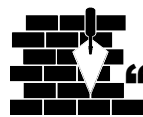


## Martha - “Winnowing Your Passions”



## “Building Blocks”

1. **(Overall)** Because of the boldness with which Martha approaches Jesus in both accounts—and its radical nature in the Ancient Near East—it is nearly certain that Jesus was well-acquainted with this family. She obviously knew him well enough to feel free to address him in such a confrontational fashion both times. Remember, Jesus was a rabbi, not just a male. Perhaps Jesus’ family stayed with Martha’s family during their visits to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals each year. Certainly this familiarity is born out in the later story in John’s gospel where the word “love” is used three times for Jesus’ feelings about Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:3,5,36).

Luke’s account is a vital interpretive key for Jesus’ later encounter with the three in John 11. It helps us establish the missing “history” responsible for, or at least authenticating his unique “love” for them.

2. **(Q2a)** The word “serving” (ESV), “preparations” (NAS) is the Greek word, *diakonia*, from which we get our English word, “deacon.” It is a word for ministry to others. Martha seems to have seen what she was doing as “ministry” to Jesus and the crowd that was traveling with him. Keep in mind that there were at least 20 or more people in that house that day! (Unless you think Jesus was coming into Jerusalem “under the radar”!)

It is noteworthy that Martha and Mary each appear three times in the Scriptures, all three are encounters with Jesus. This “random” visit in Luke 10, the raising of Lazarus in John 11, and the anointing of Jesus in John 12. In all three cases, Mary is found at the same place...at the feet of Jesus. The first time learning, the second time weeping, the third time, ministering to Jesus. Martha is “in Jesus’ face” during the first two encounters, and then silently serving in the third. You get a beautiful composite portrait of these two very different sisters, both *beloved* by Jesus.

3. **(Q3)** In fairness to Martha, what we call “hospitality” is a *much* bigger social expectation in the Middle East even to this day. In Jesus’ day it was *expected* to entertain strangers, much less those whom you “love.” This custom is the background behind Jesus’ parable on persistent prayer in Luke 11:5-9. (Note: The stories of the two angels visiting Lot in Sodom, and the Levite visiting Gibeah in Judges 19 illustrate this custom.). It is significant that the Greek word translated “hospitable” (1 Tim 3:2) in our NT is *philoxenos*, which means “lover of strangers.”

However, what *Mary* did was more socially unacceptable than what Martha would have imagined herself doing by failing to “overdo it” with hospitality and joining Mary on the floor. Women were *not* allowed to be “disciples” of rabbis in the ANE. Mary’s posture that day was a very loud statement of her desire to be a “follower” of Jesus. Perhaps it was made easier by the presence of the “*women who travelled with him and provided for him out of their own means*” like Mary Magdalene, which Luke introduced into his story only a few chapters earlier (cf. 8:1-3).

4. **(Q5b)** The other two men were not only Jews, they were religious “professionals,” who served at the Temple in Jerusalem. Stopping to help this man would have certainly interrupted their religious plans, but may have also rendered them “unclean,” and therefore unfit for ritual service, if the man had been dead or died in their care, or worse, if he happened to be a Gentile. (This seems to be *implied* on the measures they took to avoid the man by crossing on the “other side.”). However, being “unclean” was *not* a sin, only an inconvenience as one had to go through ritual purification to be made “clean” again, and could not participate in temple worship while “unclean.”

What you want to get to (eventually) in this 2<sup>nd</sup> question is the issue of *time*. The Samaritan’s life had “room” for this unexpected, uninvited need. In fact, this actually *became* his “life” for a few days.



## “Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Q2b)** Don’t be misled into thinking that “opportunity” is positive and “intrusion” is negative. Even though being interrupted is difficult and would likely produce anxiety, seeing it as an “opportunity” isn’t automatically better. In this case, it appears that Martha saw it only as an opportunity to minister or serve, and *missed* the “opportunity” to enjoy her guest’s company, which *Jesus* seems to have preferred, based on his response. Don’t lose sight of the fact that Jesus was *not* in the area of Jerusalem very much. Often, because of the centrality of the crucifixion and the resurrection, we are lulled into thinking he was in that region a lot. He wasn’t! The majority of Jesus’ ministry was in the regions around Galilee in the north. That means this visit, though not the first, also was not regular. How much more should Martha have enjoyed the time with him.
2. **(Q4)** These three verses will be meaningless apart from Ps 86:11 and Ezek 11:19. The point here is that time with the Shepherd, time with people around the “fear of the Lord,” and the basic fruit of righteousness is the *opposite* of Martha’s feelings of anxiety and being burned out.
3. **(Q5b)** Don’t be totally distracted by the “religious” arguments about the two Jews not wanting to associate with this half-dead victim. While this is certainly true, the real issue we’re looking for in this section of Jesus’ parable is the interruption of our life by the needs of someone we don’t know. Don’t lose sight of the fact that this entire parable is Jesus’ answer to the question: “Just who *is* my neighbor?” The inescapable answer is: “Your neighbor is the next person you meet who has a need you can meet...if you have the time.”
4. **(Q5c)** Be very careful here! There *is not* a “right” answer. Martha may have jumped right in, she was a woman of action and deeds. Her and Mary may have “tag-teamed” the guy and did an amazing job of compassion and mercy. Or...Martha *may* have been in a hurry because she had her day all filled-up and there was no “room” for an emergency like this. *The main goal for this question is thoughtful dialogue. Get all the options out on the table. Talk!!*



## “Going Deeper”

1. **(Q3)** “Do you think the real issue in the Luke 10 story is *that* Martha served, or *how much* she served? (NOTE: Martha’s complaint to Jesus was that Mary had “left her to serve alone.” The Greek text, in talking about Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet, has the word “also” in it, which our English translations omit. It seems to indicate that she *had* been helping her sister, and perhaps decided they/she had “done enough.”)
2. **(Q4)** Contrast Martha’s emotions/state of mind with the various words used in these three passages that describe time spent with the Lord or his people. What was missing from Martha’s experience?
3. **(Q5a)** “What exactly did this Samaritan actually *do* for this victim?” Push for thorough dialogue here. Don’t miss that he:
  - a. interrupted his own journey simply to stop
  - b. interrupted his own *plans* by spending the night with him, mostly likely nursing him through the night (cf. 10:35). The inn-keeper certainly wasn’t going to do it for “free.”
  - c. invested his own money to care for him, with the promise to see it through to the end
  - d. planned a follow-up visit to check on the man’s progress (an indication of just how badly he was traumatized).
4. **(Q8-10)** Take the time to talk slowly through each person’s answers to these three questions. Stop and pray individually over each person’s answer to #9 and hold them before the Lord in what they want to see happen. Write down on paper what each person’s “experiment” is going to be for the week and then give time at the beginning of next week to “report” how it went and especially what they learned about themselves and their lives. (be sure to include possible things to cut out that were not present or popular when this study was first written, such as facebook, laptops, email, TV).
5. **(Overall)** Ask group members what it means to “serve” someone. Work towards the idea that “serving” someone means doing what you’re asked to do. Then, ask them this: “If I am busy doing something for God that he hasn’t asked of me, am I serving him?” The truth we see in Martha’s life is that even though she was killing herself to “serve” Jesus, he told her it *wasn’t* service to him. This is a very significant truth. Much busyness in churches and our lives as Christians is merely religious activity, which often prevents us from doing the very kind of true service that we saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan, or more soberly in Jesus stinging statements in Matthew 25, where he makes spontaneous ministry to the needy a barometer of true faith.