

Small Group Guide

"Two Approaches to Jesus" | Mark 14:1-11

BEFORE YOU MEET

Read Mark 14:1-11 and John 12:1-8 on your own. As you read, pay attention to the contrast between Mary and Judas and what motivated each of them.

WELCOME QUESTION

To get the conversation started, have everyone answer this question before diving into the material:

Growing up, what was your earliest mental image of God -- and where did that image come from?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

These are the central ideas from the sermon to keep in mind throughout your discussion:

- How we view God directly shapes how we experience and approach God.
- Mary's extravagant act of worship was an outward expression of a heart fully surrendered to Jesus. She trusted God with her best because she had already seen that God gives his best.
- Judas approached Jesus with his own agenda. When Jesus did not fit that agenda, Judas turned away.
- God does not ask for perfection. He asks for your heart and whatever you have to offer.
- He We do not earn God's love. Romans 5:8 reminds us that God demonstrated his love for us while we were still sinners, before we ever responded to him.
- As Dallas Willard wrote, "The most important thing in your life is not what you do, it's who you become." The condition of our hearts shapes everything else.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Work through as many of these as time allows. Do not feel pressure to cover every question -- go where the conversation is most alive.

On Our View of God

1. The sermon described several common views of God: the police officer, the grandfather, and the vending machine. Which of these resonated with you most, either from your own experience or from people you know? Are there other images of God you would add to that list?
2. The pastor said, "How you view God shapes your experience of God." Do you agree with that? Can you think of a time when a wrong view of God affected how you related to him?
3. Have you ever caught yourself in "vending machine" mode with God -- treating prayer or church attendance like deposits that should produce a specific result? What did that feel like, and what shifted your thinking?

On Mary's Worship

4. The alabaster jar was likely the family's financial safety net -- not just an expensive gift but a source of security. What does it mean to you that Mary broke the whole jar rather than offering just a portion?
5. Jesus said of Mary, "She did what she could." He did not compare her offering to anyone else's. How does that phrase challenge or encourage you personally when you think about what you bring to God?
6. The sermon drew a connection between what Mary witnessed -- her brother Lazarus raised from the dead -- and the extravagance of her worship. How do your own experiences of God's faithfulness affect the way you give to him or trust him?

On Judas and Our Own Agendas

7. The sermon suggested that Judas may have come to Jesus with a pre-formed idea of what the Messiah should do and be -- and when Jesus did not fit that picture, Judas turned away. In what ways can we fall into a similar pattern today, expecting God to follow our plans rather than surrendering to his?
8. The pastor said there are two approaches to Jesus: using Jesus to accomplish your plans, or allowing Jesus' plans to become your plans. Which of those feels more like your default posture right now, and why?

On Giving God Our Best

9. The sermon made a distinction between serving God out of gratitude versus serving God out of a nervous attempt to earn his favor. How would you describe the difference in how those two motivations feel from the inside?
 10. What is one area of your life where you sense you might be holding something back from God? What makes it difficult to open your hands in that area?
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one of the following to practice individually before your group meets again. Be ready to share what you noticed.

- **Examine your view of God.** Set aside 15 minutes this week to journal honestly about how you currently view God. Ask yourself: When something goes wrong in my life, what is my first instinct about God's response? What does that reveal about how I actually see him?
 - **Identify what you have to offer.** Make a simple list of what God has given you -- time, abilities, relationships, resources, experiences. Pick one item from that list and take a concrete step this week to offer it back to him in some way.
 - **Practice gratitude-driven obedience.** Each morning this week, before you do anything else, remind yourself of one specific thing God has already done for you. Let that be the motivation behind one act of service or generosity that day -- not to earn anything, but simply in response to what you have already received.
 - **Pray about your agenda.** Spend time in prayer asking God to show you any area where you have been approaching him with your own agenda rather than a surrendered heart. Ask him what it would look like to release that to him.
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CLOSING REFLECTION

Close your time together by reading this line from the sermon aloud as a group:

"We can trust God with our best because God has already given his best for us."

Then invite anyone who is willing to finish this sentence out loud as a simple prayer:

"God, one thing I want to trust you with this week is..."

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Romans 5:8 -- Reflect on the truth that God demonstrated his love by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners -- not after we had cleaned ourselves up or earned his favor.