

Martha & Mary, part 1

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-05-02

Christ's friendship with Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus

Two weeks ago we looked at Rahab - a woman snatched by grace out of the fires of Jericho. Last week we looked at Eve - a woman snatched by Satan out of the glories of Paradise. Today we are going to look at two women whose lives are for the most part exemplary: Martha and her sister, Mary. They were two single women who lived with their single brother, Lazarus, and all three of whom were dearly loved by Jesus. Like the apostle John, they were considered to be His close friends. In John 11:11 Jesus calls Lazarus, "our friend Lazarus." John 11:5 says, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." It doesn't just say that He loved Mary. That is the misconception that some people have from the passage in Luke 10. No, He loved all three. There was something special about all three of these singles that drew Christ's heart out to them in friendship. They showed themselves friendly and Jesus acted as a friend to them.

So before I even look at their personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and unique ministries, I want to comment on two things that most books overlook. The first is that Jesus was human and needed friends. And while he showed great propriety in how he related to these single women, He was friends with them. There is a tendency in our circles to completely shy away from friendships with the opposite sex, but I think that is shortsighted. Having a mix of males and females in our circles and in our friendships adds hugely to the richness of our Christianity.

We saw last week that Eve was not a clone of Adam. God deliberately made her different so that she would be *essential* in the Dominion Mandate - not just in marriage, but in the Dominion Mandate. She was not simply an add-on. We saw that Eve was different than Adam emotionally, physically, socially, sexually, relationally, and economically. Now those differences do mean that we all need to be modest and proper in how we relate to the opposite sex and even exercise extra caution. But the fact of the matter is that Jesus had a very close friendship with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary.

And even though we will be looking at some pretty major personality differences between Martha and Mary, those very differences added richness to all of their relationships. Those very differences (while they occasional brought frustrations, misunderstandings, and irritation) made the friendships deeper, richer, and fuller. And especially within family integrated churches there shouldn't be as much segregation between marrieds and singles, young and old as their sometimes is. We should have propriety and care yes, but let's not exclude from our circles those who are different from us - whether those are age differences, personality differences, or male/female differences. We probably need to emphasize the "integrated" part of the family integrated concept a bit more than sometimes happens. In any case, I think all three of these siblings can teach us something about friendships - what's appropriate and what is not. It's worth a little bit of extra study beyond what I will be giving you this morning. They were good friends. What made them so?

Singles can find fulfillment in God's kingdom

The second thing that I want to point out is that all three of these siblings were singles - and Jesus opened the door wide open for singles to serve in His kingdom. Sometimes singles feel out of place in our family integrated churches, and we need to make sure that does not happen. We need to bend over backwards to make sure that does not happen.

How do commentators know that these three were unmarried? There are five logical proofs that tie in with each other. Luke 10:38 calls the home they were eating in *Martha's* home. For it to be Martha's home rather than a man's home either means that her husband died, divorced her, or that she was never married. There are really no other realistic explanations for that phrase. No matter which of those three explanations you accept, Martha was now single - even if she was at a previous time married. This may also indicate that Lazarus was under-age, though that is debated.

Second, Mary and Lazarus lived in Martha's home. If they themselves were married, it is unlikely (extremely unlikely, given that culture) that they would live in Martha's home. They would have had their own home.

Third, there is no mention of parents or spouses for any of them, even though they all three hang out with Jesus and had Jesus over to their place. There are a couple scholars who believe that Martha was married to Simon the leper in Matthew 26, but I have my reasons for believing that is absolutely impossible.

Fourth, from the birth order implied in John 11:5, we can assume that Mary and Lazarus were younger than Martha. Some (like John MacArthur) have supposed that this means that Mary and Lazarus were very young (possibly even under 20), though I'm not sure we can be certain about that. But the birth order seems to be Martha, then Mary, then Lazarus.

And last, we know that Christ and the apostles lodged at Martha's house (and even Matthew 21:17 seems to be a final allusion to all of them lodging there overnight). If this is true, having that big of a home would seem to imply that she was fairly wealthy. So it is possible that all three of them received an inheritance from their now-deceased parents, and Martha, as the oldest, got the house.

