

Relationships 101: What You Can Learn From Mary and Martha

Are we too heavenly minded to be any earthly good?

This is often said of people who talk about God a lot but are not practically helpful. Think of Mary and Martha. Maybe Martha was the first one to come up with the saying as she fumed in the kitchen at her sister Mary.

In Luke 10:38-42 we find the story of the Bethany sisters and a tense interaction that occurs between them. Martha was doing what was expected of her; she was following hospitality traditions, serving Jesus and His disciples. There was a lot of work to do feeding so many mouths; it was no wonder she felt stressed. Then to top it off, Mary, who should have been assisting, was distracted with Jesus.

Here we have a perfect example of Relationships 101.

Relationships can bring us great joy, or they can be our biggest stressor. Often, we can be emotionally reactive to the environment around us due to internal triggers. Martha was possibly wanting to sit with Jesus herself, but her need to be practical clouded her priorities. This led to resentment against her sister that boiled over into terse words. I don't know about you, but I have had a few Martha moments in life—I get her.

Now Jesus, clever as always, uses this moment to teach not only Martha but hundreds of generations since how to deal with relationship stress. His response to Martha's distress is the key we all need to hear: "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one" (Luke 10:41b-42a, NIV). In this passage of Scripture, Jesus gets to

the heart of the matter in a second. Putting relationships first is our priority.

Hang on, doesn't that mean that Mary was too heavenly minded? After all, she still wasn't helping! The fact is that Mary was taking a moment to be refreshed by Jesus so that she could be more practically helpful. When we operate our lives like this, we are more at peace and become less flustered like Martha. Being heavenly minded allows us to be earthly good.

When we become drained, we become reactive and head down the road of burnout. Mary was practicing self-care by learning how to live from Jesus (sounds smart when we think about it). When we live life like Mary, we increase our capacity and can function better spirit, soul and body. This is what Jesus was getting at when He responded to Martha that Mary had chosen the better part (v. 42).

Relationships are vital to God. The Godhead operates in relationship; we likewise operate in relationship with Him and with each other. It is a crucial area that we should be constantly learning about and developing in. Yet we often become so hurried in our goal-orientated and status-driven lives (yes, even Christians) that we forget the importance of them. When they are not going well, we are deeply impacted, and we can do great damage with careless words and misplaced emotions.

How can we safeguard our relationships? It really begins with us and Jesus—just as with Mary. Philippians 4:6-7 is a key Scripture—a formula that helps protect our minds and emotions: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This is exactly what Mary was doing at the feet of Jesus that day. Her desire to be more heavenly minded was to help her be more earthly good to those she loved by receiving

all that Jesus had for her and them.

To find out more about successful relationships listen to Episode 10 of *Abiding Matters* on Charisma Podcast Network.

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