

INTRODUCTION

Most people tend to be a Mary or a Martha. Christian women know what I mean when I say that. Generally speaking, Marys tend to be quieter and more contemplative and Marthas are highly driven, organized and outspoken. Although this is a short passage, recorded only by Luke, it is rich in application to our lives. Let’s read about this incident in Luke 10:38-42:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village [Mary and Martha lived in Bethany; that’s why we have a Bethany Suite with two rooms called the Mary room and the Martha room] where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.”

Seventeenth Century Dutch artist Jan Vermeer painted this scene to capture the essence of this event. Mary is seen at the feet of Jesus while Martha is leaning over to complain. Vermeer has Jesus leaning back as if he really doesn’t want to get embroiled in the sibling controversy. As I think about the scene, there’s something I’d really like to know: What happened next? I want Paul Harvey to give me “the rest of the story.” Did Mary jump up and run into the kitchen to help Martha? Did Martha plop down on the floor beside Mary, saying, “Lord, you are so right. Mary, you made the right choice.” Or did Martha’s eyes flash with indignation as she turned on her heels to head back into the kitchen? I’d sure like to know.



Christ in the House of Mary and Martha
Jan Vermeer 1655 oil on canvas National Gallery, Scotland

My wife (who claims to be a Martha) says Martha probably returned to the kitchen and quickly changed the feast into a snack and then joined Mary sitting in front of Jesus ... and after the meal, she sat down and put her feet up while Jesus and Mary did the dishes! We don’t know what happened next and that’s the point. This story is left open-ended so we can apply it to our lives. There are four interesting dynamics in this story we must consider:

I. MARTHA’S DILIGENCE

Martha was one of those people who didn’t work to live; she lived to work. It makes me wonder if her full name wasn’t Martha Stewart. She believed any job worth doing was worth doing well.

She invited Jesus into her home and then turned her attention to preparing the finest feast possible. Like in our story, Marthas tend to get upset if you ask them to leave the kitchen and sit down at Jesus’ feet. I love Ray Stedman’s little poem about the emotions of strong women like Martha:

There’s a gladness to her gladness when she’s glad;
There’s a sadness to sadness when she’s sad;
But the gladness of her gladness and the sadness of her sadness is nothing like her
madness when she’s mad!

Marthas, I love you and Jesus loves you, and today I’m going to affirm you and challenge you. Let’s learn a couple of lessons from Martha.

1. Jesus wants to be invited into your home and heart

Martha had the wonderful gift of hospitality. Have you invited Jesus to be the honored guest in your home? Throughout the gospel accounts Jesus accepted dinner invitations into peoples’ homes. He ate in Matthew’s home, Simon the Pharisee’s home, Zacchaeus’ home, and He’ll accept the invitation to join you and your family as well. Here’s how you can invite Him: Make Him the honored guest at mealtime by praying. Recognize His presence with a family devotional time. Put Christian art on your walls and listen to Christian music. Consider Him to be the unseen listener to every conversation. Remember He is watching over your shoulder when you are on the Internet or watching television. If your “religion” starts when you drive on this parking lot and ends when you drive off and never enters your home and family life, well, then, that’s what it is—a religion only.

Jesus also wants to live in your heart. He wants to make your heart His home, His dwelling place. In Revelation 3:20 He offers this promise: “Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I’ll come right in and sit down to supper with you.” (Revelation 3:20, *The Message*) The door is the door of your heart. Jesus is standing there seeking to be admitted into your life. There isn’t a doorknob on His side of the door so He’ll never force His way into your heart. The doorknob is on your side. Will you open the door to your life? If you do, Jesus promised He would come in and sit down and fellowship with you.