Other than a brief reference in Matthew 21, we basically only have three snapshots that we can derive information from: the Luke 10 passage that I read earlier, the funeral of Lazarus in John 11, and Mary's anointing of Jesus in John 12 - with parallels in Matthew 26 and Mark 14 (though some people debate whether that was a different situation). Some people think that the anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman in Luke 7 is the same anointing as occurred in John 12. John MacArthur takes that position. So some (like MacArthur) think there was only one anointing of Jesus in the Gospels, others (like myself) think there were two, and a few think there were three. If MacArthur is correct, and there was only one anointing, it would completely change the dynamic of the story; that would make Mary out to be a former prostitute. But William Hendriksen and many other conservative commentators give several exegetical proofs (and I think they are proof positive) that Luke 7 and John 12 describe totally different women, in totally different homes, with totally different owners of the home mentioned, on totally different occasions (with Luke 7 being

much earlier), with totally different conversations, and some other major differences between the two accounts. The fact of the matter is that the three siblings were exemplary Christians without any of that kind of past baggage.

But back to my thesis - there is overwhelming evidence that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were all singles.

What difference does that make? It actually makes a *lot* of difference. We don't see Jesus pressuring them to get married, as the rabbis were accustomed to doing and as matchmakers today sometimes tend to do. We don't see Jesus treating them as lesser people, as some of the rabbis of that time did. For example, one rabbi said, "happy is he whose children are male, and woe to him whose children are female."¹ And you ought to see their scathing remarks about older singles. In contrast, Jesus valued these women - as they were. Third, contrary to the dictates of several rabbis of Christ's day, Jesus encouraged women to be part of His theological studies - and we will look at that later. But most importantly, Jesus clearly valued the ministry of single women and reserved a place in His kingdom for singles. The apostle Paul will make the same point in 1 Corinthians 7 - that singles can have a special place of undistracted ministry - and while they are single should take advantage of their providential state to serve - not just to wait. Jesus valued singles and so should we. So this balances what I said last week - that marriage is the norm and singleness is the exception that God calls some people to. We should not downgrade the exceptions. In any case, it is important that we have a theology that fully includes and embraces singles. There is no hint that Jesus demeaned their status.

Further applications from the first snapshot of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42)

But let's dig into the first of the three snapshots of these two remarkable women and draw out some other applications. And I will start by reading Luke 10:38-42 again.

Luke 10:38 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

Note Martha's warm welcome of Jesus. She initiates the welcome. She loves Jesus too, and many interpretations fail to recognize this. Yes, she had a different personality than Mary, but Martha could be very warm as well. She put out the welcome mat. Verse 39.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha,

¹ Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud: Original Text, Edited, Corrected, Formulated, and Translated into English*, vol. 13 (Boston, MA: The Talmud Society, 1918), 53.

Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Misinterpretations of Luke 10:38-42

This text has had an interesting history of interpretation (or misinterpretation). Two early Greek fathers thought that Christ was teaching against gluttony, and that only one dish of food was necessary and that was what Mary had chosen. She had decided it was more important to learn from Christ than to continue eating. Another slight variation is that Mary has the right to eat the good piece of food. But both of those are reading into the text something that is not there.

Roman Catholic scholars have frequently cited this verse to try to prove that the secluded, contemplative life of the monastery and convent is more spiritual and much to be preferred to the secular work that married life brings. And when Christ says, “only one thing is needed” they interpret that as the meditative life of separation from the world. They say, “It’s OK to be a secular Martha, but more spiritual to be a separated Mary.” But it is clear that Mary was not in a convent, and for sure she is not separated from men.

Now on the other hand, some feminists argue that Christ wanted to liberate women from the shackles of the home and to break down the traditional division of labor, not so that they could go to a convent, but so that they could do the things that men do. So they use this to undermine the role relationships we looked at last week. Mary is the liberated feminist for them. So one woman said - this passage liberates women from the shackles of the kitchen into the pursuit of a career.² Well, this says nothing about a career for Mary; nothing. Another feminist thinks she can see in these words a call to women being pastors in the church.³ All of those interpretations are reading something into the passage that is not there.

Context of this passage

Let me give you a hint as to where we are heading. First, this passage does not say that Mary was liberated from the kitchen. She was liberated from *servicing her job rather than servicing the Lord with her job*. There’s a big difference. And that Mary’s job involved serving in the kitchen is hinted at in verse 39 itself. Verse 39 says that Mary “*also* sat at Jesus feet”, implying with that word “also” that she did two things: hospitality *and* learning. And what

² Jeanne Hendriks says she was taught as a child about this passage: “that kitchen work is bad, servile, lowly, and unspiritual.” (*A Woman For All Seasons*, p. 157).

