

# Adult Teaching Resources

July 21, 2019



## Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

### On the Road with Jesus

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 – “A Mission Trip to Remember”

Luke 10:25-37 – “A Wonder on the Road”

**Luke 10:38-42 – “A Better Way to Go”**

Luke 11:1-13 – “A Good Way to Pray”

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# A Better Way to Go

Luke 10:38-42

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

*“... there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:42*

Today we read the story of two sisters, who both love Jesus very much. One is busy being busy trying to make sure everything is just right for Jesus. The other is busy simply being in the presence of Jesus.

Sometimes being busy, as productive as it is, gets in the way of what really needs to be done in the moment. Sometimes, simply being is what we need to do. This story of Martha and Mary might open our eyes to when we should be busy and when we should just be.

### Opening

As your class arrives, ask each person to find a partner with whom they can have a good conversation. Ask everyone to think about how they typically act in the following scenarios and share their thoughts with their partners.

When you are at a social gathering that you are attending, are you more comfortable helping out by serving others, making sure everything is just right, and staying busy; or are you more comfortable sitting and talking and not worrying about those details?

When you have unexpected visitors, are you more concerned about the state of your house or more concerned about the quality of the conversation with your friends?

When you have friends over for dinner, are you more at ease putting the final touches on the meal, or in the family room engaged in conversation?

Give each partnership time to talk through these scenarios. Then, go to the board and write the words “Do” and “Be.”

Ask your class to share if they consider themselves “doers” or “be-ers” in the context of the discussions they just had. Record the names on the appropriate lists and allow for any conversation or clarification as folks deem necessary.

## Reading the Bible

Who welcomed him into her home? (Martha)

What was her sister's name? (Mary)

What did Mary do while Jesus was there? (sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying)

What did Martha do? (she was distracted by her many tasks)

What did Martha ask Jesus? (Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?)

What did she want Jesus to say to Mary? (Tell her then to help me)

How did Jesus respond to Martha? (Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing.[a] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.)

## Making Connections

Describe the qualities of a good friendship. How do you act around a good friend? What can you say to a good friend? How do you treat a good friend? What do you expect of a good friend?

What clues do you get from our text, and other passages mentioned from our Lesson Writer, that Martha and Mary are good friends with Jesus?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Words are powerful things. With words we can bless others or we can curse them, we can speak truth or we can lie. Words can bring healing or hurt, pleasure or pain. They can show us the right way or point us into the darkness." When have you experienced a powerful conversation where everything else was blocked out or insignificant in the moment?

Would you rather keep yourself busy or sit and be a part of a conversation?

When have you been hurt by the (in)actions of someone close to you and you got your feelings hurt? What was the situation? What were you doing? What was the person close to you not doing? What did you think that person should have been doing? What ultimately happened?

With matters of faith and religion, is it more important to be busy about the administration, structure, and doing the ministries of the church; or more important to worship, listen, and be fed by the spirit? Why do you say that?

When have you unintentionally allowed yourself to be distracted by trivial busy-work so that you missed out on something important? What did you miss?

When have you intentionally allowed yourself to be distracted by trivial busy-work so that you missed out on something important? What did you miss? Why did you distract yourself?

## So What?

Have everyone to find their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Share with everyone the words from our Lesson Writer:

“Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem, where he had an appointment with a cross. The time available for him to spend with the sisters was limited. Housework was needful, but it could wait. The one thing that truly counted was the building of their relationship, learning more of God’s way. That required concentration.

There is also danger in doing without listening. Sometimes we have all good intentions but get ahead of ourselves and potentially do more harm than good. Missionaries intent on saving the souls of isolated populations have sometimes brought diseases to which the locals had no immunity, killing the very people they came to save.

At other times, people offering simple aid with no attention to resource building have fostered dependency rather than self-sufficiency. Our doing should always be seasoned with listening.”

Ask each couple to spend time talking about these questions, “When is it time to listen, and when is it time to work? How do you discern the difference?”

Give everyone time to talk to their partner, then open the floor for large group discussion. Share that the story of Martha and Mary force us to think about our intentions, in the moment, when we allow good things to distract us from the best thing.