2. It’s great to serve Jesus “in the kitchen”

Martha showed her love for the Lord by working in the kitchen to prepare the meal. It’s where she felt most at home. Can’t you see her slaving away in there, preparing the flour to make the bread, putting more wood on the fire, cooking the meat and making a salad? She is almost a blur, but she’s happy up to her elbows in flour. The reason she was slaving away in the kitchen was the same reason Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet, because she loved Jesus. Are you a Martha? Mary Anderson wrote:

Southern women are great Marthas and proud of it! Those who have refined southern hospitality never sit, they hover. Many times the hostess will continue to cook all through the meal. When does the hostess eat? This is one of the South’s greatest mysteries. The

hostess keeps working, huffing around the table, a trickle of perspiration running past the string of pearls on her neck. She misses all dinner conversation, all sharing of feelings and information, and gives herself totally to serving. Those who sympathize with Martha ask, “If Martha had sat down with Mary and listened to the Master, then who would have made and served the food? Who in the world would have done the work?”

Martha represents people who feel most comfortable expressing their love to Jesus by doing acts of service. You are probably a Martha if you are always looking around for something to *do* for Jesus. Marthas tend to be task oriented and they usually make lists of things they need to do each day. Marthas are hard workers and they believe “a place for everything and everything in its place.” If you are a Martha, good for you! The church would never accomplish much if you didn’t deliver meals or work with preschoolers or labor in a hundred different ways. But Mary was different. Let’s notice

II. MARY’S DEVOTION

While Martha sweated in the kitchen, Mary was perfectly satisfied to simply sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to Him. Mary wasn’t task oriented, she was more relationship oriented. Some of you identify more closely with Mary. Ladies, if you are a Mary, chances are you don’t kill yourself trying to imitate Martha Stewart—you have Domino’s Pizza programmed in your speed dial on your telephone!

At the feet of Jesus is a good place because at the feet of Jesus you can:

1. Love Him (worship)

Kneeling at someone’s feet was a sign of subservience and honor, like a formal bow or curtsy in front of royalty. And you must humble yourself before the Lord in order to truly worship Him. Her position before Jesus was her way of saying she adored Him and honored Him. All throughout the Bible, when a person encountered the greatness and glory of God, they fell and kneeled before Him. When doubting Thomas finally confronted the Resurrected Lord he could only fall at His feet and say, “My Lord and My God!” When the Apostle John saw the vision of Jesus in Revelation 1, he “fell at His feet like a dead man.” Revelation 4 tells us all the saints of all the ages will fall before the Lamb on the throne, and lay our crowns at his feet and praise Him.

In a sense we are all at the feet of Jesus this morning. That’s what worship is. Have you expressed your love to Him by just basking in His presence and allowing your heart to overflow with praise? If you are a Mary, you *love* to come before the Lord and sing songs of praise to Him. Also, at His feet you can

2. Listen to Him (discipleship)

The term “at the feet” was used to mean a disciple. Paul later said he was trained “at the feet of Gamaliel.” Whenever you sit down alone (or in a crowd like this) and open your Bible and ask

God to speak to you, you are sitting at His feet. You have paused to say, “Jesus, I’m listening. Speak to me.”

Some people think what we are doing is a waste of time. Look at you; you aren’t *doing* anything. You are just sitting there. If you are a Mary, that’s fine. You love this. You are sitting there concentrating on Jesus, soaking it in and you are satisfied. When the service ends, you’re disappointed. You don’t want me to stop preaching. If this service went on for thirty extra minutes you’d be pleased because you’d think it was a glorious experience of sitting at the feet of Jesus and you would be energized and refreshed.

For Marthas, worship is something they have to do between acts of service. Marthas enjoy worship—but don’t make it too long because they’ve got to get out and go to work again. How many of you remember the offering envelopes we used to have that allowed you to “check” off the things you were doing each Sunday? Marthas loved those because there was a list: Present in Sunday School, Giving, Contacts, Attending worship. Check it off on the list. Marthas may get a little impatient with worship services because they are thinking about how they ought to be *doing* something rather than simply sitting here. Come on, be honest. How many of you have been sitting there making mental lists of what you need to be doing this afternoon or tomorrow? Chances are you’re a Martha. Because Mary and Martha were so different it led to:

