

Evaluating Priorities

Setting Limits

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

³⁸ As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

⁴¹ But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! ⁴² There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." (NLT)

☞ **Pray for God's guidance as you study**

1. Both Mary and Martha loved Jesus. How were Mary's actions a form of "serving" Jesus?

2. If you were Martha, how would you have responded to Jesus' words?
 - a) flown off the handle
 - b) thought to myself, "He doesn't have to live with my sister"
 - c) left the room and pouted
 - d) accepted the correction, sat down with Mary and forgot about supper

3. From this story, how would you describe the different personalities of Mary and Martha?

4. What are their strengths and weaknesses?

5. What was Jesus saying to Martha?
 - a) she should be more like Mary
 - b) she had her priorities messed up
 - c) people are more important than housework
 - d) “sitting at Jesus’ feet” is more important than anything else

6. In each of the following, which quality is more true of you?
 - a) task or relational oriented
 - b) work or quality-of-life oriented
 - c) practical or ideal oriented
 - d) uptight or laid-back
 - e) physically or spiritually oriented

7. If Jesus dropped in on you, what might He point out that distracts you from the really important things in life, like spending time with Him?

8. Regarding giving to others, how often do you experience each of the following motivations - seldom, sometimes or frequently?
 - a) to feel in control
 - b) to feel needed
 - c) to receive in return
 - d) to get people to like me
 - e) out of obligation

Wrap-up: In light of your answers to the last question, what course of action do you need to take?

- a) admit my need to change
- b) open my life more to God’s love
- c) keep in touch with my motivations
- d) set limits on what I do for others
- e) keep doing what I’m doing

Prayer: For one another

Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Notes for Verses 38-42

Mary and Martha both loved Jesus. On this occasion they were both serving him. But Martha thought Mary's style of serving was inferior to hers. She didn't realize that in her desire to serve, she was actually neglecting her guest. Are you so busy doing things *for* Jesus that you're not spending any time *with* him? Don't let your service become self-serving.

Notes for Verses 41,42

Jesus did not blame Martha for being concerned about household chores. He was only asking her to set priorities. It is possible for service to Christ to degenerate into mere busywork that is no longer full of devotion to God.

Martha's Profile

Many older brothers and sisters have an irritating tendency to take charge, a habit developed while growing up. We can easily see this pattern in Martha, the older sister of Mary and Lazarus. She was used to being in control.

The fact that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus are remembered for their hospitality takes on added significance when we note that hospitality was a social requirement in their culture. It was considered shameful to turn anyone away from your door. Apparently Martha's family met this requirement very well.

Martha worried about details. She wished to please, to serve, to do the right thing -- but she often succeeded in making everyone around her uncomfortable. Perhaps as the oldest she feared shame if her home did not measure up to expectations. She tried to do everything she could to make sure that wouldn't happen. As a result, she found it hard to relax and enjoy her guests, and even harder to accept Mary's lack of cooperation in all the preparations. Martha's frustration was so intense that she finally asked Jesus to settle the matter. He gently corrected her attitude and showed her that her priorities, though good, were not the best. The personal attention she gave her guests should be more important than the comforts she tried to provide for them.

Later, following her brother Lazarus's death, Martha could hardly help being herself. When she heard Jesus was finally coming, she rushed out to meet him and expressed her inner conflict of disappointment and hope. Jesus pointed out that her hope was too limited. He was not only Lord beyond death, he was Lord over death -- the resurrection and the life! Moments later, Martha again spoke without thinking, pointing out that four-day-old corpses are well on their way to decomposition. Her awareness of details sometimes kept her from seeing the whole picture, but Jesus was consistently patient with her.

In our last picture of Martha, she is once again serving a meal to Jesus and his disciples. She has not stopped serving. But the Bible records her silence this time. She has begun to learn what her younger sister already knew -- that worship begins with silence and listening.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Known as a hospitable homemaker
- Believed in Jesus with growing faith
- Had a strong desire to do everything exactly right

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Expected others to agree with her priorities
- Was overly concerned with details
- Tended to feel sorry for herself when her efforts were not recognized
- Limited Jesus' power to this life

Lessons from her life:

- Getting caught up in details can make us forget the main reasons for our actions
- There is a proper time to listen to Jesus and a proper time to work for him