

Jesus Teaches

Be a woman who is focused on learning

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In this and the following chapter we will be looking at two sisters, Mary and Martha. They lived in Bethany with their brother Lazarus. We will focus first on Martha as her story appears in Luke 10:38-42.

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

We see right away that Martha is a good hostess. She welcomes Jesus into her home. Her sister Mary sits and listens to the Lord, but Martha goes about doing all the things hostesses do—preparing food, setting the table, getting everyone something to drink—every woman understands what that involves. The fact that Martha is making all these preparations is not where the problem lies. The key is that she allows herself to be distracted by the preparations and then she becomes upset with Mary *and* Jesus.

We can just imagine her train of thought: "I'm doing all this work. Why doesn't Mary help me? She's just sitting there being lazy. She should help me. Doesn't Jesus see that she should help me? Why doesn't Jesus tell her to help me? Doesn't Jesus care that I have to do all the work?"

Martha could listen to Jesus as she continues to work, but she is so distracted and bothered by her thinking that she cannot really hear what He is saying. Her thoughts finally boil over to action, and Martha then takes a bold and prideful stance with Jesus. "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."

This statement shows that Martha does not really understand Jesus or know Who He is. For if she really knew Him and His character she couldn't have questioned Him so arrogantly. Jesus' response is so gracious. He gently and patiently teaches Martha, saying to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things, but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her."

What is the "one thing" that Jesus says is necessary and that Mary has chosen? It is to keep our focus and attention on the Lord Jesus, to listen to His Word and learn from Him, realizing that it is He Who gives eternal life.

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple. Psalm 27:4

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life,
which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.
John 6:27

Now Jesus is not saying that Martha should have neglected her duties as a hostess. In fact He stayed at her home whenever He was in Bethany and so would have depended upon her service. She had a servant's heart and was gifted in serving others, but she allowed the details of service to distract and bother her so that she could not focus on what Jesus was saying and learn from Him.

Most women, especially those with a bent toward the blessing of service, are great multi-taskers. We can wash the dishes while answering the phone and in the meantime make a note on our grocery list and take the cookies out of the oven while keeping an eye on the kids in the yard. We can have three calls on hold and talk to our co-worker about some project detail, all while filing papers, addressing a few envelopes and typing an e-mail to remind our husband to pick up Sally after school. We can do a good job on all these things as long as we don't become distracted.

So it is with our spiritual lives as well. It is possible for us to do the work of service and still be focused on the Lord. We still need to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to His word as Mary did, not in an actual sense, but in our minds and hearts. We just need to make sure we don't allow distractions and worry to blur our minds and keep us from learning from Jesus.

Does Martha learn the lesson that Jesus wants to teach her? Does she choose the one thing that is necessary? Does she stay focused on Him, seeking Him for eternal life? Let's look at John 11:1-44, especially beginning at verse 17:

So when Jesus came, He found that he [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, " Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, " I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, " I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."
John 11:17-27

Note that “many of the Jews had come to Mary and Martha...” Martha, even though she was the one being consoled because of her brother’s death, could have become caught up in serving all these guests; that was her nature. But when she heard Jesus was coming she immediately went to see Him. Her conversation with Jesus at this point is very revealing especially when Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” By her bold statement we can see that Martha had indeed learned who Jesus was and believed in Him. She realized He was source of eternal life.

This scene at Lazarus’ tomb ends with the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead; we will look at that in more detail when we look at Mary in the next chapter.

The next time we see Martha is in John 12:1-2:

Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.

Jesus comes to Bethany and has supper there...and Martha was serving. That’s what she did best. Martha continued to serve and I think she also continued to learn from Jesus, for she was a devoted follower and friend. Martha’s gift of service ministered to Jesus and, as we will see in the next chapter, also freed up Mary to do what *she* needed to do.

How can we be women who are focused on learning from Jesus? The life of Martha reveals several important points that can help us:

- We are not to be distracted, worried, or bothered by the details of service. One of the best ways to avoid falling into worry or anxiety is to be thankful. Look at Colossians 3:15-17: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. I believe that if Martha had been giving thanks instead of thinking of complaints she would not have asked Jesus, “Do you not care . . .?”
- We are to keep seeking Jesus and learning from Him. We can do this by regularly reading the Word of God, by hearing sound teachings from reputable men and women of God, by praying and noting answers to prayer, and by listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- When it is time to talk to Jesus we must go to Him immediately. For example, we should not put off spending time with Jesus when we need to give praise to Him, confess sin, pray about concerns, and listen for answers. Often our “last resort” is to go to Jesus when that should be our first response.

- Jesus will ask us what we have learned. He will give us opportunities to proclaim our belief in Him, so we should be prepared to boldly declare our faith as Martha did.
- We are to continue to serve, freeing others to do what they need to do.

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Questions for you to ponder:

1. In Psalm 27:4 we read

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple.

What does it mean “To behold the beauty of the LORD?”

2. Read 2 Timothy 3. Verse seven mentions weak women who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” How can you “learn” and yet never come to the knowledge of the truth? Why is this “learning” unproductive and dangerous? How can we avoid this type of learning?

3. What can we do to keep ourselves from becoming distracted and bothered by details as we serve our family and others?

4. Is there a situation in your life in which you are telling Jesus as Martha did, “Lord, do you not care . . .?” Write down your concern, repent of pride, and pray for the Lord to give you insight into the lessons He wants you to learn from this situation.