

JESUS, MARTHA & MARY

Scriptures:-

Luke 10v38-42: ³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ 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!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

John 11v17-36: ¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." ²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell* at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

**some translations have 'knelt'*

John 12 v1-3 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Exodus 33v12-18.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "It is true that you have told me to lead these people to that land, but you did not tell me whom you would send with me. You have said that you know me well and are pleased with me. ¹³ Now if you are, tell me your plans, so that I may serve you and continue to please you. Remember also that you have chosen this nation to be your own." ¹⁴ The LORD said, "I will go with you, and I will give you victory." ¹⁵ Moses replied, "If you do not go with us, don't make us leave this place. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with your people and with me if you do not go with us? Your presence with us will distinguish us from any other people on earth." ¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses, "I will do just as you have asked, because I know you very well and I am pleased with you." ¹⁸ Then Moses requested, "Please, let me see the dazzling light of your presence."

Also helpful – **1 Peter 5v7** : Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you.

Psalm 16 v5-11 (God with you in troubles) – Use Good News translation

You LORD, are all I have, and you give me all I need; my future is in your hands. ⁶ How wonderful are your gifts to me; how good they are! I praise the LORD, because he guides me, and in the night my conscience warns me. ⁸ I am always aware of the LORD's presence ;he is near, and nothing can shake me. ⁹ And so I am thankful and glad, and I feel completely secure, because you protect me from the power of death. I have served you faithfully, and you will not abandon me to the world of the dead. You will show me the path that leads to life; your presence fills me with joy and brings me pleasure forever.

Mary and Martha

What is my character?

Two questions. 1. If we want to be effective for Jesus, what should be our number one concern, above all else?
2. Do your character and your emotions impact how fruitful or effective you are for Jesus?

What about you? Is your glass half full or half empty? Would your family say you are joyful or grumpy? Are you an active doer or a reflective listener?

God made us all different, unique in fact. The Psalms tell us that God knit us in our mother's womb, and that we are wonderfully and fearfully made. We were designed by Him. Our life choices shape what that design becomes, a weakness for chocolate might lead to obesity, a compulsion for horror films may lead to nightmares, a fitness fad may lead to us keeping a wonderful healthy body. We do have choices that shape what we become, but beneath that is our character some of which is inherited, something that is part of our design. Last time I preached was at my parents Church. My Dad is now in his 80s, and we have led very different life-styles. Our whole life experiences have been extremely different, and yet when I preached at his Church recently, I was told that as long as I was around it would be like having my Dad there, I had all his mannerisms. This wasn't so much about how I looked but more about how I was and how I behaved – she could see the character of my Father in me. She then apologised but I thanked her for the compliment.

Our character many not change a lot through life, but our emotions are changing all the time. They can be helpful or destructive. We can too often follow our emotions and make bad decisions.

But does our character influence how we get on with God, and how useful we are to him? How do we stop our emotions taking us down the wrong road?

To help answer these questions we are going to have a close at two different characters and their emotions. They are the sisters, Martha & Mary. Verse by verse we will look at their first encounter with Jesus, but we will also bring into that picture how they both responded to Jesus on two further occasions, after the death of their brother, and finally at a formal meal that they held to honour their Rabbi.

So where did it all happen?

The Bethany homestead

Well, today we are going to Bethany, a village on the Eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives to visit the home of three unmarried siblings. I need to speculate a bit too paint a picture of this family. The oldest Martha, is the matron of the house (perhaps mid twenties), and appears to be the homeowner and comfortably off, but she also has all the responsibility. She almost certainly would have had some servants, as this was common even for those with very modest incomes. She is a strong and capable woman, she has had to be. She takes on a lot but her temper can get the better of her if stressed. The name 'Martha' means woman of the house', and it is her house. Martha's younger sister Mary is more like a lodger perhaps early twenties she is laid back, without the business acumen and work ethic of her older sister but still with a strong determination to do her own thing to her own values. The name Mary means 'Beloved', and they **do** love each other but can easily rub each other up the wrong way too. One thing they do have in common though is their devotion to their younger brother Lazarus. For many years they have worked hard to bring him up well, having perhaps lost both parents whilst they were still young, which was not uncommon back then. I in 4 woman died in childbirth, so Mum may have died having the boy, with perhaps their father dying of a fever before remarrying. His land and a business was then being picked up by the oldest child to manage the business and family (most likely olive groves or perhaps a vineyard, on the sunny slopes of the Mount of Olives) whilst also providing care, along with her sister for their little brother He could have still been in his teens when he first met Jesus; a healthy young man with a bright and sharp mind. If his sisters bring him up well then he will ensure their futures, even if they don't get married.

