

# JESUS' JOURNEY TO THE CROSS & PERSONAL DIGNITY

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A Lenten Bible Study  
To be Used With Creating the Midwest Mission  
Personal Dignity Kits

By Angela Cunigan

**Context:** Lenten themes of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving and the Midwest Mission Personal Dignity Kits

**Session Overview:** This study has been put together to coincide both with Lent and the Personal Dignity Kits for Midwest Mission. It is designed to take participants through scriptures that address the themes of Lent; Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving along with addressing the ways in which Jesus' journey to the cross was a way to restore Personal Dignity for us all.

Each week participants will bring an item for the Personal Dignity kit then participate in a Bible study that will tie into scripture and use that item as an illustration. Each lesson begins with a story. These are my personal stories, which you can use or substitute in your own stories. Leaders can use the stories as is for a hook or perhaps the story will bring to mind a similar personal story that the leader may use in its place.

It will then invite the participants into the Biblical passage to explore what the Bible has to say about the topic. Each lesson will finish with discussion questions.

There are five weeks of lessons to begin the week following Ash Wednesday. As the sixth week will fall on Holy Week and churches may be busy with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday preparations, there is no lesson for that week. If you choose to meet on the sixth week you can spend the time putting together your kits and delivering them to Midwest Mission.

Please feel free to adjust and adapt any part of this Bible study to serve the needs of your local congregation. This is written to primarily serve my particular church and our style of learning. However, I wanted to share it so that others could also have a springboard to tie Lent and a mission project together. If you have any ideas or suggestions on how this lesson can be improved, please feel free to reach out to me. I would welcome your feedback.

Blessings,  
*Angela Cunigan*

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## PERSONAL DIGNITY KIT SHOPPING LIST

- 1 hand towel - no kitchen towels
- 1 washcloth - no dishcloths
- 1 toothbrush (no multipacks)
- 1 bar soap - 3-4 oz.
- 1 shampoo -12-19 oz.
- 1 deodorant - 2-3 oz. (stick, roll-on, or pump)
- 1 lotion - 8-10 oz.
- 1 1-gallon resealable plastic bag
- \$2 to be used to supply toothpaste and a knapsack

Each Week you will be asked to bring a couple of items from the list. It is pertinent that you pay attention to the size of the items. All of these items can be found at dollar stores, grocery stores and department stores. More expensive is not always better. Feel free to bring more than one of each item. Once we assemble the kits, we can bring extra items to Midwest Mission to be placed in other partially finished kits.

## Session 1: Confession (Toothbrush)

Every night when it comes to getting the kids ready for bed, it is a challenge. We have the same routine over and over and yet every night it seems to be a huge surprise to them, when it is time to start the bedtime routine. The biggest issue seems to come down to brushing teeth. More often than not they will ask if they have to brush their teeth. Now I understand their aversion to the sometimes-monotonous drudgery of brushing teeth. Many times, if I am honest, I find myself very worn out at the end of the day and just want nothing more than to crawl straight into bed, but I know that when I go to the dentist I will regret that choice, not only with all the extra required maintenance and care, but also with the extra cost, so even on my most tired nights, I stand there at the sink brushing my teeth, knowing that those moments matter in the long run.

My children do not understand the long-term consequences and that their choices matter. So, when they ask if they have to brush their teeth, I tell them, no, you do not have to brush all of your teeth. You only have to brush the ones that you want to keep. Of course, I am met with an eye roll and a groan but immediately they go straight to the bathroom and brush their teeth.

But the point is as humans we tend to want to take the easiest route. We want to do the bare minimum. We want to avoid the mundane tasks and sometimes we find ways to justify the path of least resistance, which may not seem like that big of a deal in the moment but down the road we find ourselves paying large consequences. Like the copay of a root canal, which could have been easily avoided with just a little bit of time spent each night, faithfully not taking the easy route. But let us go deeper and think about something beyond our teeth like our hearts and faith journey. How do small compromises lead to large consequences particularly in our faith walk?

Come with me into the Lenten scripture for this week and we start out with the temptation of Christ. Would someone please read for us Matthew 4:1-11?



