

Obstacles on the Journey

Lesson 3—The Mary & Martha Syndrome

I always cringe when the speaker begins to read from Luk3 10:38-42. I overly identify with Martha on so many levels I pretty much turn off whatever is coming next. I entreat you not to do that today.

Jesus has a strong word to say to us in this passage. I see it as a HUGE obstacle we have placed on ourselves. But really this isn't just a message to women. Perhaps what is happening in this passage happens more readily with women than men, but as with all Jesus' words, we must apply the principle to whatever is going on in our own lives. I don't believe men get a pass on this, just because this story is about two women. It's really a story about discipleship and therefore good for us to look at because what is discipleship but walking in obedience with Christ.

Luke 10:38-42 AMP—Now while they were on their way, Jesus entered a village [called Bethany], and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who seated herself at the Lord's feet and was continually listening to His teaching. ⁴⁰But Martha was very busy and distracted with all of her serving responsibilities; and she approached Him and said, "Lord, is it of no concern to You that my sister has left me to do the serving alone? Tell her to help me and do her part." ⁴¹But the Lord replied to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered and anxious about so many things; ⁴²but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part [that which is to her advantage], which will not be taken away from her."

I read this passage in several versions just to see if they all mention what immediately jumped out to me. There are two things here that I never saw before. "A woman named Martha welcomed them (meaning Jesus and ALL 12 OF HIS DISCIPLES) into HER home."

Did you get them? I had always thought the home Martha and Mary lived in was Lazarus' home. Matthew Henry's commentary says perhaps Martha was a widow and this home was her's. As such she felt the obligation to provide the best care for her guests.

But, these were not just any guest now were they? And there weren't just a few of them. Who knows how many were traveling with Jesus,

but at the very least, it included his disciples, all hungry, thirsty, tired men she hadn't been prepared to feed!

OK now I really am identifying with Martha! What if a well-known preacher you admire showed up at your door. Maybe there was a convention in town and he couldn't get a room. But it was not only him, but his whole team!

Which would you do? Sit in the living room and talk or go immediately to see what in the world you can serve them for supper! Because supper is coming and they look tired and hungry. One bag of rice ain't gonna feed all these hungry men.

Plus, in that day and age, she would have to get her servants to go and kill the animal she would cook, gather things from the garden or wherever she kept them. There was no running to the grocery store or calling out for pizza.

She was in panic mode. When else might such an important person come into her home? She wanted to make a good impression and for her, the only way to do that was to serve him a meal, fit for the King He is.

It is also good to note that serving was Martha's gift, a gift given by God. Not all enjoy serving. Martha did, but she also wanted her service to be an excellent gift for her Lord. The more Martha saw her little sister, sitting at Jesus' feet and essentially DOING nothing, the more her blood began to boil.

Note this, Martha's gift of serving meant in her mind if she was not DOING something she was of no value to anyone. She could not conceive of just BEING at Jesus feet. That was a totally foreign concept to her. As the one in charge of a house and possibly an estate, she was as just tells her anxious and worried about many things.

So the inevitable confrontation takes place. And it probably took a while for it to get to the point where Martha confronts Mary's lolly-gagging with the men. By the way, it would not have been appropriate for Jesus to be teaching the women in the first place or for a woman to be so obviously front and center listening to Jesus.

Here's my version of what she said, "OK Jesus, do you expect me to do all the work to feed all these people all by myself? Tell that useless, lazy sister of mine to get off her duff and help me."

I get Martha, I really do! Many times for me it's not so much about cooking a meal because I usually choose something I can cook in the crockpot ahead of time if the whole family is coming. Sometimes it's doing the work I love doing and I am like, "OK God. I'm only one person. I can't do all of this plus go to grocery store, do the laundry and make sure the dishes are done and kitchen clean and trash taken out."

In those times I make a list and shove it in my son and husband's hands and say, "I've got to shoot a video. Get this done before tomorrow." They are doers, so I know they will get it done, but sometimes I just wish they'd do it before I have to come to the end of my rope and ask for help! I think that's where Martha was. Tired, overwhelmed, scared she wouldn't get it all done on time and therefore she reached out in a bit of a huff.

Jesus' answer to Martha is one I get from Him often. "Chill, Woman!" Well, Jesus said it nicer than that. I can imagine Him looking deep into her eyes and saying, "Martha." And when she didn't look up or respond, He leaned in closer, maybe even stood and took her hands and then said her name again, this time softer, "Martha. I can see you are concerned, worried and oh so anxious not just about the preparation for the meal, but oh so many things."

This is evident I'm sure by her hustling and bustling around and throwing mean glances at Mary as she comes and goes. She is in a tizzy. Jesus stops in the midst of her anxiety to comfort her with truth.

"Only one thing is needed," He tells her again softly. There is rebuke here, but it is done in love. It is more like a course correction. What is the one thing that is needed? He tells her "Mary has chosen the better" of the two choices so what are the two choices?

The two choices are doing and being. Doing busy work, getting things done, wearying our bodies all in the name of doing good works. Notice: they are GOOD works. Or developing who were are meant to be by listening to Jesus, by being still and present with Him

so we know what we DO next time, is what is important and not just to make sure everything is done perfectly.

