

Daily Discipleship

Luke 10:38-42

Stories of Discipleship: *A Distracted Woman's Story*

Focus Question: *How do we lessen distractions in order to hear Jesus?*

word of life

“But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’” Luke 10:41-42 (NRSV)

Read Luke 10:38-42

Mary and Martha are mentioned in the Gospels of Luke and John; this story is the only reference in Luke. In the Gospel of John, we learn more about these sisters from Bethany, particularly at the death of their brother Lazarus. (John 11:1-27)

In John 11:5, we read how Jesus loved this family of siblings: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It is Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus with perfume and wipes them with her hair. (John 11:2) When their brother is ill, it is Mary and Martha who sends a message alerting Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” (John 11:3 NRSV) But Jesus does not depart and rush to see him, but waits two days. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has died.

1. *How do you respond in hearing how Jesus loved this family?*

After the death of Lazarus it is assertive Martha who comes out from the home to greet Jesus while her sister Mary stays home. Martha is forthright as she speaks to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21 NRSV) Yet, it is also Martha who in this same conversation with Jesus proclaims her faith in the resurrection and Jesus, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. . . Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” (John 11:24, 27 NRSV)

Martha returns to the house to tell Mary that Jesus is asking for her. This time Mary leaves the home, finds Jesus, kneels at his feet, weeps and repeats the words of Martha. Jesus is greatly disturbed by Mary’s sorrow and the death of Lazarus. His response is to raise Lazarus from death.

In Luke 10:38-42 Jesus visits the home of Martha. This ownership of property by a woman is worth noting. We find Martha taking charge and preparing the food. No doubt Martha wants to please her guest and gets caught up with the details. She cannot help but notice her sister’s lack of involvement with the preparations. Martha takes it personally. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself. Tell her then to help me.” (Luke 10:40 NRSV) As much as Jesus instructs people to go and do, there are times he advises to sit and learn. Mary understands the sacredness of that day and the opportunity to learn from her teacher.

2. *How would you describe Martha?*
3. *How would you describe Mary?*
4. *Where do you find yourself in the story?*

Jesus refers to “only one thing” in verse 10:41. Some translate that phrase to be “few things are necessary” or “only one”.

5. *What is that “one, only, necessary thing”?*
6. *What is the message for us?*

word *among us*

Martha was in charge of the annual garage sale at the church. The whole town knew it was the best garage sale of the year, and buyers came early in the morning for bargains. On the morning of the garage sale, the volunteers were busy with their final assignments before the doors officially opened for the sale. Martha was making a final review of the back closet in search for hidden items to be included in the sale. Thus she did not realize a guest had wandered into the sale. He was an old man with white hair, a cane, and a twinkle in his eye.

This old man was a storyteller and wove together his adventures as a missionary in Africa, working beside Desmond Tutu. Slowly the volunteers stopped whatever activity and paused to listen to his stories and reflections of his faith. Not Martha. She kept on working. When Martha finally realized the other volunteers had stopped their job assignments and were hanging on every word from this man, she could not help herself. Martha stomped over to the old man and asked him directly, “Do you not care that we are in the middle of a garage sale and you are distracting my volunteers?”

1. *What was so special about this man?*
2. *Was Martha distracted or the only one in the room focused? How so?*

The old man stopped and looked deep into her eyes. He asked her, “By any chance is your name Martha?” With that question, the group, including Martha, began to chuckle. Martha knew she was a true Martha.

3. *How are you like Martha?*
4. *When do you get caught up in being busy and miss the “only one thing”?*
5. *What does it mean to be task-oriented?*
6. *How might being focused on a task be helpful?*
7. *When is it detrimental?*

Jesus saw things clearly. He could see the distractions of Martha were pulling her from Jesus whom she desired to serve. There’s a certain irony with this. Martha’s good nature and kind spirit meant she wanted to extend hospitality to Jesus. But in serving Jesus, Martha missed time with her guest. Martha had good intentions, but her tasks overcame her intentions.

8. *Have you ever volunteered for something but worked so hard you became exhausted and could not enjoy the event? What happened?*
9. *How can you offset your “Martha” tendencies?*

Jesus simplified things for Martha and encouraged her to focus on one thing. His model for this is Mary, the sister who sat, listened, and learned. Mary chose to learn from Jesus. How rare in Jesus’ day for a woman to be given the opportunity to sit and the feet of a rabbi to learn.

10. *What is the “one thing” in your life which currently takes your best energy?*
11. *On what “one thing” does Jesus want us to focus?*

Prayer

Creator of all, focus my attention on you. Help me to chose the one thing of your teachings. Help me clarify when I need to be a “Martha” or a “Mary”. Amen

Dig Deeper

Galatians 6:7-16

last word

Pause to ask what is the good thing to be chosen today.



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