

The Better Part

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." 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 10:38-42 NRSV)

Sometimes we try too hard. Like Martha, we welcome the Lord into our lives, and we scurry around trying to do things for Him. And that is not entirely a bad thing. It is never wrong to welcome Jesus, and to want to serve Him. But there are dangers there, and this story of Martha and Mary is a good way to point them out.



Here's Martha, a good soul, devoted to the Lord. She opens her home not only to Him, but certainly to His entourage also—probably some fifteen or so people at this point, perhaps many more. She scurries around trying to get a meal ready for all these people, and figuring out where to put everyone to eat, and perhaps to sleep. She probably has to go to the marketplace or a neighbor's home for supplies.

And here's Mary, who ought to be helping, but she's sitting at Jesus's feet, just listening. Who can blame Martha for wanting some help from her sister? And for complaining when she doesn't get that help?

Does Martha get any sympathy from Jesus? Not much. He sort of tells her, "You worry too much, Martha. Lighten up. And leave Mary alone, she's busy doing something more important than helping you." He says it in a much nicer way than that, but the message is clear.

So what is Martha doing wrong? And what is Mary doing right? What's the message for us, today, in this passage of Scripture?

I believe Martha got so busy and concerned with serving the Lord that she took her eyes off the Lord. She started doing the things she thought He wanted, or that she thought He should want, and perhaps lost sight of what He really wanted her to do. That's one possibility.

It's also possible that Martha was doing exactly the right things, and her only error was in assuming she knew what Mary ought to be doing.

So what can we learn from this? Three things, I think:

(1) Let God lead.

Did you ever see two people dancing, with both of them trying to lead? Take my word for it, it doesn't work very well. It works much better with one talented leader and one dedicated and observant follower.

There was a movie based on a book by a World War II pilot, both titled *God is My Co-Pilot*. Later the phrase was adopted by others who wanted to give God credit for helping them get through difficult situations. Then someone thought about it and had some bumper stickers printed that read like this: "If God is your co-pilot, change seats."

God wants to be in charge. He wants to lead, and He wants us to follow. It just works better that way. He tells us this in many ways, in His word.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Prov. 3:5-6)

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...." (John 16:13)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (Romans. 8:14)

If you are willing, God will guide you into areas of service to Him. You don't have to hunt for them.



If you need gifts, power, abilities in order to do what He intends, ask Him. He will provide the gifts and the power and the abilities, at the appropriate time.

A dear brother tells me that he wants to be filled and empowered by the Spirit, like those early followers of Jesus were at Pentecost, so that he can allow God to work through him for God's glory. I say to my brother, God gets glory through your willingness to serve Him in any small way that He chooses. If He has you serving in the cafeteria, do it with a smile and a silent prayer for those you serve, as you are guided by the Holy Spirit, and God will get glory.

Some of us are called to be great evangelists, winning thousands of souls for Christ. Others of us are called to witness and minister to those closest to us. The point is that God doesn't want you to be the Apostle Paul, or Billy Graham, or Mother Teresa. He wants you to be you, submitted and committed to Him.

(2) Let God handle the assignments.

Just as it wasn't appropriate for Martha to dictate what Mary ought to be doing, it is not your place or mine to decide what anyone else ought to be doing for God, or how they ought to do it.

I got off track in this way several years ago, and the Lord corrected me. I disapproved of my pastor's teaching on many Scripture passages, and I got in the habit of challenging him and arguing with him. Before very long I received a message from the Lord, not in audible words, but clearly stated for all that. The message was this: *It's not your job to change your pastor, it's my job. Your job is to pray for him, and support him, and love him.* This same message also came to another brother who was doing the same thing. So we both began to pray for our pastor and be supportive, and guess what— as time went on we began to notice that his teaching was a little less liberal.

So I learned, and I'm still learning, not to let my way of serving God disrupt the unity we have in Christ.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them... (Romans 12:4-6a)

(3) Let God set the priorities.

What's the most important thing we can do to serve God? Well, what does His word say?

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt.22:37-40)

The most important thing, obviously, is to love the Lord. That's what Mary was doing. She was sitting by his feet, watching Him and listening to what He was saying. Do you think she didn't know there was other work to do? I'm sure she did. In fact, Martha had probably fussed at her a bit already. But she chose, as Jesus said, "the better part."



Do you think this is the same woman who washed Jesus's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair on another occasion? (Luke 7:37-48) Maybe so, or maybe not. But I think she shows that level of devotion, and Jesus recognizes it and approves.

Do you want to serve God? If so, that's wonderful! Start by adoring Him.

I have a friend in Maryland who starts each day with a time of simply adoring Jesus. He doesn't read the Bible during this time. He doesn't even really pray, except to praise God quietly. What he does most is sit and think about the wonder of God's love: that He loves us so much that He sent the Son—His only Son, the Beloved—to suffer and die at the hands of sinful men, for the sins of sinful people. Thinking these thoughts, my friend gets carried away into tears or into wondrous joy.

