



Leadership Training Class

LIVING A LIFE OF REAL DEVOTION

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”
(Luke 10:38-42)

I did not grow up in a church where I heard sermons or read Bible passages popular in Evangelical circles. I certainly did not read Christian self-help books or listen to podcasts. And so I was not at all familiar with this story until I was an adult. My first encounter with it was hearing a sermon about it in church.

The main point of the sermon went something like this: Martha was busy. She was into doing a lot of stuff, like housework and entertaining her guests. Martha was your typical and ideal 1950’s US American housewife idealized in *Leave It To Beaver*. Mary was different. She was a contemplative who liked to be with Jesus. She wasn’t a do-er, she was a be-er. Jesus affirms Mary’s contemplative lifestyle. He doesn’t want us to just do stuff; He wants us to be with him. This passage is troubling news for those of us who struggle with prayer and are more activist in temperament. In other words, the primary point of this story is to affirm the contemplative life, to affirm those of us who easily have quiet times every morning. The activists among us are out of luck.

As I’ve learned a bit more about the Bible over the last 20 years of following Jesus, I’ve come to understand that there’s something a bit more powerful and provocative going on in this story. Let me give you a little bit of information about what the Jewish culture was like in Jesus’s day:

- A common Jewish prayer from the Talmud - that men prayed - went something like this: “Blessed are you, O God, that I am not a brute creature, nor a Gentile, nor a woman.”
- A man could divorce his wife for almost any reason at all (even burning his dinner), leaving her with no home and no source of income, and often forcing her into prostitution.
- Women did not eat meals in the same room as men. In a Jewish home there was space for men and there was space for women. The only time they mixed was when little children played outside or in the marriage bedroom.
- Jewish women were not educated, and certainly were not taught as disciples of rabbis. To sit at the feet of a rabbi was not this posture of dog-like devotion, where you sit on the floor gazing adoringly at some rock star. It meant being a disciple of that rabbi. It meant learning the teachings and the ways of the rabbi, and it was what you did if you yourself wanted to become a rabbi.



In light of the cultural context, here is the truly radical truth of what is happening here: **Mary has quietly taken her place as a would-be teacher and preacher of the Kingdom of God.**

Martha isn't just upset because she needs more help doing the dishes. She's upset because Mary is breaking numerous taboos - social, sexual, gender, and religious. Mary isn't just choosing to chat rather than preparing the after-dinner coffee. She is crossing well-defined social and religious boundaries. And Jesus affirms Mary for doing it!

I want you to stop and think about Mary for a minute. What Mary does in this story takes tremendous courage. She risks being ostracized by her family and community. Imagine the sneers, the looks, the condemnation, and the judgments. Even her own sister goes after her! In today's world think about what's it like for the only woman working on a construction site, or if you're the first and only woman stationed at a firehouse. Imagine the pressures that female politicians face when they run to be the first woman elected to a political office. It's not comfortable. Why would Mary do it? Because of her devotion to Jesus. Because of her hunger for the Kingdom. Because she is driven to hear the words of Jesus. Because more than anything else she wants to be with him, learn from him, and be like him.

When I say that we want Chi Alpha to be a community of real devotion, what do I mean? I want us to be people who, like Mary, value above everything else a deep, intimate, and transforming relationship with Jesus. I want us to be people who take seriously Jesus's call to love God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength - that we would have a passion to know Christ and to worship him with the whole of our being. And that passion would compel us to pursue Jesus and his purposes for this world even when it's uncomfortable, risky, and costly.

That even when the world and the culture around us sneer at us and tell us we're fools, we would be devoted to our King.

When our study group gets the answers to an exam and is going to cheat, we would be devoted to our King.

When it means breaking off that relationship that violates God's best for our lives, we would be devoted to our King.

When it means being ridiculed by a professor for our beliefs, we would be devoted to our King.

When it means taking a risk in a relationship and being honest about our faith, we would be devoted to our King.

When our families think we're crazy for passing on a lucrative job opportunity to serve on the mission field or in a disadvantaged school, we would be devoted to our King.

That, like Mary, our lives would elicit the response from Jesus, "You have chosen what is better."