

Conscience, Morality and the  
Spiritual Life  
CMS-023 and 024:  
Mary and Martha

Luke 10:38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.

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

40 But 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."

41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;

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

The little story which these verses contain is only recorded by St. Luke. So long as the world stands, the story of Mary and Martha will furnish us with lessons of wisdom which should never be forgotten.

But first, it is important to look at the context, here, for Luke has chosen to place the story of Mary and Martha next after The Good Samaritan. The lesson of Mary and Martha completes the lesson of The Good Samaritan:

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."

34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

In this passage a Jewish Legalist asks Jesus how one can inherit eternal life. This Jewish lawyer knows that God exists and that he is accountable to that God, so his question is particularly focused: “*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” If God exists, then the goal of life must be related to his purpose for us. The terminology of the question is unique to New Testament time, but it has a rich background, since the Bible speaks of inheritance in many ways (Mt 19:29; Mk 10:17; Tit 3:7; 1 Pet 3:7; L. T. Johnson 1991:172; Bultmann 1964a:864 n. 274).

In the Old Testament one could inherit the land (Gen 28:4; Deut 1:8; 2:12; 4:1). Or one might speak of the Lord as one's inheritance (Ps 15:5 LXX). Mention is made of an "eternal inheritance," but its nature is not specified in the context (Ps 36:18 LXX). Daniel 12:2 speaks of the just who will rise to eternal life.

The lawyer seems focused on this last possibility. He assumes that he must do something to gain life everlasting. In effect he asks how he can be sure to participate in and be blessed at the resurrection of the dead.

Jewish scribes would have great interest in such questions, not only for personal reasons but because they were interested in interpreting the law for the community.

The lawyer's question seems to assume that he must earn such a reward, though when Jesus probes him we see that he knows that works are not the issue. Jesus calls for reflection on the law, asking, "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*" He is asking for scriptural support.

The lawyer responds well (v. 28) by citing Deuteronomy 6:5, a text that has become known as the “great commandment”: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”*; and, *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* This text could well be called “the law of love.” The reply shows that the issue is not action per se but the heart. Do I love God fully? That is the starting point. Everything else grows out from that relationship.

This is a relationship of trust and devotion, a truth that lies at the heart of Jesus' reply and explains why Jesus' approval is not an endorsement of works righteousness. When Jesus says, "*Do this and you will live,*" he is saying that relationship to God is what gives life. The chief end of humankind is to love God wholly. We were designed to love; but to love well, we must love the right person. Here is the definition of life that brings life.

And the product of our love for God will be a regard for others made in his image, those whom God has placed next to us as neighbors. The New Testament often connects one's relationship to God to one's response to others (Mt 5:43; 19:19; Jn 13:34–35; 15:8–12; Gal 5:14; Col 1:3–5; 1 Thess 1:1; Philem 6; Jas 2:8; 1 Pet 2:17; 1 Jn 4:11). To respond to the law means to love God. To live by the Spirit means to love and do righteousness (Rom 8:1–11).

The lawyer is confused, even though his answer is correct, because he still thinks that eternal life is earned rather than received in the context of a love relationship with God. It is also important to set this discussion in its context. Jesus has just said that to know the Father one must know the Son (v. 22, below). So to love the Father will also mean to love Jesus. If Jesus brings the kingdom message, then he must be heeded as well. This is why 1 Corinthians 2:9 describes believers in Christ as those who love God.

**22**"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

But the lawyer latches on to the second part of the reply about one's neighbor. Exactly where does his responsibility fall? Does it have limits? Luke is clear that the lawyer has not understood the thrust of Jesus' reply, for he notes that the lawyer is seeking *to justify himself* by his next question. The question *Who is my neighbor?* is really an attempt to limit who one's neighbor might be and to "define" a list of rules for inheriting eternal life.

In ancient culture, as today, such limits might have run along ethnic lines. There was a category of “nonneighbor,” and the lawyer is seeking Jesus’ endorsement of that concept. In contemporary terms, any of various forms of racism may underlie the scribe’s question: there are neighbors, “my folk,” and then there are the rest, “them.” Perhaps the lawyer could appeal to a text like Leviticus 19:16 for support: my concern is for “my people.”