³ “But if one listens—as this passage urges—to the “word of the Lord,” in one’s own experience and that of other women, one may hear behind the text another voice encouraging women’s leadership and reconciliation.” Jane D. Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe, “Gospel of Luke,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Revised and Updated (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 508–509.

Jesus did in this passage is to show us how to be a steward of *both* the job and devotion. He will also show what it is that causes us to be distracted from the purpose of both. That's the essence of my thesis.

Let's set the context a bit to understand why Martha had a temporary lapse. Martha and Mary were very different sisters. But we should not look down on either. While Martha temporarily lost sight of her stewardship in this passage, it is clear that they both loved the Lord. In fact, in John 11 Martha gives the clearest testimony to Christ's person and work of anyone prior to His death, including Peter's testimony. Hers is far more clear than Peter's. So don't tell me that Martha didn't study and understand theology. She did. Likewise, they were both devoted to the Lord, but each was a very unique Christian. And before we look at what went *wrong* in Martha's flare-up, I think it would be helpful to do a little study of their backgrounds and personalities.

The Setting For Martha's Outburst

A. Different Personalities

They had quite different personalities. Mary appears to be the aesthetic and emotionally sensitive person, whereas Martha was more outgoing, managerial, not one to waste any time. She was the practical one. She could very easily fall into the rat race syndrome of modern society where we are too busy with the hustle and bustle of work to stop for a moment and smell the roses and enjoy fellowship. And almost every book that I have looked at would probably agree with the following description of Martha by Francis Vander Velde.

"Martha was a good manager and hard worker and her home was always spotlessly clean and attractive. Martha was the kind of woman we would make chairman of an important committee or president of a ladies group. Not a project would fail, no committee would lag with managing Martha as chairman. No other banquets were held like the kind Martha supervised! All of Bethany knew how capable she was and when they needed advice or help with a supper or village project they called on her and she spared neither time nor energy, for she was a generous, able woman." (Frances Vander Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 167)

And her reference to a village project is taken straight out of John 12 where Simon the former leper had her managing his massive banquet. So Martha had tremendous capabilities. Those skills were recognized by others and she was hired by others. Simon the leper hired her in Matthew 26 to manage his huge banquet - and from the time sequence in Luke we know that it was an incredibly huge banquet.

She also had no problem speaking her mind and shooting straight from the hip. We see that here; we see that in John 11 where she reproaches Christ for not having come sooner. Later she is quick to stop Christ when He wants to move the stone from the tomb of Lazarus. She knows what a stink there will be and she is not the type to let Christ find out for Himself. So she has the strength of being transparent, and telling you exactly what she thinks, but she also the weakness of being too blunt and controlling sometimes.

So there were differences of personality that we need to factor in. Christ in this passage was *not* saying that Martha needed to take on Mary's personality. She did need to *sanctify* her

own personality, but not deny it. She did need to *submit* her personality to the leading and controlling of the Holy Spirit. I'm sure there were some rough edges that she could have refined, and her personality lent itself to this problem, but that was not the issue. We'll be looking at the issue later. But we need to recognize that God uses all sorts of different personalities and doesn't make us all fit into the same mold. We need to avoid a cookie cutter Christianity where we expect all Christians to fit into the same mold. Each Christian is uniquely used by the Lord.

Different Resources

They also had different resources. It was after all, Martha's house, and that in itself might have given rise to differences of opinion on hospitality. She may have felt more responsible as the owner of the house. It might have even made her feel like Mary owes her since Mary is living there. So they had different resources. Martha had skills and gifts that Mary may not have had.

Differing Views On Responsibility

They also had differing views of responsibility. And I want to emphasize as strongly as I can here that both Martha and Mary could look to Scripture to justify what they were doing. Nowhere does Christ condemn her for being involved in hospitality (and too many people have missed that point). It was her *attitude* that He addresses. In fact, hospitality is *commanded* by Scripture. Let's look at that so that we can be clear about what Christ is *not* doing here.

Martha was fulfilling the law

To fail to extend hospitality would have been Biblically unthinkable, and so it is not just Martha who serves. As I've already mentioned, verse 39 implies that Mary had been serving as well. It uses the word "also." Martha gave hospitality. Mary also sat at His feet. She did what Martha did and *also* did something in addition that Martha should have done, but was distracted from doing. It is a total misconception to say that housework or managing the house was not Mary's thing. We can see that Mary serves Jesus with hospitality in John chapter 12.

