

The book cover features a light cream background adorned with various botanical illustrations. There are large, soft-edged shapes in shades of peach, light green, and pale yellow. Scattered throughout are detailed drawings of leaves in various shades of green and brown, some with fine vein patterns. A prominent illustration in the upper left shows a long, curved seed pod or fruit with a white interior and small black seeds. Another similar illustration is on the right side. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and nature-inspired.

A Fresh Look at  
MARY, MARTHA,  
and LAZARUS

# Transforming LOVE

HOW FRIENDSHIP  
WITH JESUS  
CHANGES US

AMY BOUCHER PYE

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Our Daily Bread  
Publishing™

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Interior design by Jessica Ess, Hillspring Books

ISBN: 978-1-64070-228-8

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Available**

*Printed in the United States of America*  
23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 / 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labor:  
If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.  
Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

To amazing friends and family who enrich my life:  
Beth—sister and friend; Kris—friends since three;  
the FFF—through thick and thin; Tanya and Amy—  
writers and poets; Ali, Anne, and Julie—prayer warriors;  
Ali and Paul, Esther and Simon, Gill and Rob—friends  
of my adopted land who've made me feel at home.

Friends always show their love.  
What are relatives for if not to share trouble?  
Proverbs 17:17 GNT

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## INTRODUCTION

# Friends of Jesus

“Amy! Cross that out and don’t write anything else!”

The command from the junior high school principal rings out, and I flush with shame. With haste I scribble out what I’d written: “Kris is weird.” Avoiding the stares of my classmates, I step away from the wall designated for affirmations about other students.

After school, my stomach churning, I walk the few doors down to deliver a note to Kristen. *Oh, why*, I wonder, *did I write those words?* As I berate my thirteen-year-old self, I hope Kris will forgive me. Standing away from her as she reads through my note, I fidget. I hope that I haven’t ruined things and that we can salvage our friendship.

After what seems a long time, she reaches to hug me and relief floods my insides. “I’m so sorry,” I choke, trying to hold back the sobs. “I don’t know why I wrote that. I . . . I’m sorry.”

For a time our friendship stumbles along with uncertainty, but eventually I regain her trust. Her unreserved forgiveness touches me, and I know I’ll never forget the grace she extends.

Fast-forward more than a few decades and Kristen and I share tears once more, but this time of gratitude. I look around the dining-room table in

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my parents' home in Minnesota and take in the sight of three generations of neighbors-turned-friends—Kris and her parents and daughter, me and my daughter and parents, and our next-door neighbors and their daughter and granddaughter. These friendships have been foundational in my life, providing a community that I rather took for granted when growing up. We're spread out now, from Colorado to London with several places in between, but when gathered together we give thanks for how God has shared his love between us, including the many years we ran between the houses on Victoria Street.

My friendship with Kristen holds a powerful place in my heart not only because we've been friends pretty much our whole lives—her family moved to our street when we were three and four years old—but because of how God has shaped me through her. She's spoken truth to me lovingly when I've needed to hear it and has showered me with encouragement and cheering. We've studied the Bible and prayed together and have simply had fun with each other. Through her friendship, God has helped me to become more like Jesus.

I wonder if you too can call to mind longtime friends who hold a special place in your heart or those people whom you connected with immediately. When we receive this gift of friendship, it's like the Spirit within us leaps in recognition of each other; something inside clicks, and we know that a bond has been formed. We are granted welcome in their soul, just as we welcome them into ours. This openness of spirit—this extravagant generosity when it comes to letting others in—comes from an openness to God. He floods our soul with his Spirit, and the Spirit flows onto those we meet.

When Jesus lived on the earth, he had close friends whom he loved and who cared for and loved him. His friends were not only his band of disciples but also a trio of siblings who lived in Bethany, a village less than two miles from Jerusalem. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus welcomed him into their home, and their abode became Jesus's place to rest and feel at home. Just as I ran over to Kristen's home, making my way behind the houses with the joyful thought of seeing her, so too do I imagine Martha opening the door to Jesus and receiving his welcoming smile. And I ponder how much affection Jesus showed them. In fact, John's gospel names these siblings specifically as those Jesus loved (11:5). After his mother, Martha and Mary are probably the most important women in Jesus's life.<sup>1</sup>



## **Friendship with God**

I find it awe-inspiring to think that the God of the universe came to Earth as a baby. And that Jesus desired companionship with others. He needed friends, which he found in the band of disciples whom he did life with, but also these siblings from Bethany who gave him a space to rest away from life in Jerusalem. And God still desires friends today.