III. MARY AND MARTHA’S DISPUTE

This is the way I imagined it happened: After Martha and Mary properly welcomed Jesus, Martha entered the kitchen to prepare the meal. She expected Mary to join her but after a few minutes, still no Mary. I can hear her intentionally banging the pots and pans together to remind Mary what she was doing. I can even see Martha coming to the door and behind Jesus’ back motioning to Mary to get her lazy self off the floor and come in the kitchen right now! But Mary just smiles, looking up at Jesus. Finally, Martha’s anger reaches the boiling point and her temper explodes. She rushes into the room to complain about this great injustice. She doesn’t even address Mary; she addresses Jesus. She asks: “Don’t you care?” *Time out*. I suppose God has heard that prayer a million times. “God, don’t you even care?” Let me translate what it really means. It’s not a real question it’s a complaint. “God, I don’t think you *care* or else you would *do* something about my bad situation.” By the way, God *does* care. If you want to know how much, order the tape from last week. Time in:

Marys and Marthas have always been at odds with each other. They were like two opposite extremes on the temperament scale. Mary was quiet; Martha was loud. Mary was a worshiper and Martha was a worker. Now before you decide if you are a Mary or a Martha, you need to know none of us are 100% Martha or 100% Mary. Both those desires and tendencies war within our personalities.

My Martha Side

My house is a tyrant, demanding each hour.

Imperiously ordering: “Sweep, mop and scour!

Do the dishes, the laundry, then iron, dust and cook!

And there’s mending to do if you’ll just take a look.

Now, Martha, get busy and don't waste a minute:
Dirt is a sin, and you're wallowing in it!”

My Mary Side

My housework can wait ...There's a friend I must see,
Who's lonely and frightened, she's looking for me.
Then I'll tidy up quickly and hurry to hear
That fine missionary we support every year.
Home again, “Father, thank You, please help me to care
For the hungry and homeless who live in despair.”

Mary—Martha—Me

Martha nags me to keep my house spotless each day;
And Mary says gently, “I need time to pray.”
Martha's concerned with “what neighbors might think
If they dropped in and found dishes stacked in the sink.”
While Mary chides, “Selfish! I think it's a crime
If you don't share with others your talents and time.”
“Oh God, in compassion, please order my days
So that Mary might serve You and Martha may praise!”

(From *Things Happen When Women Care* by Emilie Barnes)

Let's learn two important principles from this dispute:

1. Your temperament influences how you show your love for Jesus

Mary didn't love Jesus more than Martha did—she just showed it differently. Each of us is a unique creation of God. You have a genetic map unlike any other person on the planet. Just as your fingerprints don't match anyone else's on this planet, your temperament doesn't match anyone else's either. There are books out there that say there are four or six different temperaments. That's wrong. There may be some general categories (like a Martha or a Mary) but there are at least 6 billion temperament types on this planet, because there are 6 billion people living here. Because you are a unique creation, don't spend your life trying to be like someone else. You should seek to understand your unique temperament and love and serve God according to how God made you.

2. Don't criticize another believer because they don't show their love like you do

Martha's mistake was not working in the kitchen. Her mistake was rushing out and demanding Mary show her love in the same way. There's a lesson for us here. Not everybody is going to serve the Lord or worship the Lord the same way I do. I know it's hard to believe, but sometimes I receive criticism about the way some people worship in our church. Someone recently complained who thinks it's a shame the way I walk around and wave my arms when I preach, that I get too excited. I'm sorry folks; that's my style. I know Mike has had people tell him they

don't like the way he smiles and closes his eyes and sings to Jesus. That's okay Mike, you do it anyway—that's you.

If you are worshiping or serving the Lord don't complain because someone else is doing it differently than you—who made you the standard? For instance, when we sing songs of praise, I don't look around to see if everyone is worshiping the way I am. Instead, I'm trying to focus and concentrate on sitting at the feet of Jesus and just loving Him. You'll have a better worship experience if you aren't looking around to see what everyone else is doing. For sure, don't criticize those who don't worship or serve exactly like you, that was Martha's mistake and it's a mistake repeated today. Charles Hummell, wrote in *Freedom from the Tyranny of the Urgent*:

Tension and frustration mount when we are performing the wrong tasks or trying to cram too many of the right activities into a given period. A critical spirit develops and we begin to judge and condemn others for what they do or don't do. Anytime you feel a wave of criticism gaining momentum in your spirit remember it's completely out of line as far as God is concerned.

