

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE, Part 2

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The picture you now see on the screen illustrates one woman's extravagant expression of love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. Pouring out her perfume, as she poured out her heart also, in adoration of the world's only Savior. We'll learn more about her story in a few minutes.

Two weeks ago, I spoke to you about God's extravagant love for us:

- The extravagant love of God the Father, which is MERCY.
- The extravagant love of God the Son, which is GRACE.
- The extravagant love of God the Holy Spirit, which is INTIMACY.

We may find these thoughts summed up beautifully in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (MSG): *"The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you."*

But the subject of love is not merely about God and His devotion to His creation. The story of love is always about relationship.

Recently, a book was published under the title, "One-Way Love." Have you read it? I enjoyed reading it. The premise is that God's nature is to love, and His love is so gracious that it requires no response; that is, God will love you even if you ignore or reject Him.

That means *nothing* to the person who does in fact ignore or reject God. But to the soul who would like to come home to God, but fears that he has offended his Maker, that is *good news*.

However, as far as that goes, it is an incomplete story. For love is always about a vibrant relationship between two persons. In order to be complete, it must be *two-way*.

When it comes to relationship with God, love that is not returned is love that has not yet been received.

Today, we're going to learn again about Extravagant Love; this time, from us to God. We're going to learn about the extravagant love that we return to God because He has first loved us.

Today, I'll speak of showing our love—extravagant love—to God in three dimensions of life:

- Extravagant love for God through acts of worship.
- Extravagant love for the Church through acts of friendship.
- Extravagant love for people through acts of compassion.

1. Extravagant Love for God through acts of worship

Come with me, for a visit to ancient Bethany, a short journey on foot outside of Jerusalem. This was the village where Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from death, lived with his sisters Mary and Martha.

On a previous occasion, when Jesus visited, Martha was excited to prepare a meal fit for a king, but Mary preferred to sit and talk with Jesus for the afternoon, soaking in His gracious wisdom. Now, it was Mary's turn to give back.

John 12:1-8 (NLT)

¹ *Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead.*

² *A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him.*

³ *Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.*

⁴ *But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said,*

⁵ *"That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor."*

⁶ *Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.*

⁷ *Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial.*

⁸ *You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

This is a beautiful, tender story of an individual who had been wooed by the love of God through Jesus Christ. When her brother fell ill and died, Mary said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" No matter-of-fact statement this, but the bitterness of agonizing grief. Mary expected nothing in return; she was just venting her disappointment. But Jesus had something more in mind.

They rolled away the stone from the door of Lazarus' tomb and Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And with His words, to their utter surprise, Lazarus lived again!

There was deep and lasting joy in that home for Jesus' occasional visits.

On this occasion, Martha, once again, was busy serving. Mary's devotion was of another sort. She opened a bottle of expensive perfume and began to rub it on Jesus' feet as He lay beside the dinner table, filling the house with the fragrance.

To give us some perspective, I did a brief search of contemporary expensive perfumes and learned this from Chanel of Paris:

“The parfum, or extrait, is the highest concentration of fragrance, the most precious form of scent, and it lasts the longest upon application. Since 1921, the fragrance of Chanel N°5 has held the power to astonish and seduce – expressing itself differently on every woman. It may be dabbed onto the skin using the jewel-cut cabochon stopper” (The classic, faceted bottle pictured here may be yours for a mere \$4,200. In fairness, it does contain 30.4 fluid ounces—just less than a quart. And if you prefer hand-crafted crystal instead of glass, you may own this limited edition for just \$15,000.)

Mary’s perfume was even rarer, valued at a year’s wages! And in her mind, there was no greater occasion, and no greater love, for which it could be used. So she broke the seal, and opened the flask, and poured out a year’s wages on the feet of Jesus, catching the flow and smearing it over His feet with her hair.

This was extravagant love!

What has Jesus Christ done for you? Revealed God the Father to you? Forgiven your sins? Healed your body? Calmed your troubled mind? Rebuilt your life and relationships? Baptized you with the Holy Spirit? Supplied your personal needs? Given you supernatural gifts and a ministry?

And how have you demonstrated your love and appreciation to Him? Does it approach Mary’s extravagance?

Let me ask this another way. How have you thought about showing your love to God, but hesitated to carry it out? What have you been holding back? How have you been less-than-extravagant? And, what would it take to change that?

Didn’t God give His very best for you? And doesn’t God deserve your very best in return? I plead with you: become extravagant in your worship.

What do I mean “extravagant in worship”? I’ll let the Apostle Paul explain it to us:

Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)

¹ *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.*

This worship is not merely mental; it is physical! “Give your bodies.” That’s why I call it “acts of worship.” Like the Book of Acts, which was the early disciples’ response to Christ’s act of love for them. Worship is love, and love is action.

Paul begs us to offer to God our bodies—our physical strengths, energies, and lives—as a “living and holy sacrifice.”