The Old Testament law commanded hospitality several times. The New Testament does the same. Hebrews 13:2 says, "*Do not forget to extend hospitality.*" - and He is talking to everyone when He says that. Mary is not an exception. In Luke 14 Christ told the crowds not just to extend hospitality to friends and relatives, but also to those who would not be able to invite them back. So Christ expected hospitality as a part of Christianity. Titus 1:8 indicates that an elder's wife should love hospitality as a role model. 1 Peter. 4:9 tells all Christians, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Romans 12:13 includes the phrase "given to hospitality" as one of the characteristics of every believer. So Martha was fulfilling the law. And Mary would not have been praised for laziness or breaking the law. So the hospitality of both was very Biblical. Don't neglect that word "also."

Mary was also fulfilling the law

What about sitting at Jesus' feet? It's true that many Jews of Christ's day would have been shocked by Mary's action. Their attitude very literally would have been, "Why isn't she in the kitchen where she belongs? Women are to be seen and not heard." And though I don't know if this was a minority or a majority viewpoint, let me read you some quotes from noted figures of this period that may indicate that Christ was bucking tradition.

The famous Jewish writer, Philo, said, "all public life with its discussions and deeds . . . (is) proper for men. It is [only] suitable for *women* to live indoors and to live in retirement."⁴ He was a fairly famous and fairly popular writer of that period, and He would have disapproved of Mary sitting here and partaking in these discussions. Rabbi Jose ben Johanan 150 years before Christ said, "talk not much with women." He would have disapproved of *Christ*. The Mishna (which was the oral teachings of the Pharisees of Christ's day) said this: "He that talks much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law." (mAb. 1.5) Rabbi Eliezer said, "If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery" (mSot. 4.3). They didn't have very positive views of what Mary was doing or what Christ was encouraging her to do. In another place rabbi Eliezer said, "It is better that the words of the Law should be burned than that they should be given to a woman" (jSot. 3.4).

And so Christ had a remarkably different attitude than the Pharisees and other rabbis had. They thought that women were to be in the kitchen, not with the teachers. Though Martha had no doubt been taught differently by Christ, I see a little carry over of this prevailing attitude in Martha's comment. It is very easy for us to unconsciously imbibe the thinking of the culture around us. We need to constantly resist that influence. So what did the Old Testament say? It justified Mary. Deuteronomy 31:12 says, "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may *hear* and that they may *learn* to fear the LORD your God and *carefully observe* all the words of this law." Over and over the Old Testament speaks of women being instructed, and in turn instructing their children and servants. The woman of Proverbs 31 was not only a capable Martha (in fact she was a Martha par excellence), but she was also a Mary who studied God's word and was able to open her mouth with wisdom and teach her children and servants the law of God. So both Mary and Martha were doing things prescribed by the law of God for women. The question was, how and when should these things have been done? Balance. Let's look at one last difference.

Differing Languages of Love.

Martha and Mary also had differing views on devotion to Christ. Another way of saying this is that they majored on different languages of love. Some people feel loved the most when they are served, and they tend to express their love the most that way. Other languages of love are physical affection, talking, gift giving, etc. And I think we should all seek to communicate in all the languages of love, but there is a natural tendency to emphasize one

⁴ Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, 169.

over the other. And we see those differences in Martha and Mary. In John 12 it speaks of Martha's devotion to Christ by saying that she served at the banquet. That was an expression of devotion and Matthew 25 says that when we serve food to believers and to our own children we are serving Christ and expressing devotion and love to Him. Mary on the other hand expresses her devotion by pouring perfume on Christ's feet and wiping His feet with her hair. Now Mary didn't spend the whole banquet doing that. She no doubt served food too (and that's probably implied in the plural "they" in John 12:2 - "*they* made Him a supper"), but it shows graphically the different approach the sisters had. Martha appears to be more practical, and Mary more emotional and aesthetic in her devotion.

So you can see how these differences could easily set them up for conflict if they were not careful. And I want to take a look at the minor conflict that they had in this passage because there is much we can learn from it.

Scripture's Analysis of Martha's Outburst (v. 40) - Several applications

Look at verse 40: "But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.'"