## Scripture



Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. <sup>2</sup>After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’<sup>[b]</sup>”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup>“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’<sup>[c]</sup>”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’<sup>[d]</sup>”

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup>“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’<sup>[e]</sup>”

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

– Matthew 4:1-11 [NIV]

## Discussion Questions

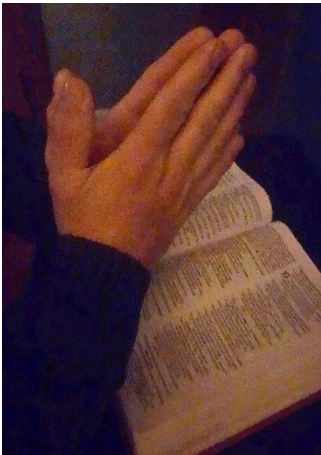
1. Imagine yourself having not ate for forty days and nights, and now here is someone reminding you that you have the capability to create food out of nothing.... What would be your first thoughts? How great would the temptation be?
2. What are the three temptations listed here? What does each one offer? Why are these significant?
3. Why do you believe it was so important for Jesus to be tempted? Why in these three particular ways? Do you think there is significance in these three particular temptations? What are they?
4. After being offered food/comfort, safety and finally power Jesus resists these temptations. How does it change the magnitude of the cross? In facing the cross there was no comfort, there was no safety and there was a definite surrender of

power, so does recognizing these were the temptations make the cross more significant in any way? Why or why not?

5. In what ways do we choose to do the bare minimum in our faith? What are our big consequences for small compromises? In what ways can we begin to break those compromises and live more fully into faithfulness?

The three themes of Lent are commonly prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Through this season of Lent is there something that you can choose to sacrifice to experience these three themes more fully? Something small that you do weekly such as buying a donut or a coffee, or going out for breakfast, that you can replace with prayer and an inner examination of your heart and then use the funds you saved from not doing that thing, which can be used to purchase more items for the Human Dignity Kits. What is something you can sacrifice to look more at your own heart and to help restore the Dignity of someone else around you?

Next week you are being asked to bring a one-gallon sized zipper sealed plastic bag and a \$2 donation. Oh, and maybe an extra toothbrush too so we can make more Dignity kits than just one per person.



**Closing prayer:** *Jesus, we know that you like us were tempted and yet you did not compromise or succumb, despite the very real pangs of hunger and the knowledge of the path you came here to walk for our sake. You showed us what it means to hold fast to our faith, and through this scripture we begin to see an inkling of the depth of the love you have for us. We glimpse the extent to which you were willing to go in your desire to restore our lives, when we choose to make compromises with much bigger consequences than we acknowledge in the moment. Help us to stand fast to the faith and not compromise to those things that seem easier in the moment. Help us to remain faithful to you in all our ways. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

## Session 2: Giving (1 gallon bag and \$2 Donation)

When I was in my undergraduate studies I was taking a class on spiritual disciplines. My professor told us that we had to choose a spiritual discipline from a list and practice it for a day and then write a paper about our experience. As I was looking at the list, I knew that silence was probably not going to work really well for someone who can start a conversation with a complete stranger, and most of the people would probably choose prayer. I wanted something that was a bit of a challenge and that I had not ever done before. So, for whatever reason I settled on fasting.

I started out the day great, after all I was not much of a breakfast person anyway at that time. I rounded out through lunch and pretty soon I started learning something new about myself which is that without food I am a person who quickly becomes hangry. In case you don't know, hangry is anger that shows itself when one experiences hunger.

I am walking across the campus toward one of my classes with a bad case of hangry. As I pass about the third person without saying hello and glaring at anyone who even looks at me, I heard God whisper in my heart, you know it defeats the purpose of this if you walk around with your face like that. I lashed back quickly in prayer, "With my face like what?!?: And it was not so much a response but more like I could feel his sigh in my heart. I was suddenly very aware of how much I had missed the mark. I told him I was sorry and that I had really missed the point of the spiritual discipline in my desire for pity from the world.

I told God how important it was for me to pull closer to him in this spiritual practice and then I pulled myself together and began to smile and greet each person as I normally did on a small campus. Smiling and saying hi, making small talk without acting like the world was ending if I did not get a sandwich. The hunger was still there, but it was there as a secret shared between my God and myself. I felt like while I was going through my day within the world, my soul was somewhere else in fellowship with God. Each pang brought him closer.

We live in a world of recognition. We cannot open social media without seeing videos of people helping others or oversharing about the great deeds they have done to help others. My children really love following one social media influencer whose entire page is dedicated to all the ways that he "Helps" people for likes and the applaud of man. It's easy to get trapped in doing things for the ways in which they bring us attention, but the scripture reminds us that in giving, prayer, and fasting all of it should be done in a way that is between us and our God, not for all of man to see. I had lost

sight of that in my practice of fasting. Have you ever lost sight of that in your service, prayers or spiritual practices?

