# A CALL TO MISSION: EXTRAVAGANT SACRIFICE

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**Category:** Controversies

Why would anyone translate the Bible when there is so much starvation and obvious suffering in the world around us? Isn't Bible translation a bit of a luxury in this climate?

Over the next few days I'm going to try to give a few different answers to this question. For this first answer, I'd like to turn to a well-known passage in Mark 14

> *Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head.*
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> *Some of those at the table were indignant. â€œWhy waste such expensive perfume?â€ they asked. â€œIt could have been sold for a yearâ€™s wages and the money given to the poor!â€ So they scolded her harshly.*
>
> *But Jesus replied, â€œLeave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this womanâ€™s deed will be remembered and discussed.â€*

Mary could have sold the perfume and given the money to feed the poor; it would have been a good thing to do,Â  the obvious thing to do, but she didn't do it. Instead she apparently wasted a costly jar of perfume washing Jesus' feet. An extravagant gesture and a significant sacrifice, all to honour her Lord. And Jesus praised her for it.

Jesus expects his followers to step in and help those who are in need and suffering. This sort of caring intervention is supposed to be one of the characteristics of his followers (Matthew 25:31-46). But there is also a place for extravagant gestures like Mary's which are aimed at doing little more than honouring Jesus name.

Our society is obsessed by money; numbers, measurable impact, the bottom line. We see a need to feed the poor, to get involved and make a difference. Gestures of personal sacrifice to lift up the name of Jesus around the world, don't fit the *zeitgeist*. Bible translation and other forms of frontier mission; announcing the name of Jesus in languages and cultures where people know little about Him are costly in terms of time, money and personal sacrifice. If the Gospel is going to reach to the ends of the earth, to the places where people have never heard the name of Jesus, it will call for extravagant and reckless sacrifice. It will call for gestures like Mary's when she washed Jesus feet.

Are we up for it?

*By the way, I would actually argue that Bible translation and language development are a necessary*

*component of any programme to address long-term development needs in a country anyway. It isn't just enough to feed the poor, we have to address the underlying causes of poverty - I unpack this them in this video.*