

When One Dish Is Enough

August 17, 2014

Good morning. Today we are taking a week off from the book of 1 Peter. The next section of 1 Peter is a rich, spiritual meal, and I didn't think serving that kind of teaching at a church corn roast would fit the tone of the day. Today we are doing something much lighter, uncharacteristically short and very simple.

We are studying one simple point found in Luke 10:38-42. It is the story of Mary, Martha and Jesus. Let me read it to you.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38–42 (ESV)

Have you ever wondered how Jesus spent his evenings and his nights? After long hours teaching on the road, where did Jesus rest? When a disciple asked Jesus about the perks of traveling with him, he was wondering if Jesus stayed in four- and five-star hotels. Jesus told him that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. I take that to mean there were nights when Jesus slept in the field with nothing but a stone for a pillow and stars for his blanket. While many nights were hard, that wasn't every night. The Bible tells us there were times when he enjoyed the warmth and hospitality of an evening with good friends.

There was probably no home in all of Israel more treasured by Jesus than the home of Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus, in the village of Bethany.

Bethany was a suburb of Jerusalem only two miles outside of town. In the closing hours of his life, when other hearts and homes were shut, the door to that house was always open.

When Martha heard that Jesus and his disciples were in town, she insisted they come to her house for dinner. She wanted to extend her love through hospitality and cooking. She was a woman who showed love by feeding people. Her plans were to make a feast that Jesus and the disciples would never forget.

Being married more than 20 years, I know having guests over to the home for dinner can put a lot of stress on a woman. You have to clean the house and get rid of the piles. Having a famous Bible teacher for dinner only adds to the stress. That evening Martha was not just feeding Jesus but his 12 disciples with him. Martha had taken on a hospitality challenge of Olympic proportions.

Cooking a lavish meal for 15 people at the drop of a hat is not easy. You need to have the cold food in the refrigerator most of the time, the hot food on the stove and in the oven done at the right time. Everything needs to come together at the same time so everyone has a good time. Cooking for a group like this, especially if you aren't used to it, means a minor miracle needs to take place.

As Martha was trying to pull off the miracle, things weren't going well. The stove was giving off more smoke than heat. The bread refused to rise. The gravy was burning to the bottom of the pan. The meat wouldn't cook to the center. The whole thing was turning into a burnt offering for Jesus rather than his dinner. As the meal fell apart, Martha looked around for her sister to see if she

could lend a hand. She glanced into the living room and there was Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus.

You can picture the situation. An emotional volcano inside of Martha was building pressure and threatening to erupt. While the meal was burning on the outside, she was burning on the inside. She had more than she could handle so she burst. She stormed into the living room, went up to Jesus and said to him, “Lord, don’t you care that I have to get this meal by myself? Have my sister come and help me.” As she stood in front of Jesus, I am sure smoke from her cooking rolled into the living room from the kitchen. She expected Jesus would come to her defense and send Mary scurrying into the kitchen. That’s not what happened.

Jesus told Martha, “One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better portion, which will not be taken away from her.” Some ancient manuscripts say “Martha...only one dish was necessary.”

You don’t have to go to Bible college to understand the story. Martha gets the thumbs down. Mary gets the thumbs up. That is just the way it is. It appears the lesson is that we should skip dinner for Bible study whenever we have the chance. The problem is... my heart doesn’t agree with that conclusion.

To put it bluntly, I like Martha. She is my kind of woman. I actually agree with her. If you are cooking for 16 people, you need a little help in the kitchen. Bible study hour with Jesus can wait until after dessert. If it were not for Martha, Jesus would need to perform a miracle for anyone to eat. The Marthas of the world get things done. Marthas make sure dinners are made. They make sure

houses are cleaned, children are taught. They see a task, they make a plan and accomplish it. I have a lot of sympathy for Martha because if everyone sat at the feet of Jesus, nobody would be eating that night.

What did Jesus fault Martha?

Why did Jesus fault Martha? I don't think it was for her serving. Just before this, in Luke 10, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that story, the basic lesson is that a neighbor is anyone whose need we see and are in a position to meet. We are to meet the needs of anyone we can help. I think that is what Martha was doing. She was simply being a good neighbor. She saw the need for food because Jesus and his disciples were hungry. She had the gift of hospitality. She was in a position to meet the need. She sprang into action.

