

Stepping Out
Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World
a Book Review



Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World is a book about the familiar story of Mary and Martha. Did you know there are actually three stories about these sisters and their brother Lazarus? Who are they? How can their interactions with Jesus influence my relationship with Him? What on earth do they have to do with the Cumberland Presbyterian Step Out initiative?

ACTION: *Forget what you remember about the sisters and read the story again from Luke 10:38-42, preferably from a version that is different from your regular readings. Reading from a new version can bring freshness to the story. I love using *The Message* along side other versions.*

How many of us can relate to Martha? Dear Martha, so overloaded with service. So overwhelmed while trying to do the right thing for this special guest in her home – plus all the guys he brought with him. The author, Joanna Weaver, quotes a woman who said, "My life is like a blender – and it's stuck on frappe!"

ACTION: *Take a moment to discuss one of the questions from the book's study guide: "I guess I'm just a Martha and that I'll always be a Martha.' Is it possible for our basic character to change, or are we destined to live our lives stuck in a predetermined nature? Look up the following scriptures and see what the Bible says about change: Ezekiel 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6." How does this attitude about an unchangeable frappe lifestyle affect our prayer time and Bible study?*

ACTION: *In the chapter titled "The Diagnosis", Weaver describes worry as the main problem. Proverbs 3:5-6 and Philippians 4:6-7 tell us what to do with our worries and concerns. Find a command and a result in each of these two scriptures.*

Weaver claims the cure to the diagnosis of worry is "Living Room Intimacy." We have so many things trying to keep us from this time of intimacy with our Lord. Unworthiness, busyness, guilt, shame, pride and depression all creep into our minds and convince us that we should not even try. If we just follow the rules we can leave intimacy for those with nothing else to do, and who are far better women than we believe ourselves to be.

So, what do I do with service – stepping out? It needs to be put into its proper place with our times of intimacy. Intimacy first will direct our service. Sometimes it seems it would be easier just to mind our own business and stay behind in the crowd rather than sit at his feet and actually do what it takes to get more of Him.

I asked a young friend to proof this study for me. I love one of her comments: "When I was reading over your notes and thinking back on the book, I wondered how often we confuse "stepping out" to work towards the Lord's will and legalistic obligations. We serve on committees and make sure the normal functions of the church are running, but if this is our only focus, like Martha's, we're never really sitting at Jesus' feet to hear if he has other work for us to

do. Mary was in a much better position to hear what the Lord wanted from her." Amanda Groves, Good Prospect CPC, Trilla, IL.

Being teachable, while in intimacy with God, is the beginning of transformation. How teachable are we? The answer comes with looking at how we take criticism. How did Jesus answer Martha when she came with her complaints? He was gentle, but it was still a rebuke. It would be so easy to react with a huffy and self-righteous attitude: "Well, I'll go back to the kitchen and do what I am suppose to do." Proverbs 12:1 says, "He who hates discipline is stupid." Stupid?!? Hummmmm . . . think about that for a moment.

But Martha was able to accept what Jesus said to her. It is evident in John 11 when her brother Lazarus died. We see a different Martha here. When she hears Jesus is approaching, she leaves her tasks and runs to him. Though she does not understand the delay in his coming to them, she places her whole trust in him. To this open, teachable