How can we remain focused on the best thing and keep distractions away?

## The Challenge

This week, pay attention to the times you allow yourself to be distracted with good things, but that take you away from the best thing. Work toward remaining focused on the best thing.

## Prayer

*Loving God, you call us to do and you call us to be. Help us to figure out when the best thing is to do and be busy; and help us to figure out when the best thing is to simply be. Help us to carry the story of Martha and Mary with us as an example of what you desire of us. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.



**Bethany**—The name “Bethany” is from the Hebrew *bêt ônî*, meaning something like “House of Poverty.” I used to joke that my late daughter was named Bethany because I figured she would put us in the poor house – a sentiment that parents who have paid for a wedding lately can resonate with.

The village of Bethany thrives today on the outskirts of Jerusalem, now called *el-Azariyeh*, an Arabic version of the name Lazarus. The village is home to an ancient tomb traditionally occupied by Lazarus (left). Next door is a church that commemorates Jesus’ raising him from the dead. Across the street, of course, are shops selling souvenirs to tourists.

**Chaperones**—The image of Jesus at home with Mary and Martha has long been a favorite subject of artists. Some Baroque artists added older women to the picture to act as chaperones, thinking it would be scandalous for Jesus to be alone with the two sisters. An example is the 1618 painting by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Valázquez, below.

**Priorities**—The printed lesson asks the question of where a church sets its priorities. One set of answers can often be found by taking a look at the church budget.



**Distractions**—While in the Washington, DC area for a meeting recently, I took several rides on the Metro. Each time I boarded, I looked around, and almost every person in sight was looking at his or her cell phone.

It can happen in class rooms or homes or cars, as well – people who are in close proximity to each other but do not talk, unless it’s by text.

You can be sure that if Mary had owned a cell phone, she would have not only silenced it but left it in another room while sitting with Jesus.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Good, or better?**—While the NRSV translates Jesus as saying that Mary had chosen the “the better part,” the Greek text says she chose “the good part.” It is possible to translate a simple adjective in such texts as a comparative, or even superlative. The NET has “Mary has chosen the best part.”

The point, however, is not that active service is less valuable than contemplation. Note that Jesus prefaced his comment with “There is need of only one thing” (although there are textual problems here: some texts say “few things are needed – or only one”).

Thinking of the “one thing,” Matthew Skinner has noted, “this does not mean one form of devotion, but one *object* of devotion” (italics mine, from *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 of Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], paragraph 16194).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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### What does this story suggest about women's roles?

The familiar story of the two sisters who loved Jesus in different ways has given rise to various interpretations regarding the relative roles of women in the church. Some readers see the story as a clear affirmation of women's involvement in the life of the church. They note that Mary is accepted by Jesus as a disciple who sits at his feet and learns along with the men. Martha's attempt to have Jesus "send Mary to the kitchen where she belongs" is rejected. Thus, they believe the story affirms the place of women as equal to men within the church, with Mary as the model for emulation.

On the other hand, some interpreters have seen it differently. They view Martha as a dynamic person who is the voice of authority in the house, a typical male role. In contrast, Mary sits meekly and submissively at Jesus' feet, fulfilling cultural expectations for women. When Jesus rebukes Martha for her forcefulness, does he gently endorse the idea that women should be quiet and subordinate like Mary, rather than taking on authoritative male roles, as did Martha? Whether intentionally or not, they suggest, Luke's praise of Mary over Martha could undermine the role of women within the church.

It is possible to see something in both readings. Jesus clearly cares for both Martha and Mary. Both sisters can be seen as positive role models and appreciated for their devotion to Jesus, albeit expressed in different ways. Overinterpreting potential sexist undertones misses the point of the story, which does not speak directly to the issue of women's roles in church, but certainly offers nothing to prohibit it.

Loving others as Jesus did is a daily task that requires daily strength, for our natural selfish tendencies will keep cropping up. Every day, we make the choice whether we will act in loving ways. That is why Christ has given to us his Spirit to guide and empower us day by day.

As an exercise, consider thinking through an average day and name some typical opportunities to be kind that require a conscious choice to act in a loving way.