

Martha, Martha

Priorities are things that we place in the highest order of importance.

The word "prior" means *before, or ahead of, or preceding*.

A priority then is something that comes before everything else.

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they were traveling along. He entered a village and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.

³⁹She had a sister called Mary,
 who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word.

⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."

⁴¹But the Lord answered and said to her,
 "Martha Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;
⁴²but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The Simple Story

If you were to put yourself into this story, would you be Mary or Martha?

Luke documents a minor disagreement between two sisters.

Martha had a job to do and expected her sister's help.

Her sister, Mary, was content, instead, to listen at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus often stayed in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. It was located in the little village of Bethany which was situated about two miles northwest of Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. It was a perfect location for Jesus to stay, especially when He was ministering near Jerusalem.

Setting:

³⁸Now as they were traveling along.

Unplanned Stop. Unexpected drop-ins – Jesus and his disciples arrive

Now, this is a simple enough story to make a very simple point.

The good part: Mary chose it and Martha missed it.

Why does Luke drop this story in here? What is his point?

From chapter 10 verse 38 into the 19th chapter, the focus is on Jesus' teaching ministry. In fact, for the next six months until Jesus enters Jerusalem and is crucified, Jesus goes back and forth many times primarily teaching.

The story makes it so clear that

the number one priority is to hear what God has said.

³⁸Now as they were traveling along. He entered a village and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.

Martha – “lady” or “Mistress” as in the “lady of the house” Clue to her personality: responsible, serious, or perhaps a little intense.

She wanted to be a proper host for her guests with a great meal, etc.

Mary – her sister’s opposite

When Jesus arrived Mary sat at his feet.

Martha – energetic, responsible, list-maker

Mary – attentive, conscientious listener

Scene – set for conflict

:40 - Mary was soaking in the Lord’s teaching

Martha “**distracted** with all her preparations”

- Perispao – “dragged away”
- Martha was overburdened with business

Martha’s problem –paying too much attention to the things that did not matter
And not enough attention to the Person who did.

Warren Wiersbe comments,

Consider Martha’s situation. She received Jesus into her home *and then neglected Him as she prepared an elaborate meal that He did not need!* Certainly a meal was in order, but what we do *with* Christ is far more important than what we do *for* Christ.

Swindoll writes,

“Martha feeling overwhelmed by the burden of hosting – perhaps with a streak of perfectionism fueling her frustration – and feeling abandoned by her sister lashed out at the two least deserving people in the room. She accused both Mary and the Lord of callously disregarding her at a time when Mary would have pitched in to help. Martha expected the Lord to rebuke Mary for her laziness or selfishness, but she received a surprising response.”¹

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights: Luke*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012), p. 283.

On Priorities

Are your priorities straight? A couple I heard about in Atlanta read that *My Fair Lady* was still playing on Broadway in New York City. They wanted to go so badly, so they bought their tickets months ahead of time and planned their vacation.

The long awaited day came and they flew to New York City. They presented their tickets, walked in, and sat down in wonderful seats, seven rows from the front near the orchestra. To the man's amazement, the entire place filled up except the seat right next to him. He was curious about that. At the intermission, he leaned over in conversation with the lady in the second seat away from him and commented how they had to wait so many months to get tickets to a performance. When there was such a demand for seats, why would someone not come. Did she have any idea? She said, "Yes, as a matter fact, these two seats are mine. This one and that one." She explained further, "You see, that seat belonged to my husband and he died." The man said, "I'm... I'm terribly sorry. But could 't you have invited a friend to come with you?" Her answer was classic. She said, "No, they're all at the funeral home right now."²

A closer look:

1. Martha

"Martha, Martha" – doubling her name expresses deep emotion

Lit. Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many, but one is lacking (or needed).

What Martha was fretting over many things,

and yet neglecting the only thing that was important: listening to Jesus

Instead of a big meal – a simple meal and spending time with Jesus

She was the only one missing what was important.

Martha was caught up in her preparations and captured by business.

2. Mary

⁴²but only one thing is necessary,
for Mary has chosen the good part,
which shall not be taken away from her."

Mary was the example of doing right and deserved praise for her priorities.

² B. Clayton Bell, *Preaching* magazine, May-June 1989.

