

*“God speaks. When God speaks things happen.”  
- Eugene Peterson*

When we love someone, we develop this fascinating ability to hear their voice. From the mother who can distinguish each distinct cry of her baby and its corresponding need, to the person who can pick out the laugh of their significant other amidst a busy, noisy crowd—our ears hear what our hearts are most connected to.

The words of Jesus in our reading today deeply reveal his heart for us. In a world where God seemed distant and people were weighed down with religious requirements they could never keep up with, Jesus came on a rescue mission. The religion they knew brought only burdens, restrictions and spiritual death. The offer to follow Jesus brought the promise of protection, gentle guidance and abundant life.

This message sounded like great news to everyone except the Jewish leaders. They spent so much of their energy discrediting Jesus’ words and picking apart his actions that their hearts had hardened to the point of no return. Just as we have seen in previous interactions, Jesus called them out on it. His words were a blatant indictment that they were not true followers of the God they claimed to honor so much.

Even in the midst of their murderous rage, Jesus still pleaded with them to believe (John 10:37-38). Sadly, they would never come to recognize that Jesus was the savior they had been searching, waiting and hoping for. Jesus challenged their every notion of who they expected God to be and they were simply unwilling to budge.

Today, there are so many people in the world who continue to write off God altogether because they can’t seem to reconcile the things about him they don’t understand or simply don’t like. And while Jesus will give us every opportunity to believe, in the end, he will honor the choices we make—even if that choice is to reject him.

## **READ**

John 10

# REFLECT

1: In what ways does Jesus care for his sheep?

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2: Do you feel Jesus speaks to you? If so, how? If not, why?

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3: Take time to reflect on the fact that Jesus knows you and calls you by name. How does this impact you today?

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## RESPOND

One of the primary ways we can come to know God more personally and hear his voice in our daily lives is through the practice of meditating on Scripture. This practice involves slowing down to reflect on small portions of the Bible, allowing ourselves to really ponder what we're reading and how it connects with our lives. We will engage in this practice by applying it to our reading today.

### Scripture Meditation Instructions

1. Re-read John 10 1-2 more times
2. Choose the sentence or phrase that stands out to you most, then paraphrase it in your own words
3. Write down answers to 3-4 of the following questions:
  - What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?
  - What does this text show me about my thoughts, behaviors or words that I need to confess and repent of?
  - What does this text show me about a need I have?
  - How can Jesus and his grace help me overcome my sin or answering the need I have?
  - What is going on in my life that God would be bringing this to my attention today

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## PRAY

As you reflect upon today's reading, spend some time in prayer thanking God for the specific ways that he cares for, guides and protects you. Ask God to continue to help you to love Jesus more and more so that you can hear his voice in your life.

## WEEK FOUR

## DAY TWO

*“Heartache forces us to embrace God out of desperate, urgent need. God is never closer than when your heart is aching.”*

*- Joni Eareckson Tada*

Some of the most difficult times in our faith occur when we feel like God is silent or not coming through in our lives in the way that we hoped. These moments can cause us to question God, doubt his goodness and plan for our lives, and can even cause us to feel angry with him.

This is exactly the place that the two sisters, Mary and Martha, found themselves. Jesus sent word to them that Lazarus’ illness would not end his life and yet, days later, he was dead. These women were not merely holding onto the belief that Jesus had the power to heal—they had been given a promise directly from Jesus that their brother would be okay. The confusion, betrayal and hurt that Mary and Martha must have experienced is difficult to imagine.

When Jesus arrived, he didn’t immediately explain his plan to make everything right. Instead, he stood before the tomb of his friend and wept. Jesus reveals that God is not distant when we suffer, but rather moves toward us, entering our sorrow. He is present when it feels as though our world is falling apart.

Beneath what seemed like abandonment and silence to Mary and Martha was a far deeper and more powerful plan. Jesus fulfilled his promise by raising Lazarus from the dead with the ease of waking a child from sleep.

In this life, we all will experience moments where we don’t see God immediately answering our prayers, healing us or altering our circumstances. And yet, we can rest in the truth that God cares deeply for us and we can trust him, even if that healing never comes. When we follow Jesus, death no longer has to be our greatest fear because it is no match for him.

### **READ**

John 11

# REFLECT

1: How do you typically respond when you experience suffering or loss?  
What have you learned about God or yourself during these times?

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2: Where in your life are you still waiting for God to respond? Or, in what areas of your life is it difficult to trust him?

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3: How can our reading today encourage and give you hope during difficult times?

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**RESPOND**

Identify someone in your life who is currently going through a difficult time similar to something you have experienced in your own life.

Choose one way that you can tangibly encourage or serve that person this week.

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**PRAY**

Looking back at your response to Reflection Question 2, spend some time praying for those areas where you find yourself waiting or struggling to trust God. As you pray, visualize yourself placing these concerns, burdens and relationships into his hands.

# WEEK FOUR

# DAY THREE

*“God nowhere tells us to give up things for the sake of giving them up. He tells us to give them up for the sake of the only thing worth having—life with Himself.” - Oswald Chambers*

In today’s reading, we will explore another encounter between Jesus and Mary, the sister of Lazarus. While the act of pouring perfume on another person’s feet is not something that we engage in today, we can understand that her gift reflected great love, humility and personal sacrifice (the cost of the perfume would have been the equivalent of nearly a full year’s salary!).

Mary had spent years developing a relationship with Jesus, sitting at his feet to learn from him, and watching him perform incredible miracles (most recently, the resurrection of her brother!). Mary had come to understand something incredibly important—that life with Jesus was of greater value than any material possession she would ever own, relationship she would ever pursue and accomplishment she would ever attain. When we see that Jesus himself is the greatest treasure we could ever have, it loosens our grip on the things we once considered valuable.

Mary’s extravagant gift to Jesus reveals something very important about the heart of giving in the Christian faith. She did not give to obtain favor with Jesus or earn his acceptance. She gave because she already had all of these things. Her gift was an overflow of lavish gratitude, adoration and love motivated by a heart that had been deeply impacted and transformed by the grace of God.

Years later, the same author of the gospel of John would write a letter to a group of new Christians. Contained in that letter are these words: “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). Truly understanding and allowing our hearts to be impacted by the extravagant generosity of God is the only thing that will produce authentic and open-handed, extravagant generosity in us.

## **READ**

John 12

# REFLECT

1: In what ways do you see God moving in your life right now? For example, have you seen God answering your prayers, healing a relationship, opening up opportunities, etc.?

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2: When was the last time you or someone in your life demonstrated extravagant love for Jesus? What did they do? How did this experience impact you?

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3: How difficult is it for you to give your financial resources, time and material possessions away? What is the most difficult part for you? How does Mary's example of sacrifice impact how you feel about your own resources?

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## RESPOND

Our reading today reminds us of how giving is really an extension of our worship. What is one thing that you could do this week to go above and beyond in your giving of (1) your financial resources, (2) your time or (3) your abilities/talents?

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## PRAY

Spend some time brainstorming all that God has provided for you, both in the realm of material things as well as your relationships, health, etc. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for the way he has poured out his extravagant love in your life.