Think about that—God made us to relate to him. God created people not because he had to but because he wanted to. Then and now, God desires that we would seek him out in love, sharing with him our desires, fears, and accomplishments. Even as he reveals himself to us through Jesus and the Spirit, so too does he long for us to show ourselves to him.<sup>2</sup>

But sometimes fear crowds out our feelings of friendship with God. We might think of God as a distant parent, one whose demands we cannot meet. Or a disappointed judge whom we fail. Or an unconcerned being who doesn't really care for us. Or a fickle friend who plays favorites, skipping over us again. But with any and all of these conscious and sometimes unconscious feelings, we can trust that our loving Friend will help us to uncover and overcome them.

Because as we deepen our friendship with Jesus, we become more fully ourselves. We receive affirmation from God, which sets us free from a desperate need to please others. We find we can focus on the projects and tasks we feel called to do, instead of those others might foist on us. We can share our love with others without being stingy, knowing that God will give us more and more love to share. And we can celebrate the wonderful accomplishments of those whom we might be tempted to envy, those who flourish in the areas we inhabit. As we reach out to them in friendship, we come to understand that God blessing them doesn't stop God from blessing us. Friendship with God blesses us in all of these ways and in many others too.

I wonder what you're thinking and feeling as you consider friendship with Jesus. What longings churn within you (such as for a close relationship with him, for affirmation and love, and so on)? How is your life different because you know Jesus? How might he deepen your love for him and change you all the more? You might want to pause and ponder these questions, perhaps going for a walk as you invite Jesus to come alongside you. I trust that he will reveal himself gently and graciously. And that as

you read this book, he will accompany you as we explore the story of some of his favorite people. Even as now *we* are some of his favorite people—a mind-blowing and life-changing truth.

### Changed by Love

When I think back to that awkward teenager who wrote hurtful statements about her friend, I temper the pangs of shame with compassion for my young self who so wanted to be accepted by her peers. Who, at heart, wanted to love and be loved. And although I can find it difficult in the moment to see how God changes me—especially if I’ve just lost it with a beloved family member—when I look back over the decades I can see the transformation that has come through God’s Spirit living within me. Through friendship with God, I know that I am loved and can therefore share his love with others.

And this is what friendship with Jesus brings about; when we receive his love and affirmation, we grow more into the people God has made us to be. That is, we become more truly ourselves. We find peace and contentment as we bring to him not only our joys and praise but our fears, disappointments, and anger. We become better friends with others, as Kris and I did over the years. As we become intimate with him, God changes us to become more like Jesus, from the inside out. Even as Mary and Martha did, as we’ll see.

Jesus transforms the sisters and brother as they encounter him in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of their lives. We’ll explore how he brings Martha to a true understanding of who he is as the Messiah and who she is as one who serves and loves him. How Jesus affirms Mary in her desire to learn and be with him while also drawing her out of her deepest moments of grief and disbelief. How he effects great change for Lazarus—namely bringing him back to life.

I pray God will spark even more desire within you to meet with him and receive his love—and to be changed moment by moment as you do so. I pray that as you grow in your friendship with him, your relationships with friends and family members will deepen and flourish. As you read, you might want to hold in your heart one or two special people, asking God to show you how

## Introduction

you can bless them. You could also ask God to give you a friend whom you can affirm and show love.

My prayer too is that you would sense God's nearness while engaging with these gospel stories, and so I've included prayer prompts and prayers in each chapter to invite you to an ongoing conversation with him. You might wish to write down your thoughts and prayers in a journal as you journey through the material—doing so gives the added benefit of you having a document to read later as a reminder of what you learned and experienced.

You might try out the prayer practices in a group—if you're leading it, see the guide at the back for tips and suggestions. If not, you might want to listen to me leading some of the exercises on my website.<sup>3</sup> Or you may prefer to do them on your own. Know that whatever your approach, God is with you and will guide you.