What was Martha "distracted" from? (περισπάω means "to be pulled away from a reference point, be pulled/ dragged away" (BDAG))

The text says that she was distracted. It is very important to remember the Scriptures we gave on hospitality and to realize that her weakness was not her desire to give Christ hospitality. Far from it. It was that she was "distracted *while* she extended hospitality". That is the key to understanding this whole passage. She was distracted while she extended hospitality. And her distraction was because she was caught up in "*much* serving" (emphasis on the word much). She was intent on putting on a big production, and so *her focus of attention became more and more the act of ministering and less and less the one to whom she was ministering*. Notice the word "but" at the beginning of verse 40. That is setting up an intentional contrast. Verse 39 says that Mary "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word, *but* Martha was distracted [distracted from what? She was distracted] with much serving." And let me read you the dictionary definition for that word "distracted." The word περισπάω means "to be pulled away from a reference point, be pulled/ dragged away" (BDAG).

What reference point was she being pulled or dragged away from? She was dragged away from Christ's presence. She had switched from serving Jesus to serving her job. And the implication of the use of that word is that Christ really wanted *Martha* to be doing what Mary was doing here. He wasn't expecting Martha to do the dishes by herself. He was saying, "Whatever you are fussing with, it can wait. Take time to sit with me like Mary is." Martha was putting on a big production and was so hard at work that she was distracted from the very one she was putting it on for.

Can any of us slide from serving Jesus to serving our jobs?

And you know what? That can happen to *any* of us in *every* one of our jobs, and chores and pleasures and entertainments. We can get so caught up in what we are doing that we lose touch with the one who gives the work and who guides us and sustains us in our work. We can end up serving the job as an end in itself rather than serving the Savior with the job.

Tyranny of the urgent

And you might say, “But there is so much work to do.” And my answer is, “Yes. And there will always be far more work available than you will ever be able to get done anyway.” So don’t worry about getting all the work done. Get done what you believe is God’s priority within your given limitations. Remember that God doesn’t need your work anyway. He doesn’t need your money, your prayers or anything else. He has no needs. So why is He giving you work? He is giving you work because He is allowing you to have opportunities to grow through your labors and your rest. He is bringing integrity checks into your life [such as whether you are going to keep the Sabbath or not], testings for character; opportunities to learn to serve Him with pleasure; growth in your relationship with Him; growth in holiness. Everything you do should serve God’s purpose laid out in Romans 8:28-29: being conformed to the image of His Son. Isn’t that what the text says? We tend to focus on the first part, that “all things work together for good.” But what is the good that He is using all things to work towards? “to be conformed to the image of His Son...” You need to see your work and all the rest of your life in light of that truth.

How do we know when to take on more tasks and when to say “No”?

And I myself have to learn and relearn the wisdom of not getting distracted from the Lord by my ministry. A little confession here - I tend to be a Martha. There is always more work for a pastor to do than there are hours in a day to handle. Christ had the same endless opportunities for ministry, and some ministry opportunities He turned down, and others He accepted even though He was tired. Why did He turn down some ministries? Because God did not want Him doing them. Satan loves to bring ministry cases into our lives that God has not sent. It may be someone needing counseling - and God knows they aren’t going to follow your counsel anyway. It may be a conflict resolution. Or it may simply be the extra work that the boss is dumping onto your schedule. It’s a wisdom issue based upon the Word and His guidance as to when to work and when to rest, when to quit a job (and yes, there is a place for that) and when to tighten the belt and make sacrifices on the job. How you spend your time is an economic decision. And if I do not sit at Jesus feet to receive guidance from Him, I lack the discernment to make those judgment calls. And you as mothers will lack the discernment to know which of the many things that are tugging at your apron strings that you should handle first without communion with Jesus. Satan will tempt you to think that you don’t have time to sit at His feet. Christ is saying, “You don’t have time *not* to sit at My feet. You are so busy at home and at work that you are set up for Satan’s rat race syndrome. You must make time, or you will suffer, your ministry will suffer and those whom you are ministering to will suffer.”

Connection between being too busy for Jesus and being too busy for fellow-Christians

Interestingly, when we neglect Christ, we will begin to neglect those who are united to Christ. For example, we will be so busy serving our kids that we never spend time with them. We will be so busy earning money for our wife that we never spend time at home to talk with the wife. Martha's personality made it easier for her to get distracted by the rat race, but any of us can fall into this trap, and none of us can excuse it on the basis of personality. Christ later tells her that there is really only one thing that is needed. Martha lost sight of the one thing - taking our cues from Christ. Her devotion had ever so subtly shifted into devotion to her job. We need to be careful that our jobs do not become an end in themselves.

