

Are You Telling God to Shut Up?

by Joyce Rodgers

Returning from yet another speaking engagement, I promised myself: "I'll do it tomorrow. I really mean it this time." Despite my exhaustion, I rested comfortably that night. As daylight broke, I rose to pray and then began my morning routine. My mind was racing as I rehearsed my to-do list. How can I get all of this done in one day? I thought. With so much to do and another trip scheduled, I've got to start these errands, or I'll run out of time.

At that moment the decision was made: "I'll run my errands now, and then I'll check on my ailing neighbor later today."

As I backed out of my driveway, I spotted my two good friends in the rearview mirror. Bev and Anna were sharing a cup of coffee as they sat peacefully enjoying the morning.

"Good morning!" I shouted excitedly, waving to them. "Tell Diane I'm coming by later today! I can't stop now!"

A sick feeling in my stomach stopped me cold as I looked at their faces. I quickly learned that our friend died days before. With her last ounce of strength, she wrote letters to her husband, to her children and to me.

In the midst of shock and regret, I asked myself: "How is it that I missed being there in such a time of need? We met many times before and shared so many prayerful, worshipful and celebrated moments together. How could I have missed the last earthly opportunity to be with my friend?"

How often does this scenario occur in the everyday lives of well-meaning, Spirit-filled Christians? With our conferences, church-growth seminars, "instantaneous anointing" services and

building projects, how many times do we miss an opportunity for genuine ministry both outside and inside the walls of our churches?

I am reminded of the time when Jesus visited Mary and Martha in their home. It was Martha who welcomed Jesus. Martha loved Jesus and wanted to be around Him, as did Mary. It is clear Martha wanted to be associated with Jesus. But did she really want to be with Him?

Unfortunately, there are millions of Marthas among us today. We are comfortable being around the church, yet we do not yearn to be in the presence of the Lord. Though God desires for us to worship Him in the "inner court," our minds are distracted. Our cell phones are going off; our appointment books are filling up.

Through her "ministry of busyness," Martha prepared for Jesus instead of spending time with Him. She was a meticulous hostess but a poor servant. As a result of her adjusting the flower arrangement, straightening the furniture and setting the table, she ignored her guest, our Lord.

Consequently, Martha failed to listen to what Jesus had to say. She missed the opportunity to hear the intimate things He whispered. The ministry Jesus desired for her house would take place as she hurriedly rushed by.

In response to Martha's actions, Jesus said: "'You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better'" (Luke 10:41-42, NIV).

The one thing Jesus desired, Martha didn't have: time. Time to minister. Time for her to listen to the divine plan He had for her. Time for Him to express His love for her.

When was the last time you sat in the presence of the Lord, not to ask something of Him, but simply to listen?

Has God expressed His pleasure toward you lately? How can He do so unless you spend time with Him? Is the day you have planned one you ordered, or have you consulted God?

The only way we can really know we're on track is to stop our activity long enough to listen. If we aren't careful, we can miss God's voice on our road to destiny, despite our ministry for Him.

Take a step back from your day-to-day activities. Step away from your cell phone and your busy schedule and ask yourself, "Have I chosen what is best?"

When we listen, we can begin effective ministry. Real ministry must extend beyond church work and religious obligations. Real ministry is adopting the posture of Mary, taking the time to sit at Jesus' feet and listen.

While we sit, we minister to Him; while we listen, He ministers to us about people such as my friend Diane. Jesus is waiting to talk with you. Are you listening? Joyce Rodgers is the founder of Primary Purpose Ministries based in Denton, Texas. A highly sought-after evangelist, she is the international youth department chairwoman for the 5.5 million-member Church of God in Christ.