The sacrifices of the First Covenant (the Old Testament) were dead beasts, whose blood had been spilled at the altar. The Second Covenant calls instead for living, functioning sacrifices—our lives, sanctified and faithfully lived each day under the providential leading of the Holy Spirit, for the honor of God. Explaining how to do that, Paul adds:

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Extravagant love for God is shown in acts of worship.

2. Extravagant Love for the Church through acts of friendship

The Apostle Paul was once a church-basher, literally. He hated Christians, and did everything he could to squelch their message and remove them from society. All of that changed one afternoon, on a journey to the city of Damascus, when he met the Leader of the Church face-to-face. He was won over at once. He began to sing a different tune. And the song he sang shot to the top of the charts!

Paul's prayers for God's people are powerful. His is a great example of how to pray for your fellow believers. To start with, just take Paul's words into your own mouth and pray them for others. The Holy Spirit will lead you from there.

Ephesians 3:14-19 (MSG)

¹⁴ My response is to get down on my knees before the Father,

¹⁵ this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth.

¹⁶ I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—

¹⁷ that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love,

¹⁸ you'll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights!

¹⁹ Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.

If your fellow Christians don't seem to be walking in the Spirit's fullness, or showing the love of God—perhaps they need your prayers more than your criticism.

Oh, that we might all know by experience “the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love”! It’s breadth. It’s length. It’s depth. Its height.

And show the same to one another. For that is how, Jesus said, the world will believe our message.

Paul also painted a picture of what it could look like to live in that fullness:

Colossians 3:12-17 (NLT)

¹² *Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

¹³ *Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

¹⁴ *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*

¹⁵ *And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

¹⁶ *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.*

¹⁷ *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

Three things rise, like cream, to the top of this passage. Only they’re not things; they are human qualities. Spirit-filled human qualities. These three are “must-dos.” Christians who “live in the fullness” are:

- Mercy-givers

Christians are not just soft-hearted. They are so humbly aware of what Christ did for them that they pass it on to others. *“Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”* Forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a debt we owe. You *must* do this. For Jesus’ sake.

- Peace-makers

Peace is another quality that we are to receive *and* to give away. If you want to live in the fullness, you must *LET* the peace of Christ rule in your heart. If you permit anything else to take the throne—in your thoughts and attitude—you have made yourself king-for-the-moment, instead of Him.

- Christ-sharers

“Living in the fullness” means adopting the message about Christ as your own. Believing it. Owning it. Doing it. Sharing it. TOGETHER. Whether in learning or practicing, teaching or singing, we must do life together. Christianity is not a solo flight; it is a bus ride.

It takes longer than you think, with other passengers who talk too loud or snore too much. But it’s also like riding with the band. If you sing together, you’ll also laugh together, and eat together, and create wonderful memories together.

Devote yourself to SHARING Christ with others. Don't keep Him, or His message, to yourself. Show Christ. Speak of Christ. Rejoice in Christ. Together.

Extravagant love for the Church is shown in acts of friendship.

3. Extravagant Love for People through acts of compassion

Matthew 9:35-38 (NASB77)

³⁵ *And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.*

³⁶ *And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.*

³⁷ *Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*

³⁸ *"Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

"His harvest" is a harvest of "distressed and downcast" souls. If you're searching for "the beautiful people" to add to the Church, you're working in someone else's field. The harvest Jesus is looking for does not "have it all together." They are probably not the people you would naturally and immediately choose for your friends.

But once the compassion of the Lord touches their lives, they will be changed (like you were) and become likeable (like you are). Who are the harvesters who see people as Jesus sees them? Who welcomes those whom Jesus welcomes?

The fuel for this harvest work is compassion, and Jesus is its Source.

Will you pray the prayer that Jesus asked us to pray? "Master, send out workers into Your harvest... starting with me." Paul was such a worker, moved by such compassion, and sustained by the strength of the Lord.

Acts 20:22-24 (MSG)

²² *"But there is another urgency before me now. I feel compelled to go to Jerusalem. I'm completely in the dark about what will happen when I get there.*

²³ *I do know that it won't be any picnic, for the Holy Spirit has let me know repeatedly and clearly that there are hard times and imprisonment ahead.*

²⁴ *But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God.*

Whether in sickness or in health, in sorrow or in joy, in prison or in freedom, Paul worked for the Lord—he plowed, he planted, he harvested.

The thing that gripped him, the thing that moved him, the thing that would not let him go, was the “incredibly extravagant generosity of God.”

Extravagant love for people is shown in acts of compassion.

Our New Way to Live

2 Corinthians 9:10-11 (MSG)

¹⁰ *This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God,*

¹¹ *wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.*

This is our way of worship, our way of friendship, our way of compassion. It is not as the world gives; it is based on how and what Christ has given to us.

You may not have all that you want out of life, but because God has been “more than extravagant” with us, we have more than we need. We all have more than we need; that is, we all have something we can give away, something to share with others.

And in giving we grow. In giving we gain. And the result is also “great praise to God.” This is our real worship (Romans 12:2). Extravagant worship. Extravagant life. With our extravagant God.