Today one of the items we brought is clear bags that can be seen through. The bag reminds us that our actions should be like the bags...not the thing we focus on but transparently revealing Jesus to the world.

Would someone please read our passage from Matthew 6:1-18?

## Scripture



**“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.**

**<sup>2</sup>“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

**<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup>And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

**<sup>9</sup>“This, then, is how you should pray:**

**“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,**

**<sup>10</sup>your kingdom come,  
your will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup>Give us today our daily bread.**

**<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**



<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<sup>16</sup> "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.  
– Matthew 6:1-18 [NIV]

There is a lot to unpack here in the scripture today. The reason this scripture was selected this week is because it focuses so much on the key themes of Lent. Giving, Prayer, Fasting. Last week you were asked to give up something to free up time for prayer and resources for giving. Some of you likely did and others of you may have chosen to just give more, without giving anything up. There is no wrong or right way about what you chose to do for Lent, but Jesus has some pretty clear instructions about how we are to give, pray and fast.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is there a running theme between each of these sets of instructions? What are the common threads you notice?
2. What are the specific instructions that we are given in these verses regarding giving, prayer and fasting?
3. Why do you suppose that God wants us to do things unseen or in a way that does not involve drawing attention to ourselves?
4. Which of these if any do you struggle with the most? What comes most easily? Why?
5. Why do we long for the world to take notice when we give, pray or make sacrifices? Why do we seek the approval of man over God?

6. How do you suppose by keeping these things unseen will we receive a reward from God (verses 4,6 & 18)? What sort of reward have you experienced from God?
7. In what ways can we tangibly adjust the posture of our soul to do these things for the glory of God instead of the glory of man?

If you have found something to sacrifice or give up, I encourage you to continue to use that time to pray, reflect and use the savings to create more kits. If you have not elected to do so, please consider it this week. It is ok if you do not start right on time, no one is keeping score. Next week you are asked to bring a 3-4 oz bar of soap and a 12-19 oz bottle of shampoo. It is necessary to stay in the size specifications.



**Closing Prayer:** *All seeing God, we admit that frequently much of what we do is for the benefit of others. We give, pray and even fast so that others will notice our holiness forgetting that it is for you that our hearts should strive. Help us to make our hearts like a transparent plastic bag, which is merely there as a means to do the work without being seen, clearing the line of sight so that others may see you and glorify you, instead of our actions. Help us set aside our egos in order that our actions, prayers and disciplines may draw us ever closer to you our Holy God. Amen.*

### Session 3: Cleansing of our Sins (Bar Soap and Shampoo)

Everyone loves a good underdog story. They are the sort of stories that fill us with hope and joy right down into the deepest parts of our heart. Several years ago, I had two friends. I am going to change their names for the sake of this story. Easton was incredibly intelligent. He was one of those guys who just knew a lot of things and at times he could come across as a bit of a know it all. He just liked to carry himself in a manner that let everyone around him be reminded of his deep intelligence and possible superiority. The other friend, who we will call David, was not quite as ambitious. He was smart but he struggled in school and had been diagnosed with dyslexia.

David spent years trying to different methods and special schools, to learn how to compensate for his dyslexia, which had made him also very smart in a different sort of way. Well one night a bunch of them decided to play scrabble. Despite not knowing how to spell, David decided to play.

Slowly one by one people started dropping out of the game until it just came down to Easton and David, and everyone was on the edge of their seat watching. Easton decided to use his vast intelligence to spell out long and difficult words. Meanwhile, David kept it simple and to the point. He was just making lots of small little words. But the points started to add up quickly. Pretty soon, David is beating Easton and Easton is getting incredibly angry. Easton's pride and intelligence had gotten the best of him, while David just pattered along with little words like "to" and "the."

Needless to say, the night went down in the stories of legends. Easton got mad and David won the game. And everyone had a good laugh when Easton stood up and yelled, "I can't believe I got beat by someone who can't even spell."

Today's story is also an underdog story. It's the sort of story in which those that are intelligent and knowledgeable in the law are humbled by those to which they look down upon. See in this story a group of friends decide they are going to bring their buddy to be healed by Jesus. They carry him on a mat, but the crowds are so thick they cannot get near Jesus, so they cut a hole in the roof and lower him down to Jesus.