Applied to hospitality, employment

And I've applied this passage in another sermon to hospitality, so won't do so today. But it is easy to get so caught up in the hospitality that we get stressed out and neglect the company we were supposed to fellowship with.

Men can be this way too. This past week I read a couple paragraphs of Iowa's contributions to space science. I had no idea that one of the key scientists for several areas of space research was from the University of Iowa, not too far from here. Dr. James Van Allen has some pretty famous things in space named after him. But he was a Martha ever since he was a little kid - constantly shuffling his far-flung interests. He scared the daylights out of his mother when as a child he used a Tesla coil to make his hair stand on end and send out foot long sparks. But then he was on to another project. Even as an adult he always seemed to be behind. When teaching at the University of Iowa, he got rid of the provided In and Out boxes for mail, and substituted his own four, which he labeled Frantic, Urgent, Pressing, and Overdue. I think I can relate. If you read between the lines on Martha, she focused mainly on the categories of frantic, urgent, pressing, and overdue. She had a hard time slowing down.

Well, I believe that Christ wanted Martha not to worry about being a perfectionist in the kitchen so much and to spend a little time talking with Him.

Weakness of a take-charge type personality

Now there was another problem at work here. Martha was a take charge type of a person. That was one of her real strengths, and was a plus for her type of ministry. We need people with skills like that. But you know, Satan often attacks us at our strong points simply because we do not see ourselves as being vulnerable there. We let down our guard. And so ironically, some of our strong points can actually be the weak chinks in our armor. And Martha allowed her "take-charge" personality not only to determine what was best for Mary, but also what was best for Christ. She rebuked Christ: "Do you not care...?" she asked. She was in effect saying that neither of them had their priorities straight when in reality she was imposing *her* priorities on others without ever asking whether her priorities (which really amounted to the tyranny of the urgent) were the *Biblical* priorities. There is a real danger when Christians insist that everyone must do things their way. It will make for resentment on the part of the take charge people if the others do not conform, and it will

make for resentment on the part of the people being molded if they feel forced into going along. We need to learn to chill over the differences of personality in others and not get so bent out of shape.

The danger of being driven by the expectations of others (obliger)

And speaking of the expectations of others - I tend to be what one personality study calls an obliger. I've told a few of you this; I might as well confess it to everybody. And let me first of all clarify that all personality typing tends to be reductionistic and somewhat simplistic. But I think there was some truth to these stereotypes that divided people up into upholders, obligers, questioners, and rebels. It sure pegged me as an obliger who has a hard time saying "No." For example, when sales people would call me on the phone, I would politely try to talk them down and explain over and over why I'm not interested. My wife just hangs up on them. But as an obliger, I feel bad doing so; it seems too rude. And my wife explains to me that this is doing them a favor since it saves them time. I'm delaying the no, giving them false hope. So knowing that I am an obliger has helped me to understand my inner turmoil and to say no a bit more easily - and to hang up on telemarketers.

It wouldn't surprise me if a couple of you are rebels who have fun stringing the sales people along. But regardless, if this study was right, the majority of Americans tend to be obligers. This means that a majority of Americans probably take on too much simply because of the expectations of others. And they don't get done what *they* want to get done because they barely have enough time to please everyone else. Some of you parents are frazzled with the amount of work that you have to do because you have allowed some Marthas to tell you what you need to be doing. And when you run out of hours in a day to do all the things that 20 Marthas and the pastor have been asking you to do, you feel guilty, frustrated and stressed out. Marcia Hornok wrote a little poem that probably describes your problem. She said,

The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest. It makes me lie down only when exhausted. It leads me to deep depression. It hounds my soul. It leads me in circles of frenzy for activity's sake. Even though I run frantically from task to task, I will never get it all done. For my "ideal" is with me. Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me. They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule. They anoint my head with migraines. My ill-basket overflows. Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever.

Making Christ our reference point

But Christ's point is that you don't need to dwell in the bonds of frustration forever if you daily sit at the feet of Jesus, your reference point. Remember, the dictionary definition of distracted is, "to be pulled away from a reference point." Christ daily needs to be your reference point in all your planning. And here's my recommendation for those of you who are super busy - after you've had devotions but before you start your work day - have a daily 5 minute PEP time. PEP stands for Prayer, Evaluation, Planning. You ask God's blessing, then you evaluate the previous day (what was left over, how you did, changes that could be made), then you plan your day in general categories. Obviously God's providence changes even that during the day, but it at least causes you to have direction.