The first encounter

V38. Martha offers hospitality

The order of events in the Gospel is difficult as it is not written with that as priority. However it would seem that Jesus had made a great friend in young Lazarus, and that relationship had been there for a while before Jesus died. It is likely that on his trips to Jerusalem, he would head first to Martha's homestead in Bethany to spend time with the three siblings .

In what sounds like their first encounter thought, Luke tells us that Jesus came to the village of Bethany where (Luke 10v38) *a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.*

She could not have helped hear of the famous young Rabbi of the people, this miracle worker, who some say was the new Elijah, or even the promised Messiah, the God-King himself. He has come to their small village of Bethany, and **she** Martha and her household were trusted by the village to provide the hospitality for Jesus and his men. She had the means and capability to do a good job. She would not let them down.

Being a hostess for Jesus and his disciples would have been hard work, even with some servant help.

He may have brought many disciples to feed, and if he decided to stop over that would be a load more work. We have to be careful in belittling Martha's priorities here. Her labour represents her devotion. It's what she knows, it's what she does, it his part of her character. It is also what her culture moulded in most women. She lived at a time when 'the art of hospitality' defined you. If you did not cater well for a guest, then it not only looked bad for your household but your whole village. Food preparation was the responsibility of the matron of the house, in this case Martha. The reputation of Bethany was at stake when Martha offered Jesus hospitality. There may have been a larger number that expected that came to her house. But this was one powerful, capable young woman and she would do a good job whatever. The reputation of Bethany was in good hands. If her sister and servants were on top form that could make a good job of this privileged task. So she welcomed Jesus and his men into her home.

It was a bold move by Martha, but here was a great man who must be served.

V39 Mary sits at the feet of Jesus

Jesus takes up a position to teach and his disciples sat on the floor to receive. The doors would have most likely been open to those who wished to stand around the back of the room and listen to Jesus. But who was that, there in the middle, amongst the disciples on the floor at the feet of Jesus? (Luke 10 v39) *'She had a sister Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord, and listened to his teaching'*.

Some of the men and perhaps other women in the village, or with the travellers, stood at the back of the room, would have looked on with shock and disgust at a young lady mixing it with the disciples, as if she was one of them, a would-be teacher or Rabbi herself sat at the feet of Jesus. Unheard of. Once in the second century, the daughter of a Rabbi, married a Rabbi and became a Rabbi herself, but few people took her teaching seriously. To sit amongst the disciples at the feet of Jesus was to break with the socially accepted norms, to behave counter-culturally. She's plonked herself in the best spot too, at the very feet of Jesus.

It was a bold move by Mary, but here was a great man who must be listened to.

Here we have two young sisters in their own way showing their devotion to Jesus, one within the cultural expectations and one acting outside of the social norms. Both are in the same house with no doubt a very similar upbringing and background, but the individual characters within them, brings different expectations to the scene.

How often are we in a situation where we expect others to behave in the same way as we do, and when they don't we get annoyed, because we believe we are right, so they must be wrong, even if we are both behaving true to our characters, characteristics that God has woven it to us.

V40 Martha is annoyed with Mary

Picture, Martha getting the food ready, marshalling the servants like a restaurant chef might, but where's Mary? No-

one knows, then a servant comes in and says she is in with Jesus. Martha takes in some drinks, and though the room is rather crowded she sees her, without interrupting Jesus she tries to catch Mary's eye and fails. Martha is in and out of the room several times and was sure Mary saw her beckoning once, but took no notice. She needs more help, to keep everyone fed and watered to the level of hospitality that meets her expectations. So many things to think about, to worry about, and Mary is just in there sat on the floor. If this all goes wrong, the village will be let down, and it will all be Mary's fault. Surely Jesus can see her sister sat there not pulling her weight. 'Who does Mary think she is?' Martha is starting to lose out and may be even slamming some cupboard doors in the kitchen. Suddenly she boils over. - That's it I've had enough – I can't take the audacity of that young woman any more. She takes some fresh olives in, just as Jesus finishes telling a story and everyone is smiling and nodding.