Jesus is so moved by their faith that he looks at the man and says, "Your sins are forgiven." Well needless to say this gets those that are knowledgeable of the law and scripture whispering and talking and they start to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. After all,

only God can forgive sins. But Jesus is God and he reveals his purpose and his authority by the end of this passage. It's the sort of story that fills our hearts with hope and joy.

Would someone please read for us Mark 2:1-17?

## Scripture



A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. <sup>2</sup>They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. <sup>3</sup>Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup>Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made

an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

<sup>6</sup>Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

<sup>8</sup>Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ <sup>10</sup>But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, <sup>11</sup>“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” <sup>12</sup>He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

<sup>13</sup>Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <sup>14</sup>As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

<sup>15</sup>While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup>When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”



<sup>17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Mark 2:1-17 [NIV]

Jesus knew what he was doing when he told the man that his sins were forgiven. He knew that they would start to doubt and question, and this would be his opportunity to reveal who he really is and from where his authority comes. He asks them, which is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?” Well naturally they have to say it’s easier to say your sins are forgiven. After all, if you say get up and walk and he doesn’t walk everyone will know you are a sham, but no one but God is going to know if his sins are actually forgiven or not. Jesus is not a sham though, he is the Son of God, so he looks at the crowd and says, “In order that you know who I am and by whose authority I operate, I am going to do a little more, get up, take your mat and go home.” And the man does just that.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the things that Jesus reveals to the crowd at that moment? *(Possible answers: He can forgive sins, he can make that man walk, and he is the Son of God, operating under the full authority of the Father.)*
2. Imagine you were there and watched it all happen. How do you think you would have reacted? Would you have understood the implications of who Jesus was, when the man suddenly was able to walk? Why or why not?
3. Immediately following this story Jesus sees Levi the tax collector which is Matthew and tells him to come with him and he goes and eats supper with him. What is the significance that he called Matthew, a tax collector, immediately following forgiving the paralyzed man and telling him to walk?
4. Again we find the teachers of the law questioning Jesus authority. They start asking why Jesus is eating with a bunch of sinners. What is Jesus response?
5. Jesus declares that he came for the sinners not the righteous. How does that sit with your heart? Do you see yourself as righteous or a sinner? How does it make you feeling knowing that Jesus came for the sinners?
6. Are we, as a body of believers, eating dinner with the righteous or the sinners? How or how not?

7. Are there any changes we need to do personally, or as a body of believers, to make sure that our ministry is aligned better with Jesus' ministry and purpose? Why or why not?

Jesus' purpose was to come for the sinner. God knew that left to our own devices we would never be worthy to stand before a Holy and Righteous God. But God also loved us immensely and wanted nothing other than to be in relationship with us. The entire Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament is full of stories of God pursuing us, our promises to remain faithful and then rebelling and going our own way. God knew the only way this was going to end was if he took on sin once and for all and that could only be done through conquering sin and death. Lent is a time for us to search our hearts and focus on all that God really did for us through Jesus Christ. Every person in this room, has had a need for forgiveness, even the most righteous among us. It is a time for repentance and the recognition of what Jesus truly suffered and endured because of his immense love for us. Let's take a few moments of silent prayer and reflection and thank him for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ that washed away our sin and cleansed our hearts. After some time of quiet contemplation, I will close us with prayer.



*Closing Prayer: Jesus, who came for the sinners, thank you for not leaving us in our sin and our failures. We confess that as hard as we try to remain faithful and righteous, it is easy to become ensnared in the sin that so easily entangles us. Many times we come to worship on Sunday and we pray, sing, and listen to the sermon but we forget to really acknowledge the significance of what you did for us. Sometimes we even get a bit haughty and self-righteous, in our actions and the way we treat those around us. When our pride threatens to come before our fall, remind us once again that without your cleansing blood we would all be lost. Nudge our hearts when we are tempted to judge the sinners around us, and help us align our ministry with yours in a way that invites the sinner to our tables for dinner. Thank you for all you did for us. Amen.*

Be sure to continue in your time of fasting, prayer and reflections this week. Remember even if you have not started it is never too late to begin. Next week you will bring deodorant and lotion. The deodorant must be 2-3 oz and the lotion 8-10 oz.

## Session 4: Anointing With Oil (Lotion and Deodorant)

A couple of weeks ago I took a pilgrimage with my school to Cyprus. While I was there, we visited a monastery in the Troodos mountains. After spending some time in prayer, I was browsing through the gift shop and came across a small bottle of anointing oil. It had a beautiful fragrance that was unlike anything I have ever smelled. I knew that it would fit in my carryon bag, so I purchased it to use when I visited the sick or the dying.

