

MARTHA GETS A MAKEOVER

Have you ever felt unfairly characterized by others? Perhaps you've been in a situation where someone interacts with you on the basis of what they *think* they “know” about you (meaning what they've *heard* about you here and there), without knowing or understanding the real you—maybe without having ever met or spoken with you before.

I sometimes feel that people tend to jump to negative conclusions about Martha, the sister of Mary, based on the account of the sisters' interactions with Jesus in Luke 10.

You probably know the Luke 10 story well. It's the one where Martha is “distracted in serving ... anxious and troubled,”¹ and Mary chooses the good part: sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to Him.

There's a vital lesson to be learned from Mary's actions in this story. It is extremely difficult to differentiate between the “best things” and the “good things”—and then to make the decision to let go of something good while you reach for what is best. So learning to “be like Mary” is a worthy goal.



However, it's not uncommon to hear people say "... *but you shouldn't be like Martha.*" It's easy to fall into characterizing Martha as this "bad" person—or at least a person we assume we don't want to be like—based on this one story.

You might wonder whether there's anything else we know about Martha. The answer is yes. There's another story about Martha in John 11. This story shows us some of Martha's strengths, just as Luke 10 shows us some of Mary's good points.

John 11 is the chapter about Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus was close to Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, and loved them dearly. When Lazarus became ill, his sisters sent word about his situation to Jesus, probably hoping that Jesus would visit and heal Lazarus before his health got any worse.

Instead, the opposite happens. Jesus *stays* where He is. Lazarus *dies*. And *then* Jesus goes to Bethany, Lazarus' hometown.

When Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was dead, He said, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."² He also says, "It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."³



As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha went out to meet Him. When she reaches Jesus, she says to Him:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, *"Your brother will rise again."*

Martha said to Him, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*

Jesus said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

She said to him, *"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."*⁴

The statements that Martha makes in this passage show that she was a woman of strong faith.

She must have been in awful anguish about the death of her brother, not to mention probably bewildered as to why Jesus hadn't come to Bethany when they first asked. Also, consider that Jesus doesn't straight-out tell her, "I'm going to raise your brother from the dead today!" He doesn't exactly explain to her what it means in this situation when He said, "... everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." She might have thought, *But my brother is already dead.*

In spite of not knowing all the details or what Jesus is going to ask His Father for, she chooses to trust that Jesus will act in a way that's for their good. She says, *"I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. ... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."* Pretty powerful stuff!



Sure enough, that is exactly what they see: the glory of God in dazzling action, as Lazarus (who had been dead for *four days*) gets up and walks out of his tomb!⁵ It's an incredible miracle, and results in many more people believing in Jesus.

There's a lot in these two chapters to ponder and reflect on. But in relation to the comparisons between Mary and Martha specifically, I find myself thinking along the following lines:

Everyone has strengths and everyone has flaws. We all have things we're proud of and like about ourselves, and things that frustrate us or that we're trying to change. But nobody wants to be characterized by one of their blunders, or to be permanently labeled based on some "flaw" or "that time" they messed up. It's unfair.

The same is true about you. Just as it would be unfair to others to only zero in on their blunders, it's unfair to yourself to only consider your "flaws," or to only think of yourself in terms of personal mistakes or embarrassing moments. Self-awareness involves being conscious of your good points too, and building confidence in your strengths and the things you're learning to do well.

Footnotes

¹ Luke 10:40–41 ESV

² John 11:14–15 ESV

³ John 11:4 ESV

⁴ John 11: 21-27 ESV

⁵ John 11:44

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