Jesus’ reply not only challenges the premise but brings a shocking surprise: each of us is to *be* a neighbor and realize that neighbors can come from surprising places.

Jesus' words reflect Leviticus 19:33–34: even “sojourners” deserve love. In addition, the ethic of Hosea 6:6 seems reflected here.

The original impact of the parable of the good Samaritan is generally lost today. After centuries of good biblical public relations, our understanding of a Samaritan as a positive figure is almost a cultural given. But in the original setting, to a Jewish scribe a Samaritan would have been the exact opposite, a notorious “bad guy” and traitor. That is an important emotive element to remember as we proceed through this parable. The hero is a bad guy.

Culturally he is the last person we would expect to be hailed as an exemplary neighbor. In fact, the parable turns the whole question around. The lawyer asks who his neighbor is in the hope that some people are not. Jesus replies, “Just be a neighbor whenever you are needed, and realize that neighbors can come from surprising places.”

The story builds on a common situation, a seventeen-mile journey on the Jericho-to-Jerusalem road. This rocky thoroughfare was lined with caves that made good hideouts for robbers and bandits. The road was notoriously dangerous, the ancient equivalent to the inner city late at night. Josephus notes how some took weapons to protect themselves as they traveled this road and others like it (*Jewish Wars* 2.8.4 §125). In Jesus' story, a man is overcome by a band of robbers and left on the road to die.

As he lies there, his life passes before him. Then a priest comes down the road. The expectation culturally would be relief: “Surely help is on the way now.” Luke’s statement that the priest appeared “by chance” (Greek) suggests a note of hope that fortune has smiled on the wounded man. The NIV renders this *A priest happened to be going down the same road*. But the priest does not stop. Rather, he crosses to the other side and keeps going. The detail about crossing the road is no accident. It is a brilliant use of literary space: the priest gets as far away as possible from the wounded man as he passes by.

A Levite, another potential source of aid, arrives on the scene. As one who served in the temple, he will surely have compassion, stop and render aid. But when he sees the man, he also crosses to the other side of the road and keeps on moving. So two men of similar Jewish background have failed to render aid. They have failed to be neighbors.

Interpreters speculate as to why they refuse to help.

Do they fear being jumped themselves? Do they fear being rendered unclean? The text gives us no reason. As is often the case, the bother and discomfort of helping have kept the man dying on the road. Getting involved is costly, and for many the investment is too high. But to refuse to help is moral failure.

But now another traveler comes on the scene. In Greek the text highlights this man's arrival by placing his ethnic identity, *a Samaritan*, at the front of the description.

The scribe hearing Jesus tell the story must be thinking, “There will be no help from this half-breed.” But as often happens in Jesus’ parables, a twist on cultural expectations yields this story’s major point: the despised schismatic will be the model of neighborliness. Maybe “enemies” can love God and be examples.

Jesus focuses his language now. In as many words as he used to describe the activity of the two Jewish leaders, he details all the Samaritan does to save the man—six actions in all.

He comes up to the man, binds his wounds, anoints him with oil to comfort him, loads him on his mule, takes him to an inn and cares for him, even paying for his whole stay. In fact, given the amount the Samaritan leaves with the innkeeper, the injured man probably has about three and a half weeks to recover if he needs it, since the going inn rate was one-twelfth of a denarius and two denarii was two days' wages.

Jesus' question to close the story requires no brilliant reply: "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*"

The lawyer knows, but he cannot even bring himself to mention the man's race. The lawyer is choosy about his neighbors. He does not understand the call of God. Nevertheless, he answers, "*The one who had mercy on him.*"

This reply is correct, so Jesus simply says, "*Go and do likewise.*"

Jesus' point is, Simply be a neighbor. Do not rule out certain people as neighbors. And his parable makes the point emphatically by providing a model from a group the lawyer had probably excluded as possible neighbors.

To love God means to show mercy to those in need. An authentic life is found in serving God and caring for others. This is a central tenet of discipleship. Here human beings fulfill their created role—to love God and be a neighbor to others by meeting their needs.

Neighbors are not determined by race, creed or gender; neighbors consist of anyone in need made in the image of God.