Then Jesus looks round at Martha with a worried look on his face, one which says 'What on earths the matter'. He moves towards her. Martha nods towards Mary and says in a disapproving voice to Jesus "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!".

V41 Jesus soothes Martha

Martha knows what men in general think and expect of women, and Rabbis in particular will be very keen on seeing the right things done, so Jesus is bound to see that Mary is in the wrong. Whilst Mary might be a bit of a wild child and not do what her older sister says, she will certainly listen to Jesus. Martha was convinced Jesus would see it her way, and tell Mary to get back in the kitchen. But his response was not what she was expecting.

Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things.

His words are soothing, and the repetition of her name suggests that what is to follow, is something heartfelt and important. On a later occasion he does the same to Simon-Peter when he is about to predict his denial, He says Simon, Simon.

By repeating her name in this way Jesus would have now got her undivided attention, and reveals to her how he sees her emotional state i.e. her feelings. It's not just Mary that has upset her, she had loads of stuff on her mind; things that are worrying her, and others that are upsetting her. Her feelings are what's driving her on to do what she's doing and to say what she's saying. At this moment in time Martha, solid dependable Martha, is being driven by her emotions.

V42 One thing

Then comes the key verse in our passage.

Few things are needed—or indeed only one Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. Jesus is looking not just into her eyes but into her heart. Martha, Martha, of all those things that are racing through your mind, all the demands on you and choices you have to make, whilst they might all seem important to you, truth is very there few are really important. In fact right now there's just **one**, just one thing that is important and Mary has made that choice to do that one thing. Mary may not have initially intended to stay on the floor for long, but she had forgotten all else but him, and in doing so gave him the honour. Martha was trying to honour such an important guest by putting on the very best spread possible, but in doing so had missed out on the one thing that was really important. Martha was being controlled by a turmoil of thoughts and emotions, whilst Mary was being controlled just by a single desire to stay in the presence of Jesus.

So this is what Jesus is saying to us today.:-

Above all else, this one thing is the most important, and that is to be in his presence.

There was nothing wrong with the strong and diligent character of Martha, there was certainly nothing wrong with the wonderful hospitality and food that she prepared for Jesus and his men. But what was wrong was that was she didn't stop. She didn't rest in the presence of Jesus. She didn't sit at his feet for a while and take in his wisdom for her life. She was a good woman doing good things, but she was missing out. Jesus said on another occasion that the was the Bread of Life. Whilst food and hospitality is important, very much so in those days, it was the person, example and teachings of Jesus that were the really important food for those in Marthas house. Martha with a focus on what the culture required from her, had lost the focus on what was really important.

Mary had a different character to Martha, **not better just different**. There is no reason to believe that she wasn't hard working herself, but some-how she knew what was the most important thing to do when the Rabbi was in town, that was spending time at the feet of Jesus. Whatever our character is, and whatever our history is (good or bad), we can spend time with Jesus, we can make that our priority.

I can personally say that there have been some occasions for me, usually during a worship or prayer time where I have felt the strong tangible presence of God fill my body. At that moment, there is no other place in the whole world that I would rather be. I have always wanted to see the Giant tortoises on the Galapagos islands, but not even for that would I want to leave that moment of knowing I am in his presence. Mary chose well.

Second Encounter – emotions are running high.

The next time we come across Mary and Martha is when tragedy hits the family. Their beloved brother, was dying. Lazarus had been taken really ill. Martha send for Jesus but he doesn't come straight away or heal prophetically from a distance like he had done on other occasions. He purposefully delayed his journey until Lazarus had been dead for 4 days. He just sent word that the sickness was not one that would lead to death, but the brother had quickly died and been placed in the family tomb.

