

# Joy Equipping

“As each part does its work.”  
Ephesians 4:16-18



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## Mary or Martha—Which One Am I?

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It's frightening to realize, after years of functioning as a “good” Christian, that you have neglected the very God you thought you were serving.

But that is precisely the position I'm in. Even though I have always wanted God's best for me. Even though I have sought to please him and to tell others about him. Even though I can think of no worthwhile reason for living unless it is to serve him.

As I reminisce over the past and look to the future, I realize that I have missed the most critical element. I do not really know him—certainly not the way I should after all these years.

Strange. If you had asked me who I identify with in the story of Mary and Martha, I would have immediately voted for Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, rather than Martha, scurrying around to provide what he hadn't requested.

But now I realize that I have actually been Martha. While devoting many hours to doing things for God and for his church, I have neglected to spend time with him.

Oh, I've read my Bible, believed it, studied it, memorized it, taught it. I've prayed for God's blessings and help in planning and carrying out the work I've done for him. I've prayed, believing, for needs. I've told others about God—even had the privilege of leading people to him and helping them grow.

But I have not often spent quality time with him. I have not been Mary. Worse, I've taken him for granted—assumed that he understood why I was too busy to take time to idly sit with him. After all, I had lessons to prepare, newsletters to get out, meetings to plan....Time for him later, when my work here is done. Later, when we're in Heaven together. When there isn't so much to do.

Speaking of Heaven, I must admit it has always sounded boring to me. I like challenges. Doing new things. Finding solutions. When I read the Bible, especially Revela-

tion, and see the 24 elders sitting around praising God for eternity, I have to confess I'm not impressed.

But, lately, I have begun to realize that my lack of enthusiasm for Heaven is rooted in my lack of understanding of the God I have chosen to serve.

It began when my father became very ill and I was forced to spend ten or twelve hour days at the hospital alone with him, waiting for him to die. Ten days before his death, he accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord. My prayers of twenty-five years were answered in a few brief moments, and I fought back tears as this stubborn eighty-year-old man looked at me in bewilderment and asked, “Why did it take me so long to understand?”

As I sat by his bedside, watching him slip gradually through incoherence to semi-consciousness and finally into a sleep from which he never woke, I was filled with the sense of God's presence, watching over both of us. I began to talk to God the way I would talk to a trusted friend. All those lonely hours, I was never alone. And what could have been a difficult time became an interlude of joy and peace that, as Jesus said, passed understanding.

I had lost a father, but at the same time, I had gained a new awareness of my heavenly Father. An awareness I will not relinquish.

Now, I read passages such as God's challenging response to Job and I see God in a new way. Not intellectually new, but emotionally—involving a change of my heart.

Now when I ask the question, “What does God really want from those who are his children?” this former Martha finds new answers.

I now believe his first priority for us is simply to spend time with him. Not merely praying to him in a way which lets him know our wishes. Not even praying to him throughout the day as things come up. While I have always sensed his presence; now I have to admit I took advantage

of this to shout directions to him when I needed something.

What he really wants is for us to be with him—not only for our sake, but for his, too. He created us in the first place because he is love and he wanted more opportunities to share that love. Talking things over with him, acknowledging areas of weakness or sharing moments of strength, telling him how we feel and what we're thinking, letting him know what decisions we have to make and asking his guidance—he wants us to do these things.

But there is another part, and this is where I've had most of my problems. We have to give him equal time! We have to let him reply to our questions, comment on our problems, give us a pat on the back or a word of challenge where needed, let us know if our priorities for the day or the week or our lives match his—to converse the way we would if we were with a loving friend. He knows our every weakness, understands how we think, cares about how our days go, wants to help us grow, and has the ability to give us wisdom that never fails!

When we neglect to spend this kind of time with him, not only do we throw our own lives off course, but we make him sad. He has so much to share with us if we will only give him the opportunity. And every second of time with him benefits us.

Now, I try to spend an hour each day, simply being with him. I take my notebook, and as we talk I write down the ideas he gives me, plan my day, ask him to meet needs of which I am aware, ask him what I've missed and what I can do today for him.

And I find myself more satisfied than ever before, even with the most successful of the programs I planned or Bible studies I led.

I am nowhere near a perfect Mary yet, but I am no longer Martha, rushing around trying to please him in my own strength. I have the joy his presence brings.

And I've figured out why those elders don't object to sitting at God's feet in Heaven worshipping him. It's because God is so wonderful he is beyond our comprehension. Boredom is not a word one could ever associate with him.



The sum of the scientific understanding of minds such as Edison, Einstein, Da Vinci, Hawkings, and all the rest is like a tiny pin-prick in comparison to his knowledge and understanding. His creativity will astonish us. Look at the sampling we have here on earth—the brilliant reds and greens and blues and yellows of a Macaw, the rhythmic gait of a bounding kangaroo, the community instincts of an active honey-bee, the playfulness of a sleek river otter... His wit and humor surpasses Shakespeare, Cummings, Donne, Hemmingway, Chekhov, Shaw...all rolled up in one. His beauty will make the Northern Lights seem a pallid shadow,

Lake Louise a dingy gray, the most brilliant red rose a faded copy, the largest emerald a dull imitation.

And he loves us! In fact, his love for us is so great he gave his only Son, risking all he had that was meaningful to him. Astonishingly, he knows our every thought—every weakness—every unkind deed—and still loves us!

When, like Mary, we sit at his feet, we will never have to wonder what he means. There is no deceit in him. No hidden agenda. All he wants for us is what is best for us. In his presence is life. Not the life of this world—striving to get things that only become old or outdated, seeking our fifteen minutes of fame, feeling good because we have power over others; but life that will exist eternally, and will be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I know that in days to come, I will be tempted to revert to being Martha again. After all, there are 23 other hours in the day and I am still here on earth with a home and a family and so much to do.

But he has not left me here to do my own thing. Rather, he has something important for me to do. Something about loving others as I love myself and being his ambassador. Things I cannot do alone.

So, it is critical that I keep his perspective—doing what he wants me to do rather than what I feel I ought to do, or what somebody else tells me I should do.

I must keep being Mary, getting together with him each day and asking him to explain exactly what he desires of me, and growing in my love for him.