Now, let us return to the story of Mary and Martha to put the two stories in perspective:

Martha receives Jesus at her home as he travels from one village to another. John 11:1, 18 and 12:1 tell us that this home was in Bethany, so Jesus appears to be a few miles outside Jerusalem when this encounter occurs. This is one of several meal scenes Luke will narrate. Besides the host and the teacher, the other protagonist is the host's sister, Mary, who sits *at the Lord's feet listening to what he said*. This is reminiscent of the Jewish saying: "Let your house be a meeting house for the Sages and sit amidst the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst."

10:38 “Now as they were traveling along” This is the way Luke structures this portion of his Gospel. Jesus is traveling to His divine destiny to Jerusalem (cf. 9:51, 56, 57; 10:38; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31, 35; 19:1, 11).

“a village” From John 11:1 we know the village is Bethany, only two miles from Jerusalem on the Mt of Olives on the road to Jericho.

THE certain village into which Jesus entered was, as we know from other scriptures, Bethany, where Martha and Mary lived. Their house seems ever to have been open to the Lord. He had a peculiar love for these two devoted sisters and their brother Lazarus.

“Martha” In Aramaic this means “lady,” the feminine form of “Lord.”

“welcomed Him into her home” Martha was the head of the house. Apparently Lazarus had his own home. It was usual for the villagers around Jerusalem to welcome pilgrims into their homes during feast days. At certain times during the year the population of the Holy City swelled to two or three times its normal size. There were not enough public accommodations available.

10:39 “Mary” In Hebrew this is Miriam, which means “bitter” (cf. Ruth 1:20).

“was seated at the Lord’s feet” - It was highly unusual for a rabbi to teach women (another example of Luke’s inclusive theme), but we note that “Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village.” The Greek is clear, He (alone) entered the village, so there were likely no others with Him at their house.

Mary took advantage of the occasion to learn. “Sitting at the feet” was the common term for teaching situations (cf. Acts 22:3).

Martha was evidently the elder of the two sisters, for we read, "A certain woman named Martha received Him into her house." She is recognized as the owner of the house.

Attempts have been made to identify Mary, the younger sister, with Mary Magdalene, or with the otherwise unnamed woman of the Seventh of Luke, but there does not seem to be any valid reason for this. There is nothing to indicate that Mary had ever been an unchaste woman or one who had been demon-possessed.

In the three definite instances where she appears in Scripture, that is, here and in John 11 and 12, we see her as a contemplative worshiper, to whose heart the blessed Lord was unspeakably precious. There is not the least intimation that she had ever been a woman of bad character, although like everyone else, she was a sinner who needed to be saved by grace divine.

In verse 39 we read that, "She (Martha) had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." Mary delighted to take the seat of a learner. She revelled in the truth Christ came to reveal, and found her chief joy in sitting at His feet.

Some would like us to believe that she would seem to be dreamy and impractical, but Jesus appreciated her deep interest in His message and her love for Him. This is most precious. It may well speak to us. Nothing is more important for the child of God than to spend time at the feet of Jesus, pondering over His Word. It is in this way that we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. So Mary becomes an example to us all.

You may say that she should have been helping Martha with the dinner. Ah, but the Lord would rather have her sitting at His feet. You remember when He sat at Jacob's well and the disciples had gone for food. Then there came the Samaritan woman to whom He ministered the Word, which became, in truth, the water of life to her thirsty soul. What joy it was to Him to minister to her deep need and to unfold the riches of God's grace to her in such a way that she forgot her waterpot for love of Him and went back to the city to evangelize its men!

When the disciples came back they expected to find Him so hungry that He would be ready at once to eat of the food they had brought, but He seemed utterly indifferent to it. They asked concerning Him, "Hath any man brought Him ought to eat? Jesus said unto them, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." It was satisfying to Him to have met and saved a poor sinner. And it should be meat for us to sit at His feet and learn from Him. Then we can go forth and feed others.

Martha is not comfortable with Mary's approach to Jesus' visit, since she could use another hand in the kitchen. She requests Jesus' aid: "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me.*" We know that Martha's viewpoint is questionable not only because of Jesus' reply but also because the text says she makes the comment while being *distracted by all the preparations*. In fact, in Greek she asks the question in such a way that the Lord is expected to give a positive answer (note the particle *ou*). The Lord does care, and Martha fully expects him to tell Mary to get up and help.