I think this is the kind of woman Martha was. If there was a family in her church with a sick child, she was the kind of person who would visit the family and help around the house so mom could get much-needed rest. If someone was moving, she was the first to show up in her boots and jeans to lend a hand. If there was a sickness in a family, she was the kind of person who would make a meal and bring it over so the family was blessed and didn't have the burden of preparing dinner. I think Martha was simply using her God-given gift of hospitality to be a good neighbor to Jesus and his disciples. I don't think Jesus was faulting her for using those gifts and showing kindness.

Jesus wasn't critical of her service but the spirit of her service.

Luke says she was "distracted with much serving." Jesus wasn't critical of her service but the spirit of her service. Jesus told her she was worried and

upset about too many things. It was the spirit of her service that Jesus pointed to.

If you were to give Martha a psychological profile, she would have scored as a type “A” personality. She was the obsessive-compulsive type. For the obsessive-compulsive types, if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing right. The obsessive-compulsive types have only one speed, full speed ahead! In everything they do, they give their absolute best. Unfortunately, that motto has murdered as many people as it has motivated.

Here was a woman who bought into that motto. She was going to serve a meal, but it was not just any meal. It was a seven-course meal. It was the best of the best of the best she could possibly do for Jesus and his disciples. It was a meal fit for a king because if a meal is worth making, it was worth making right. Many of us are just like Martha. If we are going to do something, we feel we need to do our absolute best, no matter what it costs.

When I was in my doctoral program, I remember Haddon Robinson telling us that it may not be worth all the effort it would take to get an “A+” in his class. That stopped all of us in our tracks. He reminded us that we had families. Most of us had a wives, children and church that needed our attention. Doing all the work necessary to get an “A+” would kill us. He gave the stressed-out pastors in the room the freedom to not feel that they had to get an “A+” as it would transform us into irritable, angry people. He said that for some of us all the effort we could give was “B” quality work, and that was acceptable.

Jesus was giving us a very unexpected lesson in this text that many of us need hear. **Sometimes, if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing simply.** Martha, one dish would have been enough. Showing great hospitality is a good thing but if showing that extravagant hospitality is turning you into a caustic, bitter, irritable person to your family and spouse, you need to cut back. A simple soup and sandwich will suffice. One dish is enough. **Some things are worth doing, but they are worth doing simply.**

How do you know when you are too busy?

The answer differs for each of us because God gives each of us different capacities. I think one answer is that can help us know when we are doing too much is simply checking our attitude. Are we constantly upset, irritable and hurting people we love, like Martha? That may mean we have too much on our plates. That is a clue that we need to simplify. We need to take some pressure off ourselves and remember one dish is enough. It is OK to do things simply.

The way we do our service can tarnish our service.

Good service in a bad spirit doesn't do anybody good. Put yourself in the home of Martha and Mary that night. Can you imagine how Mary felt? Can you imagine how the disciples felt?

Martha was fuming. She didn't quietly slip into the living room and whisper in Mary's ear about her need to help in the kitchen. This was a grandstand performance. Martha didn't even speak to Mary. She marched into the living room and growled to Jesus for everyone to hear, "Don't you care that my sister has left me to get this meal by myself?" Can you imagine how Mary felt? If

she was the sensitive type, which I think she was, her entire evening was ruined. Martha's angry outburst, which came from trying to do too much, ruined the evening for everyone.

Have you ever gone to dinner at a home when the couple was fighting before you rang the doorbell? Sometimes when you ring the doorbell there is an instant change. Everyone becomes nice and cordial. Other times the fight continues even in your presence. It is usually not the loud yelling type of fight. It is the piercing glances. It is the sarcastic comments designed to deliver verbal punches to the ribs. When that is happening, I don't care how good the food or how lavish the hospitality, you want to get out of there. The entire meal is ruined.

When irritation is part of your service, it spoils the service. When your good works come with a bad attitude you are tarnishing your service. You need to hear the words of Christ to Martha — *one dish is enough*. **Sometimes if things are worth doing, they are worth doing simply.**

If you can prepare a seven course meal and do it with joy, warmth and good hospitality, go for it. If making a seven course meal is leading to become overextended, bitter, stressed and spiteful toward the ones you are serve, switch to serving soup and sandwiches. One dish is enough. **Sometimes if a thing is worth doing, It is worth doing simply.**



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