When I returned home, my daughter had other plans. She smelled it and instantly fell in love with the fragrance. She dabbed some on her wrists and behind her ears and I thought that would be the end of it. Then a week or so later, I picked up the bottle and noticed that it was about a quarter of the way gone. I looked over at her and she gave me this sheepish grin and pretended to know nothing of its sudden disappearance.

I told her that it was meant for the sick and the dying. Those that needed prayer and taken care of. She said, “I know mom, but it smells so good, that I can’t help but dab some on each time I get ready to leave.” I realized that it made her feel beautiful and special, even though it was intended for another purpose.

It made me remember when I was a teenager, and we were incredibly poor. My mom would buy this jar of deodorant that was just a stinky nasty cream in a jar. You would dab some onto your fingers and then rub it into your armpits. I hated it and it stunk, but it was all we could afford. We all shared this one vat of it, and she would say, that we were fortunate to even have deodorant. I would have longed to have a perfume or a lotion that made me smell beautiful, simply because there is a sense of dignity that comes with those small luxuries. Let us face it, when we have extraordinarily little, things that make us smell good or feel good are one of the first things we cut out of our lives when trying to survive. These gifts we bring today for the kits are just as meaningful and valued more than anything else in the personal dignity kits for those that have so little, because they are a luxury, and having these items helps keep us from being set aside or avoided due to smell. Would someone read our scripture today from Matthew 26:6-13?

### Scripture

**6** While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, **7** a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of extremely expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.



8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. 9 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you,<sup>[a]</sup> but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” – Matthew 26:6-13 [NIV]

When that woman approached Jesus and poured out the contents of her alabaster jar, she was acknowledging his worth, his importance and pouring out her love for him. At some point he had seen her in a way that gave her a sense of personal dignity and worth and now she was pouring out her worship upon him.

Everyone got bent out of shape because after all this was supposed to be used for another purpose. It was not meant for trivial things, which seemed wasteful. But Jesus stops them and reminds them that this was not trivial, the sacred existed even in this seemingly wasteful act. He said she was preparing him for his burial, and we know in hindsight that this was necessary to happen before his death, because the grave never held him long enough for the women to put the burial oils and perfumes upon him in death. After all, they were going there to do just that when they found the empty tomb of our risen savior.

## Discussion Questions

1. Imagine you are a disciple, and you have just witnessed this act of worship. What would your response have been at the moment? And why?
2. Do you believe that your response is different because you have the luxury of seeing the entire picture? Or do you struggle with the same things the disciples did in that moment?
3. How do we reconcile the needs of the poor and yet the woman’s need to pour out her heart in worship? Do both sides of the argument in this passage show the value of human dignity? Why or why not?
4. This woman had perfume in her alabaster jar, what would be in your alabaster jar? What would be a great sacrifice for you to pour out in worship?



5. Would you be worried about what others might think or say if you were to pour out the contents of your “alabaster jar?” Why or why not?
6. Have you ever sacrificed something of great worth in a moment of worship? If so, what was that experience like? If not, what do you imagine it would be like? Is there something you feel God is putting on your heart to pour out in an anointing on him?

This story has always been a struggle for me. I grew up so poor and my heart cries out with the disciples more often than not. I think watching my daughter “waste” the anointing oil that I intended for the sick and the dying, has done a lot to raise the story off the pages and help me see the inherent worth in the act of this woman’s worship. It really presses the issue of personal dignity and value in unconventional and on the surface seemingly impractical ways. It is my prayer that you will continue to wrestle with this story as I do and recognize the worth of people over things, even when it does not make sense in a logical way.

I hope that those of you who have chosen to take this time to give up something for Lent to be replaced with prayer and reflection and free up resources for deeper giving are sensing Jesus’ presence in these times. For those of you who have not yet made this decision, please keep in mind that it is not too late to begin. Again, be reminded that no one is keeping score. Next week you will bring a hand towel and a washcloth. Please make sure that they are NOT kitchen towels or dishcloths. They need to be actual bathroom hand towels and wash cloths.



