

How Mary and Martha's Famous Story Can Help You Make a Strong Spiritual Start in 2020

A brand-new year lies before us. Though God has ordained the days before us, He allows us to paint each page with our own unique colors. Knowing this, it's great to pause and reflect before entering.

Every year between Christmas and New Year's Day, I take a day of prayer and personal reflection. This year, I'm actually taking two days for quiet, prayer, worship and listening for God's voice. I have been meditating on the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42).

I can hear you groaning. You know the story so well. Those of us who have been more like Martha have been shamed and condemned for being busy. Sigh.

Here's the thing: Guilt doesn't motivate. It condemns. Rather than leading each other down a guilt trip, let's all admit we're a lot like Martha, and Jesus loved her as much as He loved Mary. However, Mary made a great choice in this story. Did she always make great choices? Probably not. But on this particular day, as Jesus was visiting in her home, Luke writes that "Mary sat down attentively before the Master, absorbing every revelation He shared" (Luke 10:39b, TPT). Jesus said about her, "She is undistracted" (Luke 10:42b).

As I've been reflecting on this story, I realize how easily I become distracted from God's primary purpose for my life, which is to love God and love others. How can I love God well if I don't give Him my undivided attention? How can I love others well if I am not fully present when listening to them?

As you step into the new year, you probably have desires and dreams. You likely have a few goals. May I suggest that you make one of your goals to live a listening life this year? Live with an ear tuned to God and others. Seek to live an undistracted life.

Along those lines, I'd like to suggest that you take a day of prayer and reflection. If you're distracted by all that needs to be done in your home, go to someone else's home. The key is to get alone with God.

Here are a few ideas to help you structure your day:

Bring some worship music. Spend time worshipping and praising God. Allow the music to prompt your praise. Sink deeply into His love for you.

Practice short intervals of silence. In those moments, choose a phrase to help you settle your spirit, such as "Jesus is my life" or "Jesus, I'm ready to listen." Then sit in absolute stillness before the Lord.

Open your Bible. Read a short passage and consider what God might be speaking to you through that passage. Write down anything you feel God is speaking. Focus on being fully attentive to God.

Use a journal and take inventory. Ask yourself some key questions. How are you feeling about life? How are you feeling in your relationship with God? Is there anything you need to confess? Write your feelings and ask God how to interpret those feelings. Think through the key relationships in your life. Is there tension in any of them? What can you control, and what can you not control? Invite the Holy Spirit to cleanse you of any bitterness or unforgiveness. Ask Him to fill you with renewed love. Ask God if you need to have an honest conversation, even if it means stirring up conflict to gain a stronger relationship. Then ask the Lord where He wants you to listen more attentively in those relationships. Ask Him

to teach you to be more fully present to those you love. Spend time praying for each of the key people in your life.

Enjoy beauty. No matter where you live, you can find the beauty of God's creation. Your soul needs beauty to find rest. If you live near the beach, take a walk. If you live in the mountains, take a hike or gaze at the beauty of snow softly falling. If you live in the desert, observe the beauty of the different desert plants. The key is to slow down and spend a few quiet moments soaking in the beauty of God's creation.

Friend, the truth is, you can't zoom through life without anchoring your soul in the love and presence of God. As you spend time alone in His presence, you will find yourself more focused, less distracted, more secure and less frazzled. If you'd like a more complete guide on how to spend a day in prayer and reflection, email me at becky@ and I will send you a short e-book on how to spend the day with Jesus. {eoa}

Becky Harling, an author, certified speaker, leadership coach and trainer with the John Maxwell Team, is an energetic and motivational international speaker inspiring audiences to overcome their greatest life challenges and reach their full, God-given potential. Her most recent book is *Who Do You Say That I Am?* Her husband, Steve Harling, is the president of *Reach Beyond*, a nonprofit organization seeking to be the voice and hands of Jesus around the world. Connect with Becky at , Facebook or Twitter.

This article originally appeared at .