In their grief, it is Martha who can't resist the impulse to do something. So although he is on his way she travels out to meet Jesus. In my mind I can see Martha, stocky and strong for a young woman, squaring up eye to eye with Jesus and she's not in a good mood. Wracked with grief and anger, she is wanting to slap him, she recoils her hand into a fist and pounds out the frustration on his chest, then lets her tongue release her fury. "I was devoted to you Jesus, I have done so much for you, and had just asked for this one thing in return, for you to come as soon as you could. What were you actually doing that was more important to you than healing you friend Lazarus, you seem to heal everyone else that you don't even know.. I thought you loved Lazarus, I thought you loved me." She fights back the tears and looks Jesus once more in the eyes, she has not finished with him yet. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". In other words this grief is your fault.

Mary meanwhile holds back in the homestead consumed with her grief. Martha, following her encounter with Jesus, meets Mary in private back at the house and tells her that the Lord is asking after her by name. He has stopped outside of Bethany where he had met Martha and is waiting for Mary there. Mary now sees beyond her grief. Jesus, he wants me, I must see Jesus and she goes out to find him. When she does and he beckons her close, she falls down to her knees at his feet. She is back at the feet of Jesus. Through her tears she quietly says to Jesus "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". She says this not in an accusing way, but in gentle recognition of the Rabbis greatness, that even her brothers sickness would have come under his authority.

Martha and Mary say to Jesus the same words in the same place under the same circumstances "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died", but they say it in such different ways. In her grief, Martha angrily confronts him. In her grief, Mary bows down to him and acknowledges his greatness..

Jesus loved them both. Just because he delayed 4 days in answering their prayers, it did not mean that he no longer loved them. Far from it. When our prayers are not answered within the timescales that we want or expect, that does not mean that God does not love us. Far from it.

Jesus loved them both, he answered their prayers and performed the miracle. In front of their eyes he raised Lazarus from the dead. Martha and Mary, different characters, different emotions, and different responses to Jesus, both were blessed on this day in equal measure. They both got their brother back.

Our emotions / feelings

Our God designed character makes some of us more cautious or extrovert, more adventurous or more encouraging than others, but we are all both blessed and plagued by our feelings. There is nothing wrong with having emotions, we can't avoid having them, but we often make decisions based on how we feel.

If you are feeling very low, and you empty the cupboard and see a bottle of the finest red wine and an opened box of Thorntons chocolates. What are you going to do. Without your negative feelings, you would never contemplate opening the chocolates and wine and then an hour later putting the empty box and bottle into the recycling. You let your emotions make your decision, and it was the wrong one – wine and chocolates are for sharing in an evening with friends, not on your own watching day time TV.

On the first encounter Martha is angry with Mary so makes the decision to confront Jesus and get him to make Mary work. Her feelings dictated her action. Martha is making decisions on what to do and say based on how she is feeling. If she had put others in charge for a while, and herself had sat down and spent time at the Masters feet, then inspired by Jesus she would understand more why Mary wanted to be there, and would probably not have confronted her openly. On their second encounter Martha is angry with Jesus this time, and decides to travel out to meet him and confront him over not coming earlier. Jesus was coming anyway and it would have made more sense to wait for him, and ask him gently and respectfully as to why he decided to wait until coming.

It is in our quiet times that we can gain the strength to deal better with our emotions, channel the positive ones and deal with the negative ones. The promises that God has placed in our heart need nurturing, and our negative inputs and emotions can do damage to our walk with Jesus, so we need to find an inner strength to deal with them, to have the self-control we need so that we can make decisions based on what our decisions are telling us. We need to take the power away from our feelings, and choose to submit our decisions to God. Sometimes the right thing to do is the the exact opposite of how you feel.

We must **not** let our feelings make our decisions for us, give in to how we feel. Our decisions should be spirit-led and not emotion-led.