As you engage with these practices and think about the siblings from Bethany, trust that God longs to meet with you. As you encounter him and his goodness, may he change you moment by moment through his tender, kind, and unfailing love.

*Loving Father, Brother Jesus, Comforting Spirit, thank you for welcoming me to be your friend. Thank you for being near to me—for never leaving me or rejecting me. Help me to be open to your Spirit, that I would welcome you to change me in any and every way you wish. Give me a sense of expectancy for the ways you will move in power, grace, and love. Amen.*

## PART 1



# Being and Doing

## The Luke 10 Story

The famous story of Martha serving and Mary listening helps us, regardless of our gender, age, or status, to explore how we root our identity and our actions in our relationship with God. The snapshot from this day in Bethany helps us to embrace some of the tensions we face when we pursue both action and contemplation in our life with God.



## CHAPTER 1

# So Distracted

“Hey Jen,” I say. “Will you read through my Christmas newsletter before I send it off?”

I started writing a yearly missive to friends and family in Minnesota after moving to the nation’s capital midway through university. Now, a couple of years later, I’m looking for feedback from my housemate, especially because she’s also served at the same small nonprofit with me. But her response jolts me.

“This sounds more like a work report than a Christmas letter!” she says. “You haven’t said *anything* that doesn’t relate to the organization.”

I reread the letter and realize that she’s right. Her observation gently chips away at the protective wall I’ve erected around myself to keep hurt and fear at bay. With a sense of clarity, I realize I’m a twenty-something who defines herself solely by what she does and produces. Or to put it more bluntly: I realize that I don’t have a life outside of my work.

Her words set me thinking, and in the months that follow, I explore why I’ve made everything about my work. I realize I’m masking my insecurities by staying busy. My recent breakup with my fiancé shakes up my friendships,

and I know I need to move outside my comfort zone to build some new relationships. Although I feel awkward, I resolve to go to the singles' group at church. I dread those first moments after walking through the door, but know I must push through my resistance and fears. I trust that I'll come to understand myself more through my interactions with others.

Sharing a townhouse with three women affords me plenty of opportunities to engage with others firsthand. As I digest the truth that God loves me, I have to ask myself why I struggle to live with, and love, my roommates who are also God's beloved. For instance, why do I resist when my roommate asks me to separate the forks, knives, and spoons by type in the dishwasher? Or why do I get so annoyed with the stomping overhead when they arrive home? I often overlook my own faults, but I feel a whoosh of humility when one of them shares an eye-opening insight with me. She recounts how while we were in the middle of a disagreement, she stood in the shower for a good long time while praying for me. She was seeking God's help to see me as made in his image so that she could show me love and compassion. Exactly what I'm trying to do with her.

As I grapple with my lack of awareness about what it looks like to live with me, I start to realize that throwing myself into my work helps me avoid facing the messiness of life with others. Yet I know that I won't grow in maturity if I simply hide away with my various projects. I want to learn how to enjoy resting and simply being while not acting on the compulsion to move to the next thing on my to-do list.

In these interactions and through my growing intimacy with God, I'm learning that I don't have to work and achieve to prove my worth. I start to understand not only in my head but in my heart that I am lovable simply because God created and formed me. Because I'm God's child, I can rest and simply be.

## Seeking Balance

I share this glimpse from my life in my twenties, as we explore the story of Mary and Martha from Luke's gospel, because I love to work. Sometimes I wonder if, with my heritage of both my parents growing up on farms, I have a deep-seated impetus to work. My maternal great-grandmother moved from Germany to America when she was thirteen, settling into life in Iowa

with her parents on a farm. Her children—my grandmother—also grew up on a farm, as did my mother. The women in my family were raised plucking chickens, planting and harvesting food from the garden, preserving vegetables to eat throughout the arctic winter, and milking the cows. In order to survive, they worked.

That industrious spirit continues today, and if you were to drop into my parents' home unannounced, you'd find it spotless and clutter-free. Their white kitchen floor would be pearly white. They'd invite you in and defrost a wonderful baked delight to enjoy.