Be willing to be ministered to

There is one last factor in this passage that I would like to pull out, and I am addressing it because I have tendencies to be a workaholic. I don't know if Martha was a workaholic, but she obviously thought Mary needed to serve rather than to be *ministered to* by Christ. It did not even enter her head at this time that she could let her servants carry on and sit with Mary for a time. She may have felt guilty receiving ministry when there was work to be done. Some people have an awful hard time *being* served. After all, didn't Christ come to serve? Yes He did, and He served hard - often to exhaustion. But Christ also took vacations, Christ went to homes to refresh Himself and to be ministered to. Though He was God, He was also fully man and had the needs of man - social needs, physical needs, financial needs, emotional needs. And Martha ministered to His physical needs here, and Mary ministered to His emotions in John 12 - and we will look at that next week Lord willing.

But think of this: if Christ needed to be ministered to, how much more so do we? I believe Martha was refusing to be ministered to. Which meant that she didn't have the Scriptural balance. Don't be like Peter who said to Christ, "You will never wash my feet." Christ said that to be one of His you have to accept His ministry, and not just minister. And Christ ministers to you through others as well. Let your husband take you out for dinner.

Final thoughts - relating Jesus to everything we have talked about

But let me wrap this whole sermon up with a few final thoughts that will tie everything together with the main theme. If Jesus should be our reference point for all that we do and all that we stop doing, then let's review everything we have said with respect to Jesus.

Is Jesus your reference point on friendships? Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. And the more you minister to Jesus as His friend, the better equipped you will be to be friendly in a way that generates good relationships with others. Are your friendships Christ-centered? Do they glorify God? Do they conform to Christ's instructions about conversation, building one another up, serving and being served, etc? Scripture says there are some friends that should be dropped - like a gossip or a divisive person or an angry person. Read what Proverbs says about good and bad friendships. And if you are the one whom everyone has dropped and you have no friends, seek counsel on what it means to be a godly friend to others. Evaluate your friendships with this one needed thing - Christ as a constant reference point. Does He approve of your friendships?

Second, do you relate to singles as Jesus would? Do you honor them, bless them, and receive their blessing and ministry? If Christ is your reference point, you will begin to notice singles more and value them more.

And to you singles, I would ask: Do you stick with singles, or do you mix it up with all age groups and social groups in the church the way Jesus did - and the way that Martha and Mary did? After all, Martha and Mary served the apostles, their wives and children, Simon the leper, and a host of others. See your own friendships and relationships through the eyes

of Jesus. I believe Jesus would have you avoid cliques and to make broader friendships than some of you are doing.

Fourth, whether you own a home or you do not own a home, are you hospitable in a way that focuses on people, or do you see it simply as another duty in a busy day? If Jesus is your reference point on hospitality, you will be more and more focused on people.

Fifth, do you value all the languages of love like Jesus did? Jesus valued service and gave service. He valued quality time and gave quality time. Jesus valued touch and gave touch. Jesus valued meaningful words of love and gave them. Jesus valued and practiced all the languages of love.

Sixth, evaluate the times you have felt flustered, frustrated, ready to lash out with your tongue, driven by the tyranny of the urgent, or anxiously on a rat-race. Looking back on a few of those times, can you see in hindsight that your priorities might have been wrong? If they were, ask Christ to correct and guide you as He did Martha so that service becomes a joy being done to God. I find my service takes on new meaning and much of the frustrations are taken in stride when I do them for Jesus as my gift to Him first and foremost, and to others through Him secondarily. It's good to evaluate how frequently we get distracted from that and as a result get cross and upset.

And finally, evaluate ways in which your strongest points can also be your weak points of trusting self rather than trusting Jesus. A take-charge personality should always evaluate what Jesus is doing in and through the lives of others and make sure we are not smothering or ignoring the callings of others.

And to those of you who tend to get discouraged by sermons like this, realize that none of us will perfectly arrive in this life-time. But if we can grow throughout our lives, we will be the better for it. May we imitate Jesus, a Friend of sinners; a Man who walked in the Spirit and thus had balance. Amen.