She was lost in the wonders of Christ instead of trivial concerns. Martha was pretty messed up here. Worried, distracted, bothered, on edge, Yelling at Jesus, (Commanding God)...

When Jesus answered Martha's demands He said that Mary who had chosen to be with Jesus "to sit at His feet" instead of making elaborate preparations, had made the best choice. The best choice is to listen to Jesus without distraction.

Which of these do you identify with?

What comes first in your life?

The Priority Battle

Busyness keeps us from holding still and having meaningful times with Jesus. Prayer is constantly interrupted by media, texts, messages and my next appointment or task. I have written down thoughts that intrude on my prayer times and filled a page with these items.

One pastor wrote of pastors' meetings...

"We meet to plan and plan to meet."

The greatest battle we face is to spend time with Jesus or be distracted.

Apostolic Priority established early in their ministry:

"And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:2-4).

What should our priorities be?

The Word:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."
(2 Tim. 2:15)

What if you have no time to spend in reading the Bible, church, or preaching?

Our lives are so full of the unnecessary. They control us. They ruin our attitudes. They whack away at our relationships. We get frustrated over stuff that does not matter whether politics or stuff that you get yourself involved in, in your work-a-day world, or your neighborhood. Commit your life to one thing, to see the beauty of the Lord, like David. To be made like Christ, like Paul,

A quiet time is when we read Scripture and let God's Word speak to us. We can pour out our hearts to Him and admit our needs. Different from study. We learn but also we worship and pray.

Our best choice will go against the current of the world with all its busyness and delightful distractions. Yet it seems so unnatural – against our natural inclination.

The Benefits of the Word of God

It is so easy to be captured by world around us with all its allurements. Paul warns believers, Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind... (Rom. 12: 1-2 NASB)

The JB Phillips version says,

“Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.” (Rom. 12:1-2 Phillips).

The key to resisting the world's squeeze is the Word of God that transforms us from the inside out.

A truck driver was asked what kind of changes Christ has made in his life. He said, “When I find somebody tail-gating my truck, I no longer drive on the shoulder of the road to kick gravel on him.”

The Word of God changes us

We are either conformed to the world or transformed by the Word.

“God has a program of character development for each one of us. He wants others to look at our lives and say, “He walks with God, for he lives like Christ.” Erwin Lutzer

The Word of God provides us with the truth that the Holy Spirit uses to change our thinking [mind-renewal] and set us free from the old sin nature into the new Nature.

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5).

Jesus said,

“If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32).

The Word of God is the change agent for spiritual growth and maturity.

Peter wrote,

“...like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2)

Someone said of the Bible:

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be right.

The importance of the Word of God:

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and to teaching... take pains for these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” (1 Tim. 4:13-16)

Equips us

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work for service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

Priority of discipleship:

Paul wrote to Timothy concerning making disciples,

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Presupposition: Our purpose is to promote the Kingdom of God.

Jesus spelled this out in His Great Commission: Go and make disciples by baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and Teaching them to do all that I commanded you.” (Matt. 28:18-19.) In the book of Acts the disciples carried this out once the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2:1-4) and the church was formed. (1 Cor. 12:13). Following that the New Testament is all about the churches in which the training and disciple-making was taking place.

Our purpose for living is the Kingdom of God. The visible expression of His Kingdom is the church (made up of local Bible-believing churches). Through faithful service believers store up for themselves rewards in heaven. Imagine someone saying, “God is so lucky to have me in His service.” Indeed, the greatest privilege of any saint is to be a part of God’s work, and not the other way around. Looking back from eternity we will praise Him for His grace that though unworthy we were included in the ‘beloved.’ Those who sacrificed in this life will count it an honor to have done so. As Paul wrote of all who suffered,

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

(Rom. 8:18).

It is a privilege and our purpose to be a part of the Kingdom of God.
Preparation for service is the highest priority of life.

The Basics:

Priority of the Word of God and prayer in our lives.

Discipleship

Ministry of the Word

It seems evident that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work. Blessed are the balanced!

Again, it is not an either/or situation; it is a matter of balance. Mary had done her share of the work in the kitchen and then had gone to “feed” on the Lord’s teachings. Martha felt neglected after Mary left the kitchen, and she began to complain and to suggest that neither the Lord nor Mary really cared!³

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 213). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.