*Closing Prayer: Anointed Jesus, we confess that at times we struggle with what looks like wastefulness in our desire to be good stewards of all that you have entrusted to us. Help us to discern when our offering needs to be poured from our own alabaster jars, of that which we treasure and value deeply. Help us to not be worried or ashamed as to the reactions of others, but to pour out our worship in an anointing unto you as we acknowledge the lavish love and personal dignity that you have given us amid a world that quickly jumps to judgement and condemnation. Accept our worship and the offerings of our hearts. Amen.*

## Session 5: Foot Washing (Hand Towel and Washcloth)

The first time I ever attended a service that had a foot washing component in it I felt exactly like Peter. I was mortified that this leader who I admired, followed and respected was going to wash my feet. I was going to have to take off my sweaty shoes and socks and let this person kneel before me with my feet inches from their face.

I was having a full panic attack thinking about everything it entailed. Were my toenails too long? Were my nails painted? Did I have toe jam between my toes from my socks? Did my feet stink? Were they calloused, dry and rough? I had been yelled at by a doctor for letting my feet get too dry and calloused in the past, and they were medical professionals, this was my mentor, someone whose opinion and ideas I valued. Would they remember me and ever look at me in the same way again? Or would they forever remember me as crusty feet?

As it came closer to my turn the anxiety just continued to rise in me. And finally, I had no choice but to turn to this person and the moment of decision. She whispered to me, something I had seen her do to the others. “I would like to wash your feet, but if you do not feel comfortable, I will wash your hands.” Well, so many thoughts went through my head in a matter of seconds and before any of them could become a coherent thought, I whispered, you may wash my feet. She smiled as I removed my shoes and socks.

As she began, I thought about Peter and his struggle. His feet were likely way grosser than mine, walking around in all that sand and dust in sandals, and he had Jesus in front of him. Aside from feeling relief at not being him, I also felt strangely moved and humbled. Why should this person who has poured so much spiritual vitality into my soul be knelt before me in a posture of submission? It was uncomfortable but not because of my feet, because of my feelings of unworthiness in the light of being valued by someone I valued deeply. I was glad I said, “You may wash my feet”, because Jesus was right, I may not have understood what was happening in the moment but later I understood.

Would someone please read our scripture from John 13:1-17?

## Scripture



It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup>The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray

Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup>so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup>After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

<sup>8</sup>"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

<sup>9</sup>"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

<sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup>"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. – John 13:1-17 [NIV]

## Discussion Questions

1. Imagine being one of the disciples sitting at the table and suddenly Jesus takes off his outer clothing, wraps a towel around his waist and kneels in front of you to wash your feet. What is your first reaction or response?
2. Do you think it's easier to have your feet washed or do the washing? Why?

3. How do you suppose Peter let go of his pride in order to let Jesus wash his feet? What pride do we need to let go of to serve and be served?
4. Jesus said that they would not understand what he was doing in the moment but later they would. What was it they understood later?
5. Why is it so important that one of Jesus last interactions before the cross was an act of service and humility? What does this demonstrate for us and how should we live in response to knowing Jesus deemed this important and necessary to do in his final hours?
6. The act of foot washing is very holy but naturally we cannot go around literally washing feet all the time, so how do we wash feet metaphorically? In what ways could and should we model Jesus' servant heart?

Foot washing is awkward when we overthink it, but since that night that I experienced my first foot washing service, I have done a few of them myself. I can tell you that to this day, I do not remember anything about anyone's feet, but I do remember the holiness of the moment and simple beauty of this act of service. To finish tonight, we are going to have some quiet reflection. There are various places, and you can choose to do what the Holy Spirit places in your heart. You can come and have your feet washed, you can just go to the table and think about the water and the pitcher and what that night was like. You can stay in your seat and journal, color or simply pray. This is a time for your personal reflection. After a period of time, we will close in prayer. Next week we will gather once more to put our kits together to be delivered to Midwest Mission in Jefferson.

**Note to Leaders:** You know your group, perhaps it would be beneficial to have a foot washing service on the closing night. Maybe you just need the basin, water and a towel for people to quietly meditate upon. Do what you feel is best but take a few moments to just allow you people to sit quietly with their thoughts and reflections on this final night of Lenten study. Play some soft music, and create some space for journaling, praying or just silent prayer.





**Closing Prayer:** *Servant Jesus, who humbled yourself to wash our feet, to serve us in ways beyond our comprehension. We will never fully understand the price you paid for us in order to restore our personal dignity and make our hearts worthy to stand before our Creator. We thank you for showing us what true service means and looks like. We are forever grateful for the example of humility that you have set, and we pray that our hearts will take a hold of that and respond in service to you and to others. That we may truly be the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. Amen.*