IV. THE MASTER'S DECLARATION

After Martha's complaint, she waited for Jesus to render His decision about her charge. She hoped Jesus would say, “Mary, Martha's right—get in the kitchen and help your sister.” But instead He addressed her by saying, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.” Here's the first lesson Jesus is teaching us:

1. Work that is not based on worship produces:

a. Anxiety. Worry is to your mind what fatigue is to your body. Martha represents those who is always so busy serving the Lord, they really never take the time to truly do what God said, “Be still and know that I am God.” These Christian workaholics are constantly going, going, going, working, working, working. But if they don't stop to sit at the feet of Jesus to worship and receive power, they are soon discouraged, depleted and drained. Next, she displayed

b. Anger. Martha allowed her frustration to build until she developed a critical spirit. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get angry when you get tired? Finally, she displayed

c. Agitation. The word “upset” literally means she was visibly shaking. She was stressed out because she was trying to substitute work for worship.

There are thousands of tired, irritated Marthas in our churches today. They are living on the edge of burnout. When I was a kid I remember seeing a man spin dinner plates on top of flexible poles on television. He started one plate spinning and then he went to another pole and spun a plate on it. He repeated this until he had 20 or 30 plates spinning at one time. He dashed from one pole to another to give a turn. When one plate starting to wobble, he rushed and spun the pole just in time. By running madly from pole to pole he kept thirty plates spinning at the same time. Does that sound like your life? Jesus told Martha she was worried and agitated about *many* things. Is your life so complicated and busy you spend all your time running from task to task? If you do,

don't be surprised if you are living with a high level of stress and anxiety. That was Jesus' word to Martha. But there is something else we need to note also. On the other hand,

2. Worship that doesn't produce work is:

a. Shallow. The opposite danger is found in spending all your time at Jesus' feet and never getting up to work for the Lord. That is shallow, superficial worship. Some people just want to attend a worship service that will make them feel good. They are only interested in having their emotions stirred. Remember, your emotions are the shallowest part of your personality. Some people go to church to have some kind of spiritual spasm to make the hair on the backs of their necks stand up. If that happens, they've had a good worship experience and they're satisfied until the next Sunday. They leave church and never work for Jesus. That kind of worship is also

b. Self-serving. If all you ever do is praise the Lord, but you never get your hands dirty working for Jesus in the kitchen, you are worshiping for the wrong reason. That kind of worship is focused on meeting *your* needs instead of pleasing the Lord. Have you ever heard someone say, “That worship service just didn't do anything for me?” That's the problem right there. If you think the purpose of worship is to do something for you, you've got it backwards. Worship is to glorify the Lord and to motivate us to do something for the Lord! So here's the final and ultimate lesson Jesus has for us today:

3. There is only one thing you really need

A few years ago there was a movie entitled “City Slickers.” The plot of the film revolves around three city men who decide to spend a vacation together on a cattle drive. A tough old cowboy named Curly leads the cattle drive. One day Curly has a conversation with Mitch, the character played by Billy Crystal. “You city folk. You worry a lot. You spend fifty weeks getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it.” He pauses a moment and then says, “You know what the secret to life is?”

“No, what?” says Mitch.

“One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don't mean nothing.”

As Curly rides off, Mitch yells, “That's great, but what's the one thing?” Curly turns and says, “That's what you've got to figure out.”