Third encounter - Mary takes it to a new level

The third recorded encounter as recorded in John chapter 12, of the sisters with Jesus is back in Martha's house. Jesus is there again, but he isn't just randomly passing through looking for some hospitality. This third time, he has been specifically invited to a formal dinner thrown in his honour. The first time there was no mention of Lazarus, but here he is with Jesus reclining around the table in good health, after being resurrected. There would be a long low table in the centre on which the food is. Low couches are angled such that the reclining guest has his left arm on the table and his feet away from the table.

In the first encounter Mary is **sat** at the feet of Jesus, along with his disciples as he teaches in their home.

On their second encounter, when Lazarus has died, she is now humbly **kneeling** at his feet.

At their third encounter, we find Mary **lying** at the feet of Jesus. Mary positioned herself directly behind where Jesus was reclining, behind his outstretched legs and feet. She was not part of the formal circle of reclined guests but by leaning or lying on the floor **she got as close to Jesus as she could**.

The rest of this short passage is about the younger sister. Mary may well have heard what had happened at the home of Simons the Pharisees, where an ex-prostitute had taken a small alabaster jar full of expensive perfume, perhaps the most expensive thing she owned, and tipped the whole lot over his feet. The lady had washed Jesus' feet with her tears then let her hair down to clean and wipe them. It was a sign of great love and gratitude for her Master. What the ex-prostitute had done for Jesus the very act would have shocked and electrified the room. Letting down your hair in public would be seen as indecent, perhaps equivalent to exposing your breasts. A man could even divorce his wife if she let her hair down in front of another man. This however did not annoy or shock Jesus, even if everyone else felt that way, Jesus loved it and spoke favourably about the woman.

This story may well have inspired Mary to do likewise. John 12v3 tells us that '*Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*'. It was symbolic in that the act of anointing with perfume and not cheap olive oil, was reserved for the anointing of noblemen in the court of a king, placing high honour on the man. However it was personal too, this was her King, and she wanted too to show Jesus how much she loved him.

So in a moment of pure passion for Jesus, she removes the wooden clip from her head, and her beautiful ringlet hair, cascades down over his feet. Remembering that Mary and Martha were quite well off, she takes a whole 'pint' of expensive perfume, pours it all over Jesus feet, and wipes it in with her hair. A perfume flask, or the alabaster jar of the prostitute may have held about an ounce of expensive perfume.. Mary takes what seems an incredible amount of perfume, a whole pint over 500ml. Today a small bottle (7.5ml) of pure perfume Chanel no.5 costs £90, so a whole pint would cost £7000 or \$10,000. As she poured all the contents over the feet of Jesus, it would be streaming off his feet onto the floor. It was extravagant, it may have even been her savings, her dowry for getting married, but she wanted to give the very best she had for Jesus. Mary is taken her devotion to a new level, she cares not now for what anyone thinks of her, except Jesus himself. He is her number one now, all else if unimportant.

Doing.. but listening first

What about Martha, where is she on this third occasion? Has she learnt the importance of spending time with Jesus. No – all it says is that 'Martha served'. She is still in charge of the catering, she has not trusted anyone else to do a good job. She was on a journey too there in understanding the importance of being with Jesus, at least for her sister. There is no insistence of Mary helping in the kitchen, and no criticism of her emptying her perfume away, even though they may have worked long and hard for it. It is Mary though that is back at the feet of Jesus and not Martha.

Martha does. She is a doer. How many doers have we in Church? Some might answer that with – 'not enough'. It is right that we do things for Jesus, that we serve Jesus. It is good to be busy about his work, but how do we know what to do? How do we plan and prioritise rather than try and do everything, meet everyone's expectations happy, OK I'll sign up for that rota, even though it's my one free evening, and I am not really interested, but if I don't you will probably make me feel guilty.

As Christians is does not start with us serving him, it starts with him serving us. If we are not spending time in his presence, studying the bible, praying and being quiet, listening for his inner voice and for his prompting, and we will not easily find our focus or our purpose. We could end up doing the wrong things, working hard but going in the wrong direction. We'd be like a farmyard chicken, running about flapping our wings but never taking off, just running in the dirt round and round in circles.

Jesus needed time alone with his Father, he needed to get into Gods presence to be guided and filled up, so do we. we cannot charge our spiritual batteries So be selfish about your quiet times, make sure you put aside time for being with Jesus, prioritise it over everything else.