As I consider my heritage and think back to my twenties, I ponder whether now I'm more balanced with work, family, and recreation. My answer is, "Yes, but . . ." Yes, I often strike more of a balance than I did decades ago but no, I don't have it all figured out. My love of creating, producing, shaping, and achieving hasn't dissipated—I still enjoy immersing myself in a project and getting it done. And I still often find myself overcommitted, wondering why yet again I find myself in the predicament of looming deadlines amid a too-tight schedule. These years later, I still need the story of how Jesus loves Martha and Mary as he calls Martha to a better way.

## **Examining the Story**

In this chapter we're focusing on Martha from the story in Luke and how she let her tasks overshadow the invitation to sit at Jesus's feet and learn from him. But for an overview, let's dig into the narrative bit by bit:

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)

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First, notice where this story appears in Luke's gospel. It's sandwiched between two crucial sections, the account of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and Jesus teaching his friends to pray in what we know as the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1–4). Perhaps with this ordering Luke shows us first how to love and serve our neighbor (the good Samaritan), then the importance of listening to Jesus over serving him (Mary and Martha), then how to be heard by Jesus (the Lord's Prayer).<sup>1</sup> While God wants us to love our neighbor, even as ourself, he also wants us to prize our relationship with him.

### The Village and the Siblings (v. 38)

As Jesus and his friends travel, they arrive at the home of Martha in Bethany. With this village less than two miles from Jerusalem on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, it wouldn't be a long journey for them. For further context, it's about four miles from Jesus's birthplace in Bethlehem.

In Aramaic, the common language they spoke, Martha's name means "owner" or "master." She's the firstborn in what may be this family of means, and although she's a woman, Luke names her as the head of the household.<sup>2</sup> Even in this first verse of the story, the Bible goes against the culture of the day. In the ancient world, the eldest male would be seen as the homeowner. He would be the one to greet visitors. In contrast, women would have very little interaction with men outside of their family.<sup>3</sup> But God breaks through the accepted conventions and empowers women according to their gifts and his purposes.

Why might Luke name Martha as the key person? Some commentators wonder if Lazarus doesn't play that role because he's incapacitated by some kind of chronic illness.<sup>4</sup> Physical limitations that prevent him from traveling would fit the pattern of Jesus visiting the home of the siblings in Bethany instead of them going to meet him.

### Martha Reacts to Mary and Confronts Jesus (vv. 39–40)

Another countercultural feature of this story is how Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, learning from him (which we'll explore more in the next chapter). Martha, in contrast, doesn't think she has time to sit at the feet of Jesus. She serves the Lord, who has arrived unannounced—it's not like he texted ahead



to say they were coming! When he and his friends appear, she kicks into high gear and bustles around the kitchen as she makes the preparations. At that time, many were a woman's tasks—grinding flour, baking bread, tending the garden, spinning wool, washing clothes, cooking the food.<sup>5</sup>

Notice, however, that those many jobs don't include serving the meal to the men in attendance. That task would fall to a male servant.<sup>6</sup> But Martha, in wanting to see to Jesus's needs, breaks this accepted practice.

We see her presenting herself to Jesus, standing before him. In the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the verb for *stand* has a sense of suddenness to it. She stands authoritatively.<sup>7</sup> And she says to him, in effect, "Don't you care? My sister's left *me* to do all of the work! Tell her to get up and help me!"

What we witness so beautifully is the freedom Martha feels in presenting herself to Jesus in this way. She can reveal her frustration to him; she can be open and even a little cranky. I think in our rush to judge Martha we may overlook how wonderful it is that she can share her exasperation with Jesus. She's not silently stewing in the kitchen and then making passive-aggressive comments to Mary. Rather she lays it all out before her friend.

### Jesus Responds to Martha (vv. 41-42)

As we view Jesus's response, note how lovingly he sees what's really going on in Martha when he calls her by name. He understands that she's worried and upset, with many things goading her. She's not invisible nor taken for granted but so important to Jesus that he names her *twice*. In the Bible, a repeated word signifies a greater level of importance.