I also cannot help but notice that this is another story about food. Martha is concerned about what food they are going to CONSUME for supper. Will there be enough? Will I have plenty of good dishes? Will all the right plates and cups be available?

Where Jesus is saying that He has the only food we need, the spiritual food. In that space with Jesus, there was no physical hunger for Mary. She was receiving the words of life.

Look at Martha. Her busyness was not life-giving for her. It was producing stress, anxiety and worry, all things that lead to the death of our spirits. Martha was choosing something good, but Jesus is telling her there is something better than killing yourself with good deeds. These have a time and place.

This is where some of my main obstacles have come on my healthy living journey. In the past, I have been so busy doing good things, things I know I can do, that I get sucked in my making sure they are all necessary and perfect. That will kill any effort we try quicker than anything.

In this life what we build, must be built on the foundation of Jesus. There are several materials we can use to build on this foundation. We can choose gold, silver, costly stone or wood, hay and stubble. In the final analysis the things we have built that are worthwhile will be revealed through fire! In **1 Cor 3:11-14** it tells us that the fire will test and prove our workmanship. Because my friends, we are the builder.

So what lasts? Gold, silver and costly stones. Where does that come from? It comes from sitting at Jesus feet. It comes from ceasing our works and our strivings and tapping into what He wants for us.

Luke 10:42 TPT—Jesus said, “Martha, my beloved Martha. Why are you upset and troubled, pulled away by all these many distractions? Are they really that important? *Mary has discovered the one thing most important by choosing to sit at my feet. She is undistracted, and I won’t take this privilege from her.”

This story is another FOOD story in the Bible. In most every such story physical food is an analogy for spiritual food.

Most of us have a hard time just spending time in solitude and silence long enough to stop our own whirling mind to hone in to the voice of God. This is the only meal Mary wants in this story. This is the meal Mary craves. This is her ONE THING because it is the meal that will last. Jesus knows His time is short on this earth. He wants to fill up both Mary and Martha with the truth.

To every disciple, not just women, though I am glad Jesus specifically pointed this passage towards women by having the story be about two women. We are the most prone to multi-tasking. I'm happy when I can kill about three birds with one stone: Listen to a podcast, send a text and fix my breakfast. I pat myself on the back when I do that. My husband would only do one of those at a time.

We, maybe even more than men, need that connection that can only come when we've read a passage of Scripture and then spent time cleaning our mind and listening to what God says about that or shows us about that.

One thing I believe Jesus is saying to us about this passage is: "Sit at my feet. Devour my teaching. Gulp the living water. There is no important meal."

The obstacle of busyness will literally cause us to eat ourselves alive. One thing I did when I started this journey in earnest was I got out of every single thing I was doing as a volunteer. God showed me that by doing, doing, doing, I was keeping myself from totally understand who I really was deep down inside. I was afraid I would find someone I didn't like.

I resigned from boards of directors I knew I was only on because I felt privileged they asked me. The causes were good, but they were

not the main things I was called to. As I let go of each one, I was able to grab onto all I needed to go forward on this journey.

For me that included seeing a fitness trainer, a nutritionist, a health and wellness doctor, a chiropractor, an allergist, exercising daily, planning my meals, going to the grocery store for fresh fruits and vegetables, spending time with God, writing and saying yes only to things God clearly showed me I should be doing.

For a doer that is hard. But I believe to us doers that is what Jesus was trying to say. Your gifts are needed. Just understand that first you need Me. Then everything else will fall into place.

John 12:1-3 TPT— Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.³ Then Mary took about a pint^a of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Notice that after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus came back to Bethany for a celebration meal. During this meal, it notes that Martha served Jesus. She did not forgo her gift of serving. It was who she was and how she was gifted. However she did so serving Jesus in His presence, still drinking in His words. Her doing and being had been combined.

Do you notice anything else in this passage? Mary has become a doer. But her doing is done in her own way. What she did was questioned by some at the meal. Why would she waste the expensive perfume on Jesus. It was an act of devotion and a prophetic declaration of his death, burial and resurrection to come. Jesus had not been calling her to just sit at His feet. He has been calling her to act as her heart told her to do. He had crafted whole individuals out of both Mary and Martha.

Doers need to be. Be-ers need to do!

This story is Scripture is not meant to beat down us women who are by nature servants and doers. The opposite is true. Martha had chosen a good thing and Mary the best. Now Martha had learned to choose both the good thing and the best thing. And Mary had realized doing flowed out of her being.

In sharing her gifts in a peaceful way, Martha became the woman God had created her to be. She was looking after herself, not being anxious or worried about everything, but drinking in the words of Jesus, while calmly and competently doing, and not overdoing, what God called her to do.

In beginning to see that actions are necessary to declare how much she loved and wanted to serve Jesus, Mary also became the woman God had created her to be. Not a wallflower who wanted only to be hidden away, she became a bold and creative follower of Christ.

Journal your answer to these questions. Share in the comments on the website or under the video in the Facebook group.

1. In what ways are you Mary in this story?
2. In what ways are you Martha?
3. What things do you know you are doing that are good things, but not the best?
4. What things do you need to say no to?
5. What things do you need to say yes to?
6. Create a new stop-start. I will stop (things I need to say no to) and start (things I need to say yes to).

@2018 by Teresa Shields Parker