“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things” (Lu. 10:41). The Lord’s words are very striking. If you are busy about many things, you will not only be busy, but troubled. Martha, we read, “was cumbered with much serving”; and she was not only “encumbered,” but also “troubled”- -it weighed upon her. If you have service that weighs you down, look to it; see well why it is.

This is the first clue to understanding the difference between Morality and the Spiritual Life - if you are "weighted down" by your service to the Lord, you are likely producing the "wood, hay and straw" of Human Religious Morality. Plainly that very character would put you along with Martha there.

10:40 “was distracted” Apparently both women originally sat down to listen. Mary remained listening, but Martha’s personality began to worry about the task of hostess.

Clue #2: Is your "serving" the Lord distracting you from in-depth study of His Word? Then you are assuredly producing Good Deeds from your Religious Happiness Motivator and not from the Reservoir of Righteousness!

She became upset and started to complain. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” (verse 40). When she said this, this holy woman sadly forgot who she was and to whom she was speaking. She brought down on herself a solemn rebuke and had to learn a lesson which probably made a lasting impression. Alas, how great a matter a little fire ignites! This all started with a little overanxiety about the "need" to fix The Lord His supper - to "serve" Him, not just sit there at His feet, doing NOTHING!

“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things” (Lu. 10:41). The Lord’s words are very striking. Beloved friends, if you are busy about many things, you will not only be busy, but troubled. Martha, we read, “was cumbered with much serving”; and she was not only “encumbered,” but also “troubled”- -it weighed upon her. If you have service that weighs you down, look to it; see well why it is. Plainly that very character would put you along with Martha there.

Let us observe, for another thing, what a snare to our souls the cares of this world may be if they are allowed to take up too much attention. It is clear from the tone of the passage before us that Martha allowed her anxiety over providing suitable entertainment for our Lord to carry her away. Her excessive zeal for temporal provisions made her forget for a time the things of her soul. She was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made (verse 40).

“ ‘Lord, do You not care’ ” (Martha agitated herself and then blamed her sister and then Jesus!) (Another clue?)

“left me to do all the serving alone” (Ahh, looks like another "clue")!

“tell her to help me” This is an AORIST ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. ("Order her and do it now!" - yet another clue)

She is ordering Jesus to order her sister to stop listening to the Word and to begin to "serve" Him!

“ ‘Lord, do You not care’ ”

Clue #2: If you 'feel' that despite all you do for "Him", He doesn't take good enough care of you, that you "suffer" and "nobody" cares, you are functioning in Human Religious Morality.

“left me to do all the serving alone” (Ahh, looks like another "clue")!

Clue #3: Bragging and complaining.

“tell her to help me” This is an AORIST ACTIVE IMPERATIVE.

Clue #4: Losing your temper with others and with God is a sure sign your "service" is designed to bring you glory rather than Him.

Let us observe, third, what a solemn rebuke our Lord Jesus Christ gave to his servant Martha. Like a wise doctor, our Lord saw the disease which was preying on Martha and at once prescribed the remedy. Like a caring parent, he exposed the fault into which his erring child had fallen and did not spare the rebuke that was needed.

I think there must have been real sympathy when He repeated her name and referred to her worry and anxiety that He should have a well-cooked and tasty meal.

“Mary,” He declared, “hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

This was the one thing needful, or one thing whereof there is need. It was not personal salvation to which He referred, or which drew Mary to His feet.

Loving God is listening to God - the "food" for your Spiritual Life.

He responds tenderly but firmly and instructs in the process - she is a Believer. The double address "*Martha, Martha*" indicates caring emotion and a rebuke, all in the same address, as such an address does elsewhere (6:46; 8:24; 13:34; 22:31). Jesus questions her because of her activity and because of her attitude about it: "*You are worried and upset about many things.*"

"*Only one thing is needed.*" With this remark Jesus sets priorities. "*Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*"

“And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word” (vs. 39). The Lord takes her up to signify His entire approbation as to where she was and what she was.

He has a reproof for Martha’s service, but has only approbation for Mary’s simply sitting at His feet.

“But *one* thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (vs. 42).

Only “one thing.” To what a little point would that diminish all "encumbrance and anxiety" if we realized it: only “one thing”!