Curly was right. That's exactly what Jesus was telling Martha. It's exactly what He's trying to tell us today. Only One Thing in life really matters. If you can find that One Thing and focus on it; nothing else really matters. What is that One Thing? According to Jesus the One Thing is to:

TO SEEK AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS (1) HEART—WORSHIP THAT PRODUCES (2) HARD WORK

Knowing Jesus intimately is the One Thing. When it becomes your main goal in life, you will be busy serving God. I love the passage from Philippians stating clearly what this One Thing is:

“Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so

that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him ... I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally and experience the power of his resurrection.” (Philippians 3:8,10 *The Message*)

Look again at the last words in Luke 10. Jesus said this One Thing is something you must *choose*. It’s not going to be forced on you. And Jesus said, “It will not be taken from her.”

Think about all the valuable things in your life: your home, your family, your job, your church work, your hobby, etc. All those things are only temporary; they will be taken from you one day. But the *only* permanent thing in this life is a personal relationship with Jesus. No matter how old you become, you’ll still have your relationship with Christ.

I visited with one of our precious elderly ladies who is in an extended care facility several weeks ago. She told me about all the areas of service she used to fill here at Green Acres. She was one of the greatest workers the church has ever had. She talked about how much she missed being able to serve the Lord. But with a tear in her eye she said, “But you know, Pastor, the one thing I still have is my precious Lord. He’s here with me and we talk almost constantly.” Here was a woman who although she was sitting in a wheel chair, she was sitting at the feet of Jesus—nobody can take that from her!

Even death can’t take it away. My heart grieves with yours as we think about those thousands of people who died tragically in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. I told you last week about my friend who knew one of the flight attendants on the jet that hit the Pentagon. This flight attendant was a glorious Christian. In the email, my friend said, “She was simply a brave woman doing her job, but because she loved Jesus, I know she went straight from a burning jet into the arms of her loving Savior.” When it happened, Jesus didn’t have to ask “Who are you?” Because she had spent much of her life at the feet of Jesus. A relationship with Jesus is the only thing you can have in this life even death cannot take away. Do you have that One Thing?

Did Mary and Martha learn their lessons? I believe they did. In John 12, six days before Jesus was crucified, He was in the Martha’s home again. Her brother Lazarus who had just been raised from the dead was present as well. Martha was preparing and serving the meal. Where was Mary? At the feet of Jesus again. Did Martha complain? Nope. She was happy to be doing what she was doing, and she was happy for Mary to do her thing. Did Mary just sit and listen? No, she worked. She took a container of expensive perfume and lovingly cleaned Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair. There was a complaint however—Judas Iscariot complained about the waste of money. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone, she has done a good work.” He explained she was actually anointing His body for burial. Only a week before the crucifixion, she was the only one who really seemed to understand Jesus really was going to die. That’s because she spent time at His feet and listened to Him.

Are you a worker like Martha, or a worshiper like Mary? Based upon what Jesus said, there is an important priority here. Worship must precede work. You must first sit at the feet of Jesus (like Mary) before you are ready to get up and work in the kitchen (like Martha). Then it becomes a beautiful cycle. Worship that leads to work, which leads to worship, which leads to work.

Thank God for the Martha types! But you are going to have to be sure to stop working sometimes to sit at His feet. And don't get uptight because some Mary isn't doing it the way you are doing it. You Marys keeping on worshipping—but don't forget to get up and go to work for Him as well.

OUTLINE

I. MARTHA’S DILIGENCE

1. Jesus wants to be invited into your home and heart

“Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I’ll come right in and sit down to supper with you.” *Revelation 3:20 The Message*

2. It’s great to serve Jesus “in the kitchen”

II. MARY’S DEVOTION

1. Love Him (worship)
2. Listen to Him (discipleship)

III. MARY AND MARTHA’S DISPUTE

1. Your temperament influences how you show your love for Jesus
2. Don’t criticize another Believer because they don’t show their love like you do

IV. THE MASTER’S DECLARATION

1. Work that is not based on worship produces:
 - a. Anxiety
 - b. Anger
 - c. Agitation
2. Worship that doesn’t produce work is:
 - a. Shallow
 - b. Self-serving
3. There is only one thing you really need:

TO SEEK AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

1. Heart-worship that produces
2. Hard work

“Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I’ve dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him ... I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally and experience the power of his resurrection.” *Philippians 3:8, 10 The Message*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes