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LEADER'S GUIDE

MARTHA, MARTHA • QUIET TIMES



Photograph by Greg Schneider/Worldwide Challenge

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

This study focuses on the need for a daily devotional time with the Lord - times where you can pray, read the Scripture, and center your heart and mind on the Lord. Worry and busyness form both the greatest obstacles to these times, as well as the greatest reason we need to have one.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to cru.comm@uscm.org.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

LUKE 10:38-42

The Situation

Jesus has been invited to the house of Mary and Martha, to visit, eat, and perhaps even lodge with them. As Jesus sat, Mary sat as well, and engaged Him in conversation listening and hanging on His every word. In the meantime, Martha is busy making preparations for their House Guest. It's not long before Martha gets agitated that Mary is not helping, but rather is sitting listening to Jesus. As Martha enlists the Lord's help in the dispute, Jesus let's her know that it is she (Martha) who is in the wrong, and not Mary. Martha had chosen worry and busyness, over resting and listening in the presence of Jesus.

Mary and Martha

It's helpful to see that the two women, quite likely, had different personalities. In this passage, we learn that Martha owned the house and not Mary. In John 11, in the healing of Lazarus, Mary is resigned to the death of Lazarus, while Martha wants Jesus to do something. Martha seems to be a competent and busy woman of action. Mary seems more reserved. Thus, it's easier to understand why each gravitated to the place they did in this vignette.

In this story, Martha's activity is a liability. In the story of Lazarus, it is her great strength. The important thing to note, for busy and active people, is their need to slow down and pull away to be with Jesus. While this might not be a natural inclination, it is a necessity.

The Cure for Marthanness

What Martha fundamentally needs is a perspective change. She is "worried about many things." The dynamic of worry is that it elevates peripheral things to the highest priority, creating a loss of perspective. It is ironic that worry and busyness can prevent us from taking time with the Lord, and yet it is only time away with God that causes a renewal of perspective. That is why Jesus gives the simple prescription "that only one thing is really needed," and that is to spend time with Him. Worry makes us think that many things are absolute priorities, when really there is only one.

It is not incidental that this story is followed by Jesus' lessons on prayer. These lessons provide the fundamental attitude change needed to keep perspective. Some of these lessons are, to seek first God's kingdom and His agenda. Another lesson is to

be persistent, not always in actions, but in prayer. This is the primary way we are to be assertive. Jesus also teaches that we are to bring to God all of the things that are of concern to us, and entrust them to His care. As we follow these prescriptions in prayer, all of the other issues and worry begin to take their proper place and priority.

Jesus is Our Portion

In verse 41, the passage more literally reads, “Mary has chosen the better portion.” The word “portion” is rich with Old Testament background that adds additional insight into what Jesus is saying. First, the word “portion” referred to a tithe (Numbers 18:28,29). This evokes the idea of giving our best portion of time, when our minds are freshest, to the Lord. In this sense, it also speaks of apportioning a healthy amount of time to God to focus our hearts and minds on Him.

Second, the word “portion” speaks of food, daily provision, and sustenance (Psalm 73:26). Busyness and worry tend to provide their own food that raise our energy level and propel us. In contrast, we are to be energized by the Lord. He is to be the food for our souls. When other things provide that motivational food, our souls, in many ways, become sick and undernourished, resulting in a loss of perspective.

Jesus is telling Martha that she has gone to the wrong food source, and that what she needs is to “taste,” instead, of the Lord.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

None apparent.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

The focus of this study has been the need to spend time daily with the Lord. The study contains several points of application. One application is to have the group implement some of the ideas that are shared for what to do in a daily devotional time. Strongly encourage the group to devote the first “portion” of their day to the Lord. Last, you might suggest that the group all read through the same book of the Bible over the course of the week. You could begin next week’s study with some sharing time of what God has been teaching the group through their quiet times.

MEMORY VERSE

Luke 10:41 “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.”

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Martha is busy making all of the preparations, and Mary is not giving her any help.
2. See above under Mary and Martha.
3. Allow the group to share their thoughts.
4. Martha's strength is that she gets things accomplished. She's also probably very competent and extremely proactive. The liabilities can be a lack of trust in God, or the ability to stop, wait, and listen to the Lord.
5. Martha's response is somewhat typical of a person who is ensnared in worry and business. No one likes to be in this state, and often we look for someone or something to blame, when we are.
6. Allow the group to share. You might go first with an example from your own life.
7. Martha, in a state of worry, is convinced of the over importance of many things. Jesus tells her that only one thing is truly critical, and that is spending time with Him.
8. Give the group time to look up the verses and record their answers.
9. See above under “Jesus is our Portion.”
10. Worry, agendas and checklists, boyfriends/girlfriends, all can provide alternative energy, focus and motivation for the day.
11. This is a good time to share when and where you have your daily times with God. It would be good to encourage the group to consider the mornings when their minds are the freshest and free from the busyness of the day.
12. Allow the group to share some of things they have found helpful in this regard. Share some of your own insight.
13. Allow the group to share. You might give the group some suggestions or even an assignment for the next week.
14. To seek first God's kingdom and agenda, and to keep our focus there. Another lesson is to be persistent, not always in actions, but in prayer. This is how we need to assert ourselves. Also taking the time to bring to God all of the things that concern us and entrust them to His care.