How many distractions would our hearts be free from if we only recognized and bowed to the truth of the Lord's words. There are a great many needs in this busy world; there are a great many duties that Christians think they have to society, to their neighbors, and most of all, to their God and His Church.

The Lord here would bring our hearts from every thing simply to one — and that one, to sit at His feet and hear His Word!

Don't you feel as if that would leave service out altogether?

How is it possible that only one thing is needful, and Mary had chosen that very part, when there are so many things to do?

Are we to leave out service to the Lord?

What does it mean?

It is this: That the thing which is to be our care is that *we receive from the Lord Jesus*. And if we receive — if we are receiving -- service, and everything else, will take care of itself.

I do not mean that you won't serve. You will. But I say this: That if your care is not for service, but to be receiving from Him, you will find that that "one thing" which the Lord speaks of embraces all the rest.

What our Father wants from us is receptiveness. He wants in us the capacity to receive. "You take care," the Lord says, "to receive of Me. Come and drink; and he that believeth on Me (faith being that receptive character in the soul), out of his inner being shall flow rivers of living water."

Service, true Godly service for the Lord, "flows", it needs no pump of Morality or Religious Motivation to come forth, it is "natural" - "Spiritually Natural" - flowing from the Reservoir of Righteousness that we all possess by the New Birth.

You will serve without "knowing" you are serving.

No "schedule" to serve, no "planning" to serve, no "list" of things to do - just "living" will produce it, if you are "walking by means of the Spirit"

If rivers of living water flow out of you, this means both testimony and service, surely.

It implies real ministry to others, and that God is to get His own from you in the world.

But if this is to be true of you, what are the means by which it is to be accomplished?

You are to come and drink; you are to come and receive from Him as Mary did, and you shall find that in this “*one thing needful*” all other things are contained and from this “*one thing needful*” all other things are produced.

"Even amid a ruined world, paradise is returned again for him who takes this place at Jesus' feet — this place of happy dependence to which there is no lack.

You see, the fullness is His, it is not ours. People have the idea that grace in a man is a sort of thing that God puts as it were a seed into the soul, and it is to grow and grow, and develop there into more, so that he has consciously more and more.

That is not it at all. Surely I do not mean to say that a man is not born of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, and that as so born he does not grow.

Surely he does; but that is another thing. From the very beginning of growth this ought to be true of us." -

Stanford

Jesus commends the hearing of the word at his feet. To take time out to relate to Jesus is important. The language of the passage recalls Deuteronomy 8:3. In a sense Mary is preparing to partake in the “right meal” (Deut 6:1–8).

What she has done by sitting at Jesus’ feet will remain with her. This meal will last. Jesus is condemning Martha’s activity as He commends Mary’s. He is saying that her priorities are in order. To disciples Jesus says, “Sit at my feet and devour my teaching. There is no more important meal.”

An illustration from Douty:

"I remember hearing of a dear father who had lost his wife. She had left him one daughter, and he loved to have her with him; but being a busy man they could have only their evenings together. He would come home from work, and after dinner they would spend several hours together, and one or the other would read; then she would play and sing for him. He found his greatest solace in the company of his darling child. It was getting along towards the end of the year, and the daughter said to him one evening, "You will excuse me tonight, father; I have something I should do in my room."

The next night it was the same thing, and the next, and the next, much to his disappointment. But he had to get used to it, and he did not like to ask her what she was doing that she had to leave him alone. Finally it was Christmas morning, and she came into his room and called, "Merry Christmas, Dad!" She handed him a pair of crocheted slippers which she had made for him. He said after he had thanked her, "I would much rather have had you with me all those lonely evenings than to have these slippers, beautiful and comfortable as they are."

I think our Lord says that to us. We are trying to please Him by much serving, but I am afraid He will say to many of us, "You have spent so many hours in service when I would rather have had you at My feet. You were not there when I wanted to share many secrets with you." May we learn more and more the blessedness of communion with Him!" - Douty

We should observe, lastly, what high commendation our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced on Mary's choice. We read that he said, "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (verse 42). There is a profound truth here. These words were not just spoken for Mary's benefit, but for the benefit of all Christ's believing people everywhere. They were meant to encourage all true Christians to be single-minded and wholehearted—to follow the Lord completely and to walk closely with God—to go to the source of Living Water if we are to have the Living Water flow from us.

