

Stepping Into Simplicity: What Goes, What Stays, What Needs to Be Added?

A complimentary resource for *Women of Character* by Debra Evans

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42, ESV

At first glance in this scene, we see Martha sharing her home, opening her doors to Christ, and welcoming him along with the others. Some scholars say that what we're given a glimpse of in this story is a feast being held at one of the first house churches where the Lord himself was the guest of honor.

If you've ever served at a larger than usual dinner celebration, you likely know what it's like around the house ahead of the big event: Planning the seating and menu arrangements, food purchasing, kitchen and table preparations, cooking and presenting the various courses, getting everything ready in the last minutes before dinner is served. And, of course, determining who's in charge, discussing who is responsible for what, and delegating a list of specific duties.

Perhaps you can relate to how Martha was feeling: Stressed. Aggravated. Hungry. Feeling fed up, ready to quit, and run in the other direction. It can sometimes seem so unfair. *Lord, don't you care?*

Consider how much of what Martha was experiencing in this story was because she had defined for herself what her life should be in those moments before the big meal. Where and how and why might she have chosen to place her sense of value and worth in the "many things" that needed to be done but ultimately didn't matter and wouldn't last?

It's not very difficult to imagine what's going on in this scene: Martha appears to be in charge of the feast. While she's busy serving, Mary is sitting. There is more to be done than Martha can possibly do by herself: Expectations about who needs to do what and the proper way to do it, the food waiting to be prepared and served, the drinks ready to be poured. Not enough hands to do everything that needs doing.

Martha is running out of time. Maybe the meal is getting overcooked or the food has been sitting out too long. The dinner will be ruined if Mary, who is simply sitting and listening to Jesus talk, doesn't do her part. The pressure is on and Martha feels it, all while Mary . . . sits . . . and listens.

I've felt like this a lot of times. Have you? I've said yes to a serving opportunity or doing a certain job and then found myself facing resentment and frustration, faced with too much work to be done, and not enough of me to do it. After making a sizable investment of my time, energy, and effort and then finding it didn't work out the way I thought it should, I've sometimes been left wondering, "Lord, don't you care that there is no one else to help?"

That's the Martha in me, filled with my ideas and expectations, hopes and desires, longings and limits. My thoughts about the shoulds—about what life should look like and how things should go . . . life according to me, when Life itself, with a capital L, is calling. Calling me to find my character and image in Him, beyond myself, inviting me to join him where He wants me to be—out of my death, into his Life.

Might this be part of what Martha and Mary's encounter with Jesus in this story is about? I believe it is.

This means that the way I see and understand myself is vital. My identity no longer is based on who I think I am and what I do for Christ—it is based on who Christ is and what He has done for me. What He is doing now, in this moment.

Here's the deal: *Martha missed it.*

Her plans were so important to her that she couldn't step into the simplicity of the moment. She couldn't look beyond what she thought should be happening. She couldn't see the true significance of her current circumstances.

The Lord was teaching a small group of his friends and followers, right there in her living room, and she missed it.

Picture Mary's response. It's not about her plans and to-do list in that moment. Of course Mary knew she should be helping out, doing her part, carrying her share of the load. She knew about the shoulds too.

Without a doubt, Mary cherished her sister and wanted to serve alongside Martha and listen to the Lord. But in this one critical moment in time, we see she that she made the choice to sit, not serve.

With Life right in front of her, face to face, teaching her, feeding her His Word, offering her living Bread and Water, the real meal.... What does Mary do?

She makes a choice.

She sits at his feet.

She listens to the Word.

She doesn't miss the content moment.

The rest will come later.

When Martha gets upset about Mary's choice, hear again what He says:

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

One thing is necessary, He said: The good portion that won't be taken away from us.

What is it? Where will you find it? How and when will you step into this kind of simplicity in Christ?

In moving forward, you can apply some new strategies, including these:

1. *Discern your distractions*

A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. — 1 Timothy 6:7a, MSG

What current activity or opportunity might be a distraction from the kind of simplicity you were made for? When you see unmet needs for leadership and/or service around you—in your job or community, at home, school, or church, among your friends, family, and co-workers—how do you respond and try to meet the need according to a list of “shoulds” instead of focusing on what God has specifically called you to do?

What goes? What stays? What needs to be added?

Our natural inclination when we're under pressure is to turn away from God's peace. Notice the symptoms: Anxiety, upset, worry, irritability, comparisons, anger, resentment, and wanting to flee the situation. “Lord, don't you care?” Choosing to wait upon the Lord and trust Him with your concerns isn't easy or automatic. Like Mary, you can choose to turn toward Life as you seek Christ's help and direction, wherever you find yourself today.

What comes to mind as you ask God for discernment regarding your life today?

Notes:

2. *Recognize who you are*

LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. — Psalm 16:5-6 NIV

Is what you believe about yourself from God's perspective (your value and worth in Christ) accurate? How do you know? How do you see and define yourself? Are your current boundary lines supporting and protecting your “delightful inheritance” in Christ?

What stays? What goes? What needs to be added?

Understanding who you are is a lifelong process. Through God's Word, with his Spirit's help, and in fellowship with others, you'll increasingly see

yourself accurately. Boundaries are an essential part of this process. Boundaries define you are and who you are not. What's in and what's out for you. The things you're responsible for and the things you can't control.

When you think about your boundary lines right now, can you say they have they have fallen for you in pleasant places? What's your security level about who you presently are in Christ?

Where do your boundaries most need strengthening today so that you can better recognize and appreciate your true wealth?

Notes:

3. *Choose the main course*

Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. — Psalm 73:25-26, NASB

What are you most longing for today? Where is your heart? Where is your Life? Will you miss it?

What stays? What goes? What needs to be added?

Finding Jesus in the midst of life as it actually is requires faith and a commitment to choose the right path. Yielding to the power of His grace and the direction of His Holy Spirit is possible, regardless of your circumstances. You don't have to wait for the perfect moment to surrender yourself to God—the time to do it is right now, right where you are with what you have.

The Master said: "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it's the main course, and won't be taken from her" (Luke 10:38-42, MSG).

The choice is yours, again and again, and only you can make it.

Step into simplicity. Your heart, now and forever, is safe with Christ.

Notes:

Summary

- Discern your distractions.
- Recognize who you are.
- Choose the main course.
- Step into simplicity. Your heart, now and forever, is safe with Christ.

Additional Bible References

"How blessed are those who know their need of God!" Matthew 5:3, NEB

The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him. Romans 12:3, MSG

Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! 2 Peter 1:3 MSG

"Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matthew 11:31 MSG

Seek God while he's here to be found, pray to him while he's close at hand. Isaiah 55:6, MSG

"My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 MSG

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Ephesians 1:7

"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met." Matthew 6:30-33, MSG

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33, NLT

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV

Personal passages:

