




THE COMMUNITY

Martha, Martha | QUIET TIMES

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Luke 10:38-42

The Situation

Jesus has been invited to the house of Mary and Martha, to visit, eat, and perhaps even lodge with them. As Jesus sat, Mary sat as well, and engaged Him in conversation listening and hanging on His every word. In the meantime, Martha is busy making preparations for their House Guest. It's not long before Martha gets agitated that Mary is not helping, but rather is sitting listening to Jesus. As Martha enlists the Lord's help in the dispute, Jesus lets her know that it is she (Martha) who is in the wrong, and not Mary. Martha had chosen worry and busyness over resting and listening in the presence of Jesus.

Mary and Martha

It's helpful to see that the two women, quite likely, had different personalities. In this passage, we learn that Martha owned the house and not Mary. In John 11, in the healing of Lazarus, Mary is resigned to the death of Lazarus, while Martha wants Jesus to do something. Martha seems to be a competent and busy woman of action. Mary seems more reserved. Thus, it's easier to understand why each gravitated to the place they did in this vignette. In this story, Martha's activity is a liability. In the story of Lazarus, it is her great strength. The important thing to note, for busy and active people, is their need to slow down and pull away to be with Jesus. While this might not be a natural inclination, it is a necessity.

The Cure for Marthanness

What Martha fundamentally needs is a perspective change. She is "worried about many things." The dynamic of worry is that it elevates peripheral things to the highest priority, creating a loss of perspective. It is ironic that worry and busyness can prevent us from taking time with the Lord, and yet it is only time away with God that causes a renewal of perspective. That is why Jesus gives the simple prescription "that only one thing is really needed," and that is to spend time with Him. Worry makes us think that many things are absolute priorities, when really there is only one.

It is not incidental that this story is followed by Jesus' lessons on prayer. These lessons provide the fundamental attitude change needed to keep perspective. One

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What's the Big Idea?

Though a lot of things can distract us and promise to bring us life, only Jesus can really do this. As He is our portion, daily time with Him is a necessity.

What's the Problem?

We are tempted to go to all sorts of sources that are inferior to Jesus when we are seeking energy and motivation for life.

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of these lessons is to seek first God's kingdom and His agenda. Another lesson is to be persistent, not always in actions, but in prayer. This is the primary way we are to be assertive. Jesus also teaches that we are to bring to God all of the things that are of concern to us, and entrust them to His care. As we follow these prescriptions in prayer, all of the other issues and worry begin to take their proper place and priority.

In verse 41, the passage more literally reads, "Mary has chosen the better portion." The word "portion" is rich with Old Testament background. Understanding that meaning will help you lead a great study. Take a look at Number 18, especially vv. 8-10 and 20-29. Seriously, go read that and then come back here.

Got it? Okay, notice two things:

1. "Portion" in v. 8 is the Lord's gift to his servants. It's the term He used to describe His provision for the priests. The next several paragraphs describe how He will provide their food and all that they need to live. Because they had no land and no means to provide for themselves (v. 20) God promises to meet their needs through that "portion."

2. "Portion" in v. 28 is our gift to the Lord. It is the sacrifice that He calls us to make to Him and what He requires of us.

Now flip up to Lamentations 3. It's a short little deal tucked in between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Verses 23-24 read, "[His compassions] are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.'" From which we see:

3. "Portion" is also used to refer to our Lord Himself. He is the thing that we most need and our ultimate source of life.

In light of those it's easy to see Jesus' simple statement about choosing the better portion is pregnant with meaning, and ultimately points to Him. He is the gift as well as the giver. On the cross He even became the sacrifice offered to the Father on our behalf.

Mary seemed to get this better than most. In fact, every time she shows up in the Bible – literally every time – she is at Jesus' feet. Check it out. There's our passage here, John 11:32 concerning Lazarus' death and resurrection, and John 12:3 where she pours perfume on his feet. This was a woman who loved Jesus.

Mary knew that Jesus had something to offer her, and she wanted that portion. She also knew that He wanted something from her. The portion she choose to give Him wasn't her busyness, but her adoration. And most importantly she knew that Jesus Himself was her portion. He is our food source and she chose to go to Him for life.