42. "What is better." This is a general expression and should be interpreted in the light of Mary's behavior when her sister accused her. Mary chose what was for the benefit of her soul. She was seeking more grace. She was striving after closer communion with God and his Christ. This was the portion which she preferred to everything else and to which she was willing to postpone all earthly care. Those who seek such a portion will never be disappointed. Their treasure will never be taken from them.

“He came down here for your birth; now He would draw you to Himself for your growth. Mr. Stoney ever points upward:

The love of the Lord Jesus culminates in this, that we should be with Him where He is. He died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with *Him* (1 Thess. 5:10).

I find that the one who is set on usefulness (Martha) does not advance like the one set on personal love for and fellowship with Him (Mary). The Lord give us to be more personally attached to Himself where He is; then we shall be useful according to His good pleasure down here.

The heart that is captivated by an object could never be at rest until it was with the one who had won it; for satisfaction you must be where He is. Love really does not think of anyone but its Object until it is quite sure of its position with Him; and then when at rest about itself it studies the mind and heart of the Object.

*J.B. Stoney:*

*“Mary . . . sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His Word. But Martha was encumbered about much serving” (Luke 10:39, 40).*

A malingering student will make a poor servant; a diligent student will make a good servant. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15).

“Do not look for service, look for preparation for it. Everyone has to serve an apprenticeship. We do not know what we are to be fitted for, but if we keep at His feet He will prepare us for the very thing for which He has designed us. We hinder both ourselves and His work by attempting things to which we have not been called.”

“If you begin with serving (as many do nowadays), you will never truly sit at His feet; whereas if you begin with looking unto Him you will soon serve well, wisely and acceptably. When the serving quiets the conscience, and the sitting is overlooked and neglected, the enemy gains an advantage, for it is at the sitting that the conscience is enlightened, and the pleasure and mind of the Lord become better known. I never met with anyone making his service prominent who knew what it was to sit at the Master’s feet; but, thank God, I know indefatigable workers who enjoy sitting at His feet above any service.

It is clear that those who abide in Him must be most competent to serve, and most in His confidence, which, after all, is the clue to all effective service” -J.B.S.

*“Behold as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters... so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God” (Ps. 123:2).*

“Martha gets instruction; we all get that, for our Lord neglects none of us; but she did not get His company; company is what gives rest to the heart.”

“Nothing can separate the believer from the love of God, and under no circumstances whatever can he come under the infliction of wrath from God. He may have to correct His saints for their sins, and where there has been no failure He may chasten (child train) them for their profit, that they may become partakers of His holiness; but all this is in love, not in wrath. Every action of God toward His saints is in grace and blessing; it is ever the outcome of His love.”

*“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).* Miles J. Stanford

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).*

Ignorance insures insecurity; scriptural knowledge secures strength. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

“In mechanics, wobbling is weakness. Power issues from God’s restfulness. Are we resting in the Lord? Can we wait patiently for Him to act? Anxiety reduces spiritual energy. Lack of rest of heart is one of the most serious hindrances to Christians.

Douty:

“While Martha was cumbered about much serving, and *her* love, most true in its way, went forth in actively providing for the Lord’s outward need, Mary, unconsciously perhaps, proved her stronger faith and deeper love by sitting at His feet and drinking in His words. The thought of Martha’s heart was, What a feast I must give the Messiah, when I receive Him at my home!

“Mary, on the contrary, felt that the best feast for Him, and for herself, was to receive and treasure up all she could from Him—to see, and hear, and be with Him. If we are learning thus from the Lord Jesus, we honor and please Him incomparably more than by anything we think to confer upon Him. In the long run, too, it is the listening at His feet which best fits for the most acceptable worship and service.” - J.N.D.

“We should ever remember that Christianity is not a set of opinions, a system of dogmas, or a number of views; it is pre-eminently a living reality—a personal, practical, powerful thing, telling itself out in all the scenes and circumstances of daily life, shedding its hallowed influence over the entire character and course, and imparting its heavenly tone to every relationship which one may be called of God to fill.

