

Judas reacted strongly to this "waste" of resources. His "biblical" response was to condemn this useless act by pointing out the higher values of stewardship and compassion. His seemingly altruistic rhetoric was simply a way of disguising envy, lust and selfish desires. The true object of his worship was himself, and unfortunately, his words rang true for many in the room that day.

In today's passage we find a compelling connection between love and worship along with a challenging paradigm to express our love to God in ways that don't demand goals or accomplished objectives. We love greatly because we are greatly loved, and expressing our love to God isn't always calculated or productive.

"To worship the Lord is – in the world's eyes – a waste of time. It is indeed, a 'Royal' waste of time. By engaging in it, we don't accomplish anything useful in our society's terms. But Worship ought not to be construed in a utilitarian way. Its purpose is not to gain numbers nor for our churches to be seen as successful. Rather, the entire reason for our worship is that God deserves it. Moreover, it isn't even useful for earning points with God, for what we do in worship won't change one whit how God feels about us. We will always still be helpless sinners caught in our endless inability to be what we should be or to make ourselves better – and God will always still be merciful, compassionate, and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and ready to forgive us as we come to him."

From *A Royal Waste of Time*, Marva Dawn

The spontaneity, attitude and magnitude of Mary's gift revealed her heart. Likewise, the brash and selfish response of Judas revealed his first love, himself. By this time, if you are now convinced to believe in Jesus, how will you respond to him? What is in your heart?

¹ Exodus 20:1-5a

² *The Gospel of John* by William Barclay

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

- How do you initially respond to Mary's gift and act of worship? Take a moment to think about your inner thoughts and identify some of the motivations of your heart. What do you detect? Ask the Spirit to surface any impurities in your responses and confess them.
- Could you ever conceive of giving a year's wages as an expression of love to God just for his good pleasure, without thought of appreciation, recognition, or accountability for the way the funds were used? What is your internal response to such an idea?
- How can you enter into extravagant worship on Sunday morning? Is it possible to express pure, unselfish love to God week after week? What would that look like for you?

For further preparation read O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" printed separately.

Group Preparation

- This lesson may spark controversy. The god of self-centeredness can appear to be very biblical. Some people can get so busy doing things "for God" and have no sense of worship and adoration of him. Others may worship and pray, even give sacrificially to the building fund, while people are starving all around them (literally and spiritually). Subconsciously, both may be building monuments of their own worship, for their own glory. The purpose of this lesson is not to debate who is "doing it right", but rather, to discover together what worship means in our lives and how we express that to God with pure motives (as much as we are able, given our sin nature).
- Try to avoid discussions regarding the music and styles of Sunday morning worship. This lesson on worship is about the attitudes of the heart. How do we express our love to Jesus?

Discussion Questions

1. What are some characteristics of extravagant worship? How have you expressed your love to God in extravagant ways?

The Gift of the Magi

by O. Henry

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent [imputation](#) of [parsimony](#) that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the [mendicancy](#) squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could

for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to [depreciate](#) Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. O all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mne. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum [fob](#) chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by [meretricious](#) ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a [truant](#) schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say `Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims—just the shade to