Time with Jesus changes things, His Spirit helps us do the right things and be more productive in doing it. I remember running 2 hour youth-work leader meeting. In the early days we rushed straight in to business after a very quick prayer. The meetings often ran into difficulty with a lack of ideas, or disagreement on what to do, with personal emotions getting in the way, and at the end of some evenings it felt like we had worked hard but made little progress. We would need another meeting. The meetings gradually got more prayerful, until we found ourselves praying fervently for the first hour, leaving little time to plan, and yet following the prayer everything seemed to fall easily into place. Great ideas would flow from the team, and be readily agreed to. Our extended times in prayer talking to and listening to Jesus always proved productive.

Martha was listening to others, she was listening to her cultural demands, and she was doing plenty of stuff, but she was not listening to Jesus. Mary was. But it was easy for Mary to be Mary because she did not have the responsibilities of Martha. Whilst she needed to spend time with Jesus, it is much harder for Martha to be a Mary, and it is very hard for some of us too, with busy lives, jobs, family all pulling at us. Jesus never rebukes Mary for serving, it is not a bad thing, he just points out to her the importance of taking down time with him. In fact in John 11v5, it says Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Martha gets prominence in this passage as an object of his love. She is loved, and she needs to cast all her cares and worries on Jesus. So do we. He cares about what we care about. We cast our worried on him, in prayer, in his presence.

Seeds and promises

Every-one of us is pre-destined for fruitfulness. It is intended that my life and your life will make a difference. It is only whilst we abide in his presence that the most precious treasures can be born. In his presence, we are nurturing, protecting and caring for the seeds that he plants within us. Seeds that grow and make us fruitful. It is here that the promises of God on our lives take root. It is in this secret place where we commune with God that we find the courage to step out and activate those promises, and bear fruit for him, despite all the voices in our head, that are trying to dissuade us. Fruit follows intimacy with Jesus.

Fruitfulness

Time spent with Jesus is never a waste of time. We should never see our lives as being too busy to have quiet times with God. If they are that busy then we definitely need those quiet times, as they will bring the other activities into line.

If we neglect our quiet times, if we fail to get to our secret place, if we don't spend time in his presence both individually and in corporate worship, then we won't bear fruit. It is in his presence that we will increase in the fruit of the spirit (as listed in Galatians 5). Where we had to our inherent characters more love, greater joy, peace in hard situations, patience with others, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

But as we press in more and more into God, and our relationship or intimacy with him, then we will see more answers to prayer, and see God acting not just in us but through us to bless others more. We are likely to start seeing more fruit from our efforts to serve God, especially when we take him at his word, trust him more, take risks for him, relying on his strength not our own.

If we have not got any clear guidance on what to do with our Christian lives, then start by asking God for opportunities to bless others, and then simply show love to each person that you come across each day. Yet when we spend that time with God we will, even if it takes time, get a deeper sense of his purpose for our lives.

No time in the presence of God is wasted time. You can never say, I have not got the time to spend with God, I am far too busy. If you are that busy, then you can't afford **not** to spend time with God.

You must go with me

Moses was told by God to leave Mount Sinai (Exodus 33), where he was in the desert with the people of Israel; leave and go to the fertile land that had been promised to them. However he had warned Moses that because the people were so stubborn that he might not be coming with them. Moses loved to be in God's presence, and spoke to God like a friend. He told God that he would do anything that he was told, but only if God's presence went with him. He would do nothing without God by his side. If God wasn't coming then he wasn't leaving. We can pray the same thing – God I will do anything you want me to, but you must go with me, so that even though I do not feel able to do what you ask, I know that if I trust you when you are with me, then you are able. It's the time in his presence that makes the difference to what we can do. Insist in prayer that God goes with you, and blesses what you do. If he doesn't want you to go there or do that thing, then ask him to stop you. Don't go there, or do that thing, take a job, but a house etc if it is not his will for your life. Don't go without Him.