“In a word, it is that which flows from being associated and occupied with the Lord Jesus. This is Christianity. There may be clear views, correct notions, sound principles, without any fellowship with the Lord Jesus in glory; but an orthodox creed without communion with Him will prove to be a cold and barren thing.” -C.H.M.

Stoney:

When I rest in the Lord Jesus, then I begin to find all my joy and strength in Him, and I occupy myself with Him. This is the first step, or the foundation of true devotedness. I do not become devoted in the true sense until I have found rest in Him. I am, up to this, rather looking to receive from Him. I am more an object to myself; but when I find how fully I am an object to Him, then my heart is at liberty to make Him its object, He having made me His.

A great deal of what is apparently devotedness is an effort to obtain a sense of His interest in one; it is a devotedness to obtain intimacy, instead of a devotedness resulting from intimacy. Hence work is resorted to as affording a kind of joy, according as there is success; but the acts done with a motive of this kind betray their source in that the doer is more occupied with success than with assurance of the Lord Jesus' approval, and is consequently dependent on good results for cheer and encouragement.

Nothing can be plainer than that if I desire to be devoted to a person, my first work must be to be well acquainted with that one - and for this I must sit at His feet and learn of Him by His Word. Of this Mary is an example, when she sat at His feet and heard His words. Martha, on the other hand, had zeal and ability, but instead of seeking to understand what was on His mind, she cumbered herself with a very useful service, but one which was suggested by her own mind.

Every servant who has ever known the “good part” can trace in his own course how often he has made this mistake and addressed himself to something apparently, and in his judgment, a most useful undertaking and service, and afterwards found how arduous and uncompensating it was to his spirit. While, on the other hand, surely the true heart knows well that there is nothing equal to the rewards it receives from the Lord Jesus, when simply and exclusively occupied with Himself, and seeking His mind and thoughts. - JBS

“But Unto Him” (Coates)

No man could have a better moral and religious record than Job in the Old Testament and Paul in the New; but both these men were brought into the presence of God, and each one found that his best bit was corrupt. And it was not just God’s estimate, but their own estimate of them selves in God’s presence. Job cried, “I abhor myself”; and Paul states, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). If you have learned to abhor yourself, you will easily understand that if you are to be before the Father “holy and without blame” and in divine acceptance, it must be on the ground that you are in the acceptance of *another man*.

Now I ask, Is there *another* man? That is the very question that the Gospel answers. Yes, thank God, there is another Man! One who has been to the Cross to take up the whole question of sin and its consequences, and to maintain 'in connection therewith everything that is due to the glory of God. As you think of *Him* in His life, death, and session in glory, are you not delighted to think of standing in the acceptance of that Man?

Now, through God's rich grace, knowing the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we enter by the Holy Spirit into the joy of this new position. Our Father has set us before Him in the acceptance and beauty of the One in whom He has found all His delight, and has given us His Spirit that we might rest in that acceptance.

You may ask, then, has God simply ignored our sinful condition as children of Adam in giving us this wondrous acceptance? No, that sinful state which has cost you so much grief and struggle — which you have not been able to ignore — has been fully taken into account by God, and dealt with to His perfect satisfaction.

It has been brought before Him at the Cross, and has received its full and righteous condemnation there. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, *condemned sin* in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

Is that living Person now in heavenly glory really the Object of your heart?

For some time after I knew the Saviour I used to think of Him as One who had lived and died on earth long years ago, and I well remember the day when I knelt down with a dear brother who prayed that we might know the Lord Jesus as a living Person in heavenly glory, and it dawned upon me that there was a present Object for my heart in heaven. Your heart will never be satisfied until that glorified Person becomes its Object-bright and fair.

“The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). Now, are we living unto Him? Do our lives in some small degree bear the impress of true devotedness? Note that it is "unto" Him, not "for" Him.

You may ask what has often been said, that this is all very well for people who have nothing to do but to go about' preaching, but that the trials and difficulties of practical, everyday life ' render it all but impossible for most Christians. But this is a great misconception. To begin with, the only thing which a believer has to do in this world — whether he breaks stones on the road-side or preaches to thousands — is to live unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the trials and difficulties which so many complain of, are intended for the very purpose of *helping* and not *hindering* devotedness to Him. Martha could no doubt say, "My beloved is mine"; but Mary had tasted the deeper joy of ' confessing, "I am my beloved's." It is one thing to say, Christ for me, and another to say, Me for Christ. The latter is true devotedness. — C.A. Coates

Stoney:  
Sit To Serve

While it is comparatively easy to convict the idle and slothful, it is not so easy to convict the active Martha that she is unwisely occupied. The work seems so right and so necessary, that it appears almost impossible that there could be any personal plan in it.