Jesus is to be our portion. Busyness and worry tend to provide their own food that raise our energy level and propel us, but we are to be energized by the Lord. He is to be the food for our souls. When other things provide that motivational food our souls become sick and undernourished resulting in a loss of perspective.

What Jesus is telling Martha (and by extension, us) is that she's going to the wrong food source. She needs to taste, instead, of the Lord – the strength of our heart and our portion forever (Ps. 73:26).

What's Our Response?

In this study you want to help your group see their need to spend time daily with the Lord. Specifically, you might:

1. Suggest the group implement some of the ideas that were shared about what to do in a daily devotional time.
2. Encourage the group to devote the first "portion" of their day to the Lord.
3. Suggest that the group all read through the same book of the Bible over the course of the week.
4. Begin next week's study with some sharing time of what God has been teaching the group through their quiet times.

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What Are the Questions?

Luke 10:38-42

Launch

When you are sad, or tired, or discouraged, what do you turn to for refreshment?

Explore

Read Luke 10:38-42.

1. Why is Martha so upset and frustrated?
2. Read John 11:17-44. Combined with the passage in Luke, describe the basic temperaments or personalities of the two women. (Notice in Luke who owns the home.)

Mary Martha

3. Who do you identify more with, Mary or Martha?
4. What are the strengths of being a “Martha” in life and ministry? What are the weaknesses?

Having lost her focus on the Lord and having been consumed with worry, Martha lashes out and blames her sister when, according to Jesus, it was her own poor choice.

5. What are the common results you experience when you lose your focus on God? Who, or what, do you blame when your life becomes chaotic?

6. When have you found yourself recently in a Martha-like frenzy? What was your source of worry?

7. In verse 41, how does Jesus refocus Martha’s perspective?

8. In verse 41, the passage more literally reads “Mary has chosen the better portion.” Look up the following verses and record what background they give concerning Jesus’ use of the word “portion.”

Numbers 18:8-29

Lamentations 3:23-24

9. What insight does this provide as to how we should see our time with the Lord?

Apply

10. This passage invites us to see Jesus Himself as our ‘portion.’ Apart from Christ, what things do you treat as your ‘portion’? In other words, where are you tempted to look for life apart from Christ?

11. How does this study invite you to read your Bible differently?

12. What time of day have you found to be best for you to be able to really sit, listen, and hear from the Lord?

13. What things do you do in your times of prayer and Bible study to focus your mind and thoughts on the Lord?

14. Sometimes studying a book of the Bible can be helpful. What are you currently reading in the Scripture?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Martha is busy making all of the preparations, and Mary is not giving her any help.
2. See above under “Mary and Martha.”
3. Allow the group to share their thoughts.
4. Martha’s strength is that she gets things accomplished. She’s also probably very competent and extremely proactive. The liabilities can be a lack of trust in God, or the ability to stop, wait, and listen to the Lord.
5. Martha’s response is somewhat typical of a person who is ensnared in worry and business. No one likes to be in this state, and often we look for someone or something to blame when the blame is actually ours.
6. Allow the group to share. You might go first with an example from your own life.
7. Martha, in a state of worry, is convinced of the over-importance of many things. Jesus tells her that only one thing is truly critical, and that is spending time with Him.
8. See “What Do I need to Know About the Passage?”
9. If He is to be our primary “food source” time with Him is indispensable.
10. This is the central question of the study so allow the group plenty of time to discuss. Worry, agendas and checklists, boyfriends/girl- friends, all can provide alternative energy, focus and motivation for the day.
11. It invites us to look throughout the Bible for how it points us to Christ.
12. This is a good time to share when and where you have your daily times with God. It would be good to encourage the group to consider the mornings when their minds are the freshest and free from the busyness of the day.
13. Allow the group to share some things they have found helpful in this regard. Share some of your own insight.
14. Allow the group to share. You might give the group some suggestions or even an assignment for the next week.

Memorize

You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.

Luke 10:41



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