

## Martha and Mary



*The Lord and his disciples were traveling along and came to a village. When they got there, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down in front of the Lord and was listening to what he said. Martha was worried about all that had to be done. Finally, she went to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it bother you that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"*

*The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10: 38-42*

There are two types of people in the world;

1. Those who like to divide the world into two types of people, and
2. Those that don't.

### **Background**

Luke was certainly comfortable coupling people and events together. His gospel is filled with pairings that compare and contrast. The tenth chapter has two stories juxtaposed. First is the parable of the Good Samaritan who unexpectedly cares for his neighbor. The second story of Mary and Martha examines traditional forms of service and redefines discipleship.

Martha is described as the formal head of the household. Martha welcomes Jesus and his followers into her home. Martha busies herself with the responsibility of tending to the guests' needs. Martha simply wants to be a good hostess. Martha fails to realize that the disciples are not the only ones whom Jesus will be teaching in her home.

Mary chooses not help her sister. She sits at the master's feet and listens. Mary assumes an equal role with the other disciples. Mary takes advantage

of the opportunity to learn from Jesus. She must learn before she can serve.

Martha becomes quite frustrated. Martha's preoccupations with the tasks at hand blind her to what is really important. Martha interrupts the master's teachings:

- She resorts to self-pity.
- She becomes angry with others.
- She finds fault with others.
- She questions God's care.

Martha asks Jesus to send Mary back to the kitchen. Martha attempts to tell Jesus what to do. Jesus declines Martha's request and gently reprimands her. Jesus welcomes Mary and says she has "chosen the better part." Meals come and go but Mary has chosen the one thing that can never be "taken away from her." Mary opts for the "Chosen One" (Luke 9:35).

Later Jesus came to the home of Martha and Mary because of the death of their brother Lazarus. The home was in Bethany (means "house of misery") about two miles east of Jerusalem. The sisters were filled with sorrow. Martha demonstrated a significant change. She expressed her faith in Jesus' divine abilities. Jesus responded, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

This time Martha understood what was most important. Jesus is the most important thing in our lives. Martha responded by saying "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (John 11:27). Martha and Mary followed the Lord together. Jesus raised Lazarus and brought new life to the whole family.

## **Reflections**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a courageous champion of the faith. This Lutheran pastor and seminary teacher opposed Hitler and the Nazi socialist movement. The word "martyr" is used to describe someone who is willing to sacrifice his or her life for the sake of the Gospel. He did. His book, *The Cost of Discipleship* describes the importance of listening. He states that the first service we owe to others in fellowship is to listen to each other. Love of God starts when we listen to God's Word. Our love for each other

grows when we listen to each other. We are doing God's work when we listen to God and each other.

Mary listened. When we open ourselves to listening to Jesus we open ourselves to understanding more about him and his role in our lives. Martha was later privileged to hear one of the seven ways that Jesus revealed himself in the gospel of John:

- I am the bread of life (John 6:25)
- I am the light of the world (John 9:5)
- I am the gate for the sheep (John 10:7)
- I am the good shepherd (John 10:11)
- I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)
- I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
- I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower (John 15:1)

By listening to Jesus, Martha was transformed. She no longer majored in the minor details. Jesus shares the foretaste of the feast to come. He is the bread of life (John 6). When we focus on insignificant problems, we come away empty.

These sisters help show how our lives need to be a healthy balance. Mary's sacrifice was an act of **worship** as she cleansed the feet of Christ with an expensive gift of oil. The **disciple** Mary sat at Jesus feet. Martha welcomed the followers of Jesus in an act of caring **fellowship**. Martha learned the lesson of meaningful **service**. Together their message **reaches out** across the years.

Mary had it right from the very beginning. She's mentioned three times in the Gospels and each time she is sitting at the foot of her master. In this story she sat at his feet learning (Luke 10). She fell at the feet of Jesus when he came to help her brother Lazarus (John 11). Mary thanked Jesus by anointing his feet with fragrant oil and cleansing them with her hair (John 12). Mary does not say much but her actions communicate complete devotion to Christ.

