

TWO SIDES OF BEING A MOTHER

LUKE 10:38-42; JOHN 12:1-3

May 8, 2016

Introduction

Moms come in many different packages. One size does not fit all when it comes to being a mom.

The Caretaker Within the Family

Martha and example of one who cares (Luke 10:38-42)

Luke 10:38 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. 41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village – Bethany was a small town two miles east of Jerusalem. John’s Gospel names the village of Lazarus, Martha and Mary as Bethany.

...and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house - Martha was probably the eldest of Mary and Lazarus as she takes the lead in conversations at the supper in Luke 10 and at Lazarus death in John 11. “*Martha received him into her house.*” Some commentators believed that Martha owned the house as the phrase “into her house” might imply ownership. However, ownership of property by women was not commonplace in the first century, conversely, the Romans held no such rule. It might imply that Martha was the authority of the house as the elder. She might have been a widow, and seeing that Lazarus and Mary were younger, they lived with her. Therefore, it would be her place to welcome guests and be in charge of the household. This might also show us why she was so diligent in that role of taking care of the household affairs in the home.

Homes in the first century were quite small by today’s standard. Typically, they were one room buildings with the roof being used for storage and sleeping when necessary. Now Jesus and those with him would have been crammed into this small space amplifying the stress of the situation as Martha took the role of the “woman” of the house, or the hostess, entertaining and preparing a meal for Jesus and His followers. Let us suffice to say that Martha was facing a wonderful but serious challenge for a group this size. Juggling her desire to cook, which was no easy task, entertain, and to be part of this wonderful gathering would have been difficult to say the least. But this is where we find the story. She obviously considered her reputation was at stake. If this did not go well, she would be the one to carry the shame.

The Spiritual Force Within the Family

39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. 40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word – In the hustle and bustle of visiting guests, Martha is extremely busy and Mary is not. Mary had taken the customary position of a disciple, sitting at the feet of their teacher. The Apostle Paul stated that he had been “...brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).

Lost in all the activity, we find that Jesus did not waste a minute in His mission as He was teaching those with him, and Mary was listening intently.

We do not hear of any conversation between Martha and Mary, but it appears that Martha probably asked Mary for some help, but Mary continued at Jesus feet.

40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving – I always thought that the word “cumbered” meant that she was carrying the weight of doing all the serving. However, “cumbered” means to be distracted. So a better reading would be, “But Martha was distracted from hearing the teachings of Jesus because her concentration was on the temporal things.

...and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me – You can hear the stress in her words, “dost thou not care?” Of course the answer is yes He cares. But that is not the problem. The problem and the cure was in the house.

Martha became frustrated and interrupted Jesus teaching with a human request, “Can’t you see that I am working my fingers to the bone, with no help, and Mary just sits there. Don’t you think she is in the wrong? Do something.”

Before we go on, can you sympathize with Martha? Can you support Mary in her decision?

I think we all have felt we have been wronged by the inaction of others. I know there have been times where I have felt that I was being taken advantage of. If you have siblings, I am sure you can remember your brother and sister getting away with a lot and you always got the short end of the stick.

I have several observations concerning both Martha and Mary:

- a. Martha’s eyes were on the temporal needs of her guests. She readily took on the role of a person having the gift of helps. She saw the need and she responded with her abilities and talents.
- b. Mary’s eyes were on Jesus, the Messiah, and on no other. She readily took on the role of a student, gleaning all she could at the feet of Jesus. She saw an opportunity to gain in wisdom and knowledge in the teachings of Jesus.
- c. Martha soon became stressed as she attempted to care for Jesus and His followers and was feeling the load of responsibility.
- d. Mary calmly sat at the feet of Jesus, she saw an oasis in the middle of all the activity of the house to hear the Rabi teach.
- e. Martha’s whole being was centered on the needs of those present
- f. Mary’s whole being was centered on learning from the Savior
- g. Both of these ladies were doing what came naturally to them.

It Takes Two

41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

The word “careful” in the Greek means “careful to avoid a mishap or mistake.” And the word “troubled” in the Greek means “disturbed, troubled in mind.” We get the word *turbulence* from this Greek word *turbazo*.

The Faithlife Study Bible comments:

Jesus tells Martha that instead of being in the wrong, Mary was actually in the right. While Martha was weighed down and worried about serving everyone, her sister was engaged in the most important thing in life: spending time in Jesus’ presence and receiving His word (Luke 10:41–42).

We see that Martha had made a classic mistake—one that we all routinely make. She presumed that serving Jesus was more important than spending time with Him.¹

(Wiersbe, 1991)

Mary of Bethany is seen three times in the Gospel record, and on each occasion, she is in the same place: at the feet of Jesus. She sat at His feet and listened to His Word (Luke 10:39), fell at His feet and shared her woe (John 11:32), and came to His feet and poured out her worship (John 12:3). It is interesting to note that in each of these instances, there is some kind of fragrance: in Luke 10, it is food; in John 11, it is death (John 11:39); and in John 12, it is perfume.²

Conclusion

Today as we celebrate Mother’s Day, I would like to conclude with the following thoughts.

It appears that today’s Christian mother must make a decision on what type of Mother\Christian they are to be: more like Martha, worker with a gigantic heart for others, or like Mary who is a worshiper of Jesus Christ.

May I say that the best Moms are those that can balance the Martha and Mary side of their personalities.

Charles Wesley (1747) wrote many hymns. One of those is titled, “Lo! I Come with Joy”

Faithful to my Lord’s commands,

I still would choose the better part;

Serve with careful Martha’s hands,

And loving Mary’s heart.

¹ Barry, J. D., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 213). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