I don't say that this is a formula for every believer to follow. It is simply an example of someone who deliberately and devotedly loves Jesus. And that's "the better part" of being a Christian.

I challenge you to choose "the better part" of all-out love and devotion to Jesus. If you love Him, you will trust Him; and if you trust Him, He will direct your paths—and you will be amazed at where He takes you. And you will bring glory to the Father.

May the LORD bless us all with the grace to love Him more and more —

Brother Roland

This is an interview from several years ago with Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California and author of The Purpose Driven Life. In the interview he discussed new insights he had gained since getting a lot of money from the book sales, and since his wife had gotten cancer.

Rick Warren: People ask me, “What is the purpose of life?” And I respond: In a nutshell, life is preparation for eternity. We were not made to last forever, and God wants us to be with Him in Heaven. One day my heart is going to stop, and that will be the end of my body--but not the end of me. I may live 60 to 100 years on earth, but I am going to spend trillions of years in eternity. This is the warm-up act—the dress rehearsal. God wants us to practice on earth what we will do forever in eternity. We were made by God and for God, and until you figure that out, life isn't going to make sense.

Life is a series of problems: Either you are in one now, you're just coming out of one, or you're getting ready to go into another one. The reason for this is that God is more interested in your character than your comfort; God is more interested in making your life holy than He is in making your life happy. We can be reasonably happy here on earth, but that's not the goal of life. The goal is to grow in character, in Christ likeness.

This past year has been the greatest year of my life but also the toughest, with my wife, Kay, getting cancer. I used to think that life was hills and valleys—you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don't believe that any more. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for..

You can focus on your purposes, or you can focus on your problems: If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, which is, “My problem, my issues, my pain.” But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others.

We discovered quickly that in spite of the prayers of hundreds of thousands of people, God was not going to

heal Kay or make it easy for her- It has been very difficult for her, and yet God has strengthened her character, given her a ministry of helping other people, given her a testimony, drawn her closer to Him and to people.

You have to learn to deal with both the good and the bad of life. Actually, sometimes learning to deal with the good is harder. For instance, this past year, all of a sudden, when the book sold 15 million copies, it made me instantly very wealthy. It also brought a lot of notoriety that I had never had to deal with before.

I don't think God gives you money or notoriety for your own ego or for you to live a life of ease. So I began to ask God what He wanted me to do with this money, notoriety, and influence. He gave me two different passages that helped me decide what to do, II Corinthians 9 and Psalm 72.

First, in spite of all the money coming in, we would not change our lifestyle one bit. We made no major purchases. Second, about midway through last year, I stopped taking a salary from the church. Third, we set up foundations to fund an initiative we call The Peace Plan to plant churches, equip leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick, and educate the next generation. Fourth, I added up all that the church had paid me in the 24 years since I started the church, and I gave it all back. It was liberating to be able to serve God for free.

We need to ask ourselves: Am I going to live for possessions? Popularity? Am I going to be driven by pressures? Guilt? Bitterness? Materialism? Or am I going to be driven by God's purposes (for my life)?

When I get up in the morning, I sit on the side of my bed and say, God, if I don't get anything else done today, I want to know You more and love You better. God didn't put me on earth just to fulfill a to-do list. He's more interested in what I am than what I do. That's why we're called human beings, not human doings.

**Happy moments, PRAISE GOD.
Difficult moments, SEEK GOD.
Quiet moments, WORSHIP GOD.
Painful moments, TRUST GOD.
Every moment, THANK GOD.**

Got a question? It may be the same question that is occurring to someone else. Maybe you'll share it with me so I can take a shot at answering it in the “Good News Guide.” That way others can benefit from your asking it. Send it to me:

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Women of the Bible

Since Martha and her sister, Mary, featured prominently in this issue of the Good News Guide, I thought it might be fun to pull a lot of women's names out of the Bible and put them into a puzzle. How many of these do you recognize? And are they all really in the Bible?

Puzzle:

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Words:

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| BATHSHEBA | HANNAH | MARY MAGDALENE | RUTH |
| DEBORAH | HEPZIBAH | MEHETABEL | SALOME |
| DELILAH | HERODIAS | MICHAIAH | SAPPHIRA |
| DIANA | Jael | MICHAL | SARAH |
| DINAH | JEMIMA | MILCAH | SHIPHRAH |
| DORCAS | JERUSHA | MIRIAM | SUSANNA |
| DRUSILLA | JEZEBEL | NAOMI | SYNTYCHE |
| ELIZABETH | JOANNA | OHOLIBAMAH | TABITHA |
| EPHRATAH | JUDITH | ORPAH | TAMAR |
| EPHRATH | JULIA | PHOEBE | THE VIRGIN MARY |
| ESTHER | LEAH | PRISCILLA | TIMNA |
| EUNICE | LOIS | RACHEL | TIRZAH |
| EVE | LYDIA | RAHAB | ZIPPORAH |
| GOMER | | | |