The name Martha means "lady." Jesus in the end taught her the proper way to welcome a guest. Father Henri Nouwen (religious professor at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard) taught that the true meaning of Christian hospitality is creating a space where a visitor can enter in and become a

friend. Hospitality means giving the guest an opportunity to give us something in return. Mary and Martha were strengthened by Jesus' visit. So are we.

### **Strength Finders talent: Futuristic**

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252248/futuristic-theme.aspx>

Martha demonstrates futuristic talent when she recognizes and declares that Jesus is the promised disciple. She is first follower of Jesus in this Gospel of John to make such a declaration. I believe she was informed by Jesus' words and actions regarding her brother. Jesus was close to her brother. Normally friends would rush to help. Jesus did not. He had confidence (and told Martha) that it would be alright. She may have intuit that the reason Jesus was not worried about death because he had power over death. Eventually Jesus would prove this by rising from the tomb but in this case, Jesus could use God's power to help her brother; only a task the true Messiah, the true Christ, our true Savior could do. Martha looked into the future and saw the meaningful possibilities.

### **Enneagram connections: Two**

Martha comes across as a two. Two's can be very caring and giving. They like to take care of others (and even see that they are well fed). Two's can also be strategic in their giving. They many times help others to fulfill their own needs. Mary is often portrayed as the one who was a better learner. Martha demonstrates an inspired understanding of who Jesus really is. Martha also pulls from her "five" arrow to assert leadership. I suspect Martha was considered an important leader in early church, but the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10 reminds us that even good leaders need to stop, listen, and learn at times.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-two>

### **At Bethany**

MARTHA busy about household affairs. MARY sitting at the feet of CHRISTUS.

MARTHA.

She sitteth idly at the Master's feet.  
And troubles not herself with household cares.  
'T is the old story. When a guest arrives  
She gives up all to be with him; while I  
Must be the drudge, make ready the guest-chamber,  
Prepare the food, set everything in order,  
And see that naught is wanting in the house.  
She shows her love by words, and I by works.

MARY.

O Master! when thou comest, it is always  
A Sabbath in the house. I cannot work;  
I must sit at thy feet; must see thee, hear thee!  
I have a feeble, wayward, doubting heart,  
Incapable of endurance or great thoughts,  
Striving for something that it cannot reach,  
Baffled and disappointed, wounded, hungry;  
And only when I hear thee am I happy,  
And only when I see thee am at peace!  
Stronger than I, and wiser, and far better  
In every manner, is my sister Martha.  
Thou seest how well she orders everything  
To make thee welcome; how she comes and goes,  
Careful and cumbered ever with much serving,  
While I but welcome thee with foolish words!  
Whene'er thou speakest to me, I am happy;  
When thou art silent, I am satisfied.  
Thy presence is enough. I ask no more.  
Only to be with thee, only to see thee,  
Sufficeth me. My heart is then at rest.  
I wonder I am worthy of so much.

MARTHA.

Lord, dost thou care not that my sister Mary  
Hath left me thus to wait on thee alone?  
I pray thee, bid her help me.

CHRISTUS.

Martha, Martha,  
Careful and troubled about many things  
Art thou, and yet one thing alone is needful!  
Thy sister Mary hath chosen that good part,  
Which never shall be taken away from her!

CHRISTUS: A MYSTERY, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1872

### Questions

1. Rector John Ernest Bode wrote these words for his own children's confirmation. He spoke to their needs. How can Jesus make us listen? What is the connection between service and listening?

Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my Guide.  
O let me hear Thee speaking in accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self will.  
speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;  
O speak, and make me listen, Thou Guardian of my soul. (1868)

2. Being a servant means allowing God to interrupt our schedules at any time. How can we make room for God at all times? What difference does it make?

3. Real servants keep a low profile. What did Martha need to learn from Mary?