Nothing so deceives and leads astray as the conscience working at a distance from the Lord Jesus. For instance, if I feel in my conscience that I ought to be His servant (true enough, I am His bondsman), but if I am not near Him, if I am not in personal fellowship with Him, I may begin to do something to satisfy my conscience, and if so I do it legally, and not as what simply suits Him.

I do it to make my conscience easy and satisfied. When this is the case I do not consult what *He* would like me to do, but I do what I think best to be done. It is not His pleasure that guides me, it is my own mind, as to what is suitable and proper. It may be quite a necessary service as Martha's was, but Martha was evidently thinking of the services which were incumbent on her to render, and was not governed by His pleasure.

Clue #6: If you "serve the Lord" because of "conscience" -- the "need" to repay Him, you have not yet sat long enough at His feet to hear His Word.

Here is where we fail — undertaking to serve where it is in a degree creditable to ourselves, and we thus get disappointed (if we are true-hearted) because we have not the acknowledgement of His pleasure. It is evident when I am occupied with services, however useful and necessary, which I have undertaken of myself, feeling that they devolve upon me, that I am not sitting at His feet, Mary-like. There is no growth in Him — the flesh is in the service.

Clue #7: What he said.

It is most blessed to work for the Lord Jesus, but if my work engrosses me more than Himself, then I am not really working for Him: "Without Me ye can do nothing." If I am truly working for Him, I am drawing *from* Him, and growing in Him. Sitting at His feet is the natural posture of my soul. When one is sitting at His feet, hearing His Word, he will not be behind in true service — pleasing to Him.

If you begin with service, as most do, you will not sit at His feet; whereas if you begin with sitting at His feet, you will soon serve well, wisely, and acceptably.

Clue #8: "It is most blessed to work for the Lord Jesus, but if my work engrosses me more than Himself, then I am not really working for Him: "Without Me ye can do nothing." If I am truly working for Him, I am drawing *from* Him, and growing in Him."

When the serving quiets the conscience, and the sitting is overlooked and neglected, the enemy gains an advantage; for it is at the sitting that the conscience is enlightened, and the pleasure and mind of the Master become better known.

I never met with anyone making his service prominent who knew what it was to sit at the Master's feet; but, thank God, I know indefatigable workers who enjoy sitting at His feet above any service; and it is clear that those who sit most at His feet must be most competent to serve, and most in His confidence, which is *the clue* to all efficient service. — J.B. Stoney

The love of the Lord Jesus culminates in this, that we should be with Him. He died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him (1 Thess. 5:10). I find the one who is set on usefulness (Martha) does not advance like the one set on personal affection for and fellowship with Him (Mary). The Lord give us to be more personally attached to Himself where He is; then we shall be useful according to His good pleasure. --J. B. S.

***Here is how many attempt to rationalize the rebuke that Martha received:***

***"Looking to Jesus: Mary and Martha (10:38–42)\****

Balancing work and reflection is tricky. Most people in Western cultures are forced to live harried lives. Often their full schedules are full of “good” activity, labor that has merit. One of the demands of a full schedule is that the activity be prioritized. Some things come high on the list; others must wait. Sometimes priorities have to be shuffled at the last minute to meet needs. The account of Martha and Mary is about such priorities, especially when the options are good ones.

...the point is not that activity like Martha's is bad. The choice Jesus discusses with Martha is between something that is good and something that is better. Life is full of tough choices, and Jesus is stressing the relative merits of good activities here. For conscientious people, such choices are often the most difficult and anxiety-filled."

Those who attempt to rationalize their "service" must come up with such an argument, but they miss one absolute that Jesus was most careful to include - "*only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Not what you have chosen Martha, but what Mary has chosen -- it is not BOTH, it is ONE: Learn from His Word - the Meat and Drink for the Spiritual Life!