Soar like Eagles

In that quiet place we build our trust in the Lord and draw on his strength to deal with emotions and see on problems from a new perspective. Isaiah 40 says that *“those who trust in the LORD for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles ;they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak, Our fears and concerns are like big mountains in our lives. Martha was weighed down by hers, and we can feel the same with health concerns, bad relationships, financial problems. The mountains look big when we are flapping about in the dirt at the bottom of the mountain, but if only we could soar like eagles.*

I once went to Nepal, and it was there I had the most dangerous road journey of my life. I was in the back of a landrover with a few others, and the steep road was both extremely rough and narrow, with sheer drops to our side.

It seemed at times impossible that the Landrover could not lose a wheel over the edge. I prayed a lot, but then we finally arrived at a ledge near the top of this Annapurna mountain. A young man strapped himself and a paraglide to my back, then gave me the instruction. Run to the edge, and then keep running. We were thousands of feet up. I'd already done plenty of praying, now was the time to make the leap of faith and with the trust in my young pilot and I ran off the edge of the cliff. I dropped – then I soared. We got the thermal and went even further up until we were above the mountain ridge. Then I saw directly below me an eagle catching the same thermals.

From my new vantage point, soaring like an eagle, everything looked very different, the mountains seemed much smaller and were now beneath me not towering above me.

Character, Emotions and Nature (Fruit)

1. If we want to be effective for Jesus, what should be our number one concern, above all else?

Spend time with Jesus, at his feet, reading his Word, listening to him, praising him, praying the prayers that he puts you heart. Find your own secret space to be alone with him regularly, and press into his presence during corporate times of prayer and worship. Be bold, re-arrange your calendars to make time with Jesus a priority.

Mary knew that it was right to listen to Jesus. Listening comes before serving. No time in the presence of God is wasted time.

2. Do your character and your emotions impact how fruitful or effective you are for Jesus?

It does not matter what your character is. God designed you and your fundamental character will always be part of who you are. Embrace it and be the best you that you can be, for Jesus sake. Be true to the designers plans. Any one of any character can do the most important thing, and put time aside to spend with Jesus.

Your emotions will come and go and change, some will be helpful, some will hinder – understand your emotions and don't let them make decisions for you, because they are unreliable. Draw strength from your quiet times, so that your decisions are spirit-led and not emotion-led.

Martha knew that it was right to serve Jesus, and she was bold in doing so. He has a pair of shoes for you to walk in, and they are a different pair to anyone else's shoes. Don't try to walk in their shoes, walk in your own. Find out in that secret place, in God's presence, what his call is on your life, what he would have **you** do. What fruit does he want to build in you, and harvest from the good works you do for him.

God is asking you today for your time. It's the most valuable thing you can give him. Mary knew this. Precious time in his presence. The most costly gift to him, another hour of your time in that secret place. Give him your time. Let him have you and hold you, feel you and fill you, anoint you and appoint you, and when you have you had your fill from Gods presence, put on the shoes custom built for you, then go out and be fruitful for him. Give him the reins, run to the edge of the cliff and keep running. Amen

Extra Notes:-

Who was the most fruitful?

So looking at the three encounters of the sisters with Jesus, their different characters and emotions, I want to ask which of those ladies do you think went on to be fruitful for Jesus. I would hazard a guess that initially they both did, the hard-working, committed and generous Martha, and the passionately devoted Mary. One serving more, one listening more, but both glorifying Jesus.

But what about the long-term, when things really got tough, when Rome was burning and Christians were being persecuted widespread. Who was most likely to last in the longer term. Despite the strength of Martha, I would have to go with Mary. Martha, I think had a tendency to do things in her own strength, and no matter how well intentioned

to the cause of Jesus she would soon find that in her own strength she was not strong enough. However, with Mary we can be fairly sure that we know where she would be when things get tough. . In the three recorded encounters of this Mary, she is at the feet of Jesus. The first time listening with the disciples, the second weeping for the loss of her brother, and the third anointing his feet with perfume. She was passionate about Jesus. When things got tough, I think she would be back where she loved being, at the feet of Jesus, sat, on her knees, or lying prostrate in her secret place, drawing once more on his words, being filled with his Spirit to give her strength. Being equipped and refreshed in that secret place of intimacy with Jesus