

Living Generously

Generous With Attention

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: In this cultural moment, giving people our undivided attention is more necessary and more valuable than ever.

Head Change: To know that it’s possible to be physically present yet absent in every other way.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that our attention to others echoes God’s attention to us.

Life Change: To slow down enough to be present with every person in every moment we inhabit, so as to get to know them and meet their needs.

OPEN

Has anyone ever said to you, ‘I bet you haven’t listened to a word I’ve said!’? If so, have you ever replied, ‘That’s a weird way to start a conversation.’?

We’re a selfish, distracted society, and our attention span only seems to be shrinking. In this session, Jonathan continues to explore the example of Mary, whose generosity is displayed through her patient, unblinking attentiveness to Jesus.

REVIEW

Jonathan opens the session by reminding us of Mary's selfless, sacrificial act in anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume (John 12:3). He points out that she doesn't just give Jesus her time. She also gives Him her attention. **Do you agree that this type of generosity is particularly important for us today? Why, or why not? Do you ever find yourself overwhelmed and zoning out because of the plethora of cultural voices vying to be heard? Do you have a strategy for staying focused?**

Jonathan says, 'I find it remarkably easy to be present, and yet absent, at the same time. I can, undeniably, be physically present, while my mind is very much elsewhere.' **In which situations do you find it particularly difficult to be present in the moment? In these situations, who else is generally present with you? How do you think your distraction makes them feel? How do you experience the distractedness of others whose attention you crave? What are the phone rules in your household, as you rage against the relentless interruptions of the smartphone?**

Jesus knew the trajectory His life would take. He says later in the same chapter, 'Now My soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save Me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.' (John 12:27) His execution is imminent, and it's likely Mary senses His anguish. She responds by focusing her attention on Jesus, providing comfort to a body that will soon suffer unimaginably. **Think back on the conversations you've had today, or in this past week. To whom did you give your undivided attention? What did your attentiveness reveal to you about their circumstances? How did you respond?**

Jonathan quips that 'nard' sounds a lot like 'lard' but thankfully is nothing like it. Rather, nard is an incredibly expensive natural oil, known for its calming, anxiety-reducing qualities. **Do you think Mary fully understood the extent of Jesus' distress? Are we expected to perfectly perceive another's circumstances, or their mental or emotional state? If not, can we still effectively set our attention on them and care for them? How has someone generously poured out on you their kind attention, even if they didn't completely get what you were going through?**

Judas focuses on the cost of the perfume instead of what it means (John 12:4–5). He knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Ironically, just after

this encounter (during which Jesus admonishes Judas for criticising the waste of money), Judas heads off to ask the chief priests what they'd give him for betraying Jesus. They agree to pay him thirty pieces of silver – about a quarter of the value of the nard. **How does Judas lose out by paying attention to the wrong things? What does your Instagram feed encourage you to give attention to? If you have a spouse or kids, what do they hope you'll pay more attention to? And less attention? Does paying attention to certain people feel like a waste of your time or money? Why, or why not?**

Nard was not only used to reduce anxiety, but also as a burial oil. **Explain the sense of cosmic foreshadowing in Mary's anointing of Jesus.**

Mary's generosity of attention is also shown through her careful wiping of Jesus' feet. There's nothing half-hearted about her actions. She's very much physically and mentally present – which in itself is a generous present for Jesus. **Why is our attentiveness such a significant part of how we love other people? Who takes you seriously? Who often asks about you, more than they talk about themselves? Who really knows you, and how do you know they really know you? Is attentiveness an area in which you particularly need to grow? If so, is there one thing you could start doing or stop doing, this week, to help you give someone your generous attention?**

Our attentiveness enables us to really see how we can love and care for others. **Do you think your church is attentive? Do people in the wider community feel as if they receive the generous attention of the church? How do you know?**

Horizontal lines for writing.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read 1 Samuel 24:1–10. **How does David prove himself generous as he pays attention to his conscience and to Saul’s God-given role? Share about a time when God helped you to slow down enough to pay attention to someone else in a crisis situation, and choose good over evil?**

Read 1 Kings 17:3–5. **How did God give Elijah His generous attention? Considering the context of these verses, why did Elijah particularly need it at this time? Who needs you to go at their pace, giving attention to their needs in their current reality?**

Read Job 2:11–13. **Why did Job’s friends travel to come and see him? What did they do to show Job they loved him? Did they have any answers for him? What can you learn from Job’s friends, about generously paying attention to loved ones facing tragedy, trauma, or grief?**

Jesus says, ‘What is the price of five sparrows – two copper coins? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges Me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God’s angels.’ (Luke 12:6–8) **How do you know God values you and pays attention to you? How does God promise to reward you if you set your attention on Him?**

LAST WORD

The psalmist says, ‘O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.’ (Psalm 139:1–3) The attention we lavish on others mirrors the attention God lavishes on us. Being generous with our attention allows us to understand someone’s needs and see where they need encouragement. May you know that giving someone your full and patient attention is a most powerful way of loving them well and living generously.

Horizontal lines for writing.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Read the account of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1:39–56. What is God showing you about the way friends pay attention to one another, and to God? How is God calling you to be more generous with your attention in this season?

Write: Send someone a handwritten note of encouragement. Use the opportunity to practise being generous with your attention, letting the person know they're seen and valued.

Pray: Think through your schedule this week. Who will you likely be spending time with? Pray that you wouldn't be with these people absentmindedly, but that God would help you to be an active participant in the conversation – present and engaged. Ask God to give you life-giving words of wisdom that show your attentiveness to the people you're with.