Jesus sees that Martha is worked up and anxious, and he doesn't want to leave her in this state; he calls her to a better way of living. He understands that she's distracted by many things, but he wants her to focus on the one thing that's needed. That is, he invites her to make the most important thing in her life the most important thing. Instead of fretting, she can sit at the feet of Jesus—learning from him, loving him, being with him.

Jesus doesn't negate Martha's desire to serve, but affirms that Mary's choice of focusing on him is better and won't be taken away from her. Mary soaks in his wisdom and enjoys being with him.

## Anxiety-Inducing Work

Because I like to achieve and complete projects, I can relate to Martha in this story. I can imagine getting anxious and resentful over Mary sitting at Jesus's feet doing seemingly nothing while I slave away in the kitchen. When we host guests, for example, all of a sudden I see every cobweb hanging from the ceiling, all the piles of paper and clutter, every crumb and piece of dirt on the floor. I can become a bit of a madwoman as I whip the house into shape while seeking to employ my husband and kids in the task.

Like Martha in this scenario, I'm distracted and frustrated. I can be thinking about Wi-Fi codes and wondering if our guidebooks to London are up to date while forgetting that Jesus is with me. I let the distractions of preparation take over as I seek to create a welcoming space while I often overlook the other inhabitants of our home. Including Jesus.

But Jesus welcomes me to release my cares to him. He told his disciples not to worry but instead to trust God: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear . . ." (Luke 12:22). He went on to say how much God cares for even the ravens, who have enough to eat without storerooms for grain (v. 24). And when he sees Martha so anxious and upset, he realizes just how much she's weighed down. The word Luke uses in the Greek suggests that Martha being troubled exceeds that of an individual worry; she's taken on the cares of the community.<sup>8</sup>

## Equating Our Work with Our Worth

In my daily life, I can slide into defining myself by my work. That is, I achieve my worth through the articles and books I write, the retreats I lead, the spiritual direction I give. The goal, I start to believe implicitly, is to make a difference through whatever project in which I'm currently engaged. But God doesn't love us for what we do. According to Jesus, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). Believing in God through Jesus, I can revel in the knowledge that I'm God's beloved, trusting that my identity rests on being his child and not on anything that I do or leave undone. God doesn't place all of that pressure on me, so equally I shouldn't take it on.

Why do we fuse together our identity with our work? The roots of this practice come from the curse of the fall (see Genesis 3). Before Adam and

Eve disobeyed God, he entrusted them to care for creation. Work at that time wasn't backbreaking but a sheer joy. But our first parents turned from God and ushered in sin and death, and in the process work became warped. Thorns and thistles started to crowd the healthy plants and the earth suffered droughts and floods. Tilling the land then entailed laboring over the dry and cracked soil and pulling out the choking weeds.

Today our work can be tinged with disappointment, exhaustion, and distress. We can too often align our identity with it and become distracted by it. We may feel hemmed in by the expectations we or others hold regarding work, whether those of our parents or mentors, society, or peers. One example is the assumptions people have over the work of parents of young children, whether you're a mother who works outside the home or one who doesn't, or a father caring for the children at home. Another example is how often, when we meet someone for the first time, our opening question is, "What do you do?"<sup>9</sup>

Our answers to these dilemmas can be shaped by the better way that Jesus calls Martha to—a relationship with him. Through our friendship with God, we experience the redemption of our work as we collaborate with God's Spirit in creative and life-enhancing ways. He spurs us on to believe, our main work. And he partners with us on exciting projects, enriching activities, and encouraging relationships that call forth the best and truest parts of ourselves. Working with God, we spend our time and energy in ways that spread his love and life in the world, making it a better place.

God also shows us how to lay down our projects at healthy intervals. We can form patterns of work and rest that reflect our human needs of sleep, exercise, play, and good nutrition. He feeds our emotional health too. As we relate to God daily, he pours into us the affirmation we long for—which we often seek through the approval of others.



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## Time to Pray: Prayerful Reading

As we consider our relationship to God and our view of work, let's move to a time of engaging with this story prayerfully. I invite you to ask God through his Spirit to speak to you as you read the passage from the Bible four times, each time with a different emphasis. The steps of prayerful reading are reading, reflecting, responding, and resting.

## Transforming Love

If you're less familiar with this way of praying, you might want to read through my example below of how I engaged with God and this story first. But if you would like to delve straight into this practice, please do so.

1. *Read.* Take some time to silence your heart and your mind, inviting God to lead you in a time of prayer. With a spirit of receptivity and openness, read through Luke 10:38–42 for the first time. (You might wish to play a recording of it to engage your sense of hearing.) During this first step focus on reading to gain an understanding of and familiarity with the story. Ask God to incline your heart and mind toward him, inviting him to impress on you a word or idea from the passage. Read with expectancy and wonder that the God of the universe longs to share his heart with you.

Looking for a few ideas? Here are some words and phrases that might stand out to you:

- ☛ on their way
- ☛ sat at the Lord's feet
- ☛ listening to him
- ☛ distracted
- ☛ don't you care?
- ☛ left me to do the work
- ☛ tell her!
- ☛ you're worried and upset
- ☛ few things are needed
- ☛ one thing needed
- ☛ the better way
- ☛ won't be taken away

2. *Reflect.* Read Luke 10:38–42 for the second time. During this step ruminate on the text, pondering it as a cow chews its cud. Let the truths sink deeply into your heart, mingling with your thoughts, dreams, and ideas. Turn your prayer into a conversation as you talk through with God what this story means to you as you explore it in more detail. You might want to focus in on Mary sitting at Jesus's feet; or thinking about Martha in the kitchen might resonate with you more. If God revealed a word or image from the story to you in

the first step, focus on that, reflecting on how you relate to it—what does it mean to you? What associations do you have with this word or image?

3. *Respond.* Read the passage a third time, this time giving to God all of the ways you want to respond to him. The word or phrase that stood out to you could act as the doorway in for your response. For example, you might cry out to him for help, asking him to save you from a situation such as too many projects or housework or things to do. You might ask him to give you wisdom and the patience to sit at his feet, learning from him. You might seek courage or strength. Or perhaps you'd like to praise or thank him. Present all of the cries of your heart that the story stirs up in you, trusting that he receives them with joy and love.
4. *Rest.* Read the story a last time, this time focusing on a spirit of rest. Embrace the quiet not only externally but within you—as much as you can. If thoughts pop into your mind that distract you, just ask these thoughts to sit quietly to one side until you are done. You might want to jot them down. Then return to God and rest as you embrace the peace and the sense of well-being he gives.

When you come to the end of the prayer exercise, take a few moments to note what God revealed to you, how you responded, and what you've gained from the experience. You may wish to write down your reflections so that you can revisit them later. I find I can too quickly forget what I feel God gives to me in times of prayer, and these jottings take me right back to the experience of God's grace and love.

### A Snapshot View

To share how simple but deep this practice of prayerful Bible reading can be, here's an example of how I prayed through the Mary and Martha story. In sharing this I'm not suggesting that what God highlighted to me will resonate with you—for instance, I felt led to focus more on Mary than Martha, but you might have a different response. God responds to us as individuals whom he loves dearly and whom he knows intricately. We're his friends whom he cherishes and knows inside and out.

*Read.* Lord, as I read through the story the first time, I ask you please

to reveal a word to me. How might you direct me as I engage with this story prayerfully? [I read the passage.] Lord, I really resonate with Martha in the kitchen, but I think you're calling me to focus on "Mary has chosen what is better." Yes, that seems right. Thank you, Lord, for directing me to this phrase from the story.

*Reflect.* Maker of Mary and Martha, I read through the story again and interact with it. [I read the story again.] That phrase "chosen what is better" keeps reverberating within me. Mary chose what is better. I wonder if she felt a pull to the kitchen and all the preparations that needed to be made to feed you, Lord Jesus, and your friends. Did she have to resist the feelings of "should" as she stayed at your feet? I think I would have been in the kitchen already, perhaps stewing along with Martha that, again, all of the work had fallen on me. But Mary had the strength to choose the better way. I'm seeing now that strength of character that Mary had in not joining her sister in the kitchen.

I don't know that I've noticed that before, Lord. I've always been so quick to relate to Martha that I haven't seen what it could have cost Mary to stay at your feet. Perhaps she had to ignore the clattering sounds of vessels being filled and vegetables being chopped in the room next door. Did she have to battle to stay sitting there at your feet? I know I often face distractions in prayer. I can so quickly think of the next thing on my to-do list that I'm tempted to move on to it instead of staying with you.

*Respond.* Loving God, as I read through the story a third time, I can't help but respond to you. [I read the story a third time.] What's your invitation to me as I ponder Mary choosing the better way? How can I train myself to choose when to rest at your feet and when to bustle in the kitchen? I know I get this choice wrong so often. I say yes to kind invitations that affirm me and make me feel needed. And then I have to follow through with them and I get tired and overwhelmed. I said no yesterday, Lord, didn't I. Tiny victories, these are. I loved the sound of that opportunity and know I could have helped her out. But in saying yes, what would I be saying no to? Time watching a movie with my daughter? The freedom of a less-cluttered to-do list? Thank you that you gave me the courage to say no and to do so graciously. Please help me to imbed the practices not only of sitting at your feet but of saying no when I need to.

After all, I know that when I quiet the competing voices in my head and my heart and rest with you, that you refresh me. You give me this strength to say no. You give me insights and help and peace and joy. Your gifts change me, empowering me for when I am ready to do the next thing on my list. I can see how even in the past few days, as this bout of illness keeps me home and forces me to rest, that I haven't turned to you first. Instead I've watched that interior design show or tried to read a book. Nothing wrong with those things, of course, but I want to train myself to choose you first. To find my rest in you. Ah, Lord, I'm remembering that lovely line from Psalm 62: "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him" (v. 5). As Mary chose what is better, she found rest and hope in you. That's what I want too. I thank you for affirming me and lovingly calling me to a better way. You don't want me exhausted and wrung out. You want me to flourish.

*Rest.* Saving Jesus, I read through the story a fourth time in a spirit of rest. [I read the story a fourth and final time.] I find rest in choosing you. I now will stop my chatter as I spend a few moments sitting at your feet, enjoying your presence.



The Lord Is . . .

Jesus is our friend, and a wonderful way to express various aspects of this relationship is through personalizing and adapting Psalm 23. This has been a favorite activity for me since a writer told me about this practice some years ago.<sup>10</sup> I give an example of this practice at the end of each chapter, based on its theme.

Here's my rendition for this chapter, and I invite you to write your own as well.

The Lord is my colleague, I lack nothing.  
He makes me a hot drink,  
he leads me to a quiet space for a break,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He sparks ideas and guides me creatively  
for his name's sake.

## Transforming Love

Even though I face  
    rejection, hardship, and failure,  
I will fear no evil,  
    for you are with me;  
your tools of the trade,  
    they comfort me.  
You prepare a desk before me  
    in the presence of my critics.  
You anoint my hands and head with inspiration;  
    my ideas overflow.  
Surely your goodness and affirmation will follow me  
    all the days of my life,  
and I will live with you in your house  
    forever.

### Questions for Individual Reflection or Group Discussion

1. As you read through the chapter's overview of this story from Luke, what strikes you? What did you learn that perhaps you'd not come across before?
2. How do you think Martha felt when Jesus told her she was distracted by many things, but not the one necessary thing? How do you think Mary felt as she observed the conversation?
3. How are you wired in terms of work—do you tend toward working too much or not working enough? Why?
4. Jesus said that our work is to believe in the one God sent (John 6:29). What does this mean to you? How are you living this out?
5. When have you felt in partnership with God with a project you've undertaken, whether in the home, community, or workplace? What difference did God's involvement make?



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## Do you need a friend like Jesus?

When Jesus walked the earth, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were some of his closest friends. He loved them just as they were. In the context of a safe and vulnerable relationship, he emboldened each sibling to move past cultural and social expectations, let go of unhealthy patterns, and be freed of bad habits.

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**Our Daily Bread  
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COVER DESIGN BY PATTI BRINKS

COVER PHOTO © ROMANOVA EKATERINA / SHUTTERSTOCK

Taken from *Transforming Love: How Friendship with Jesus Changes Us*, by Amy Boucher Pye

CH093  
RELIGION / Christian Living / Personal Growth

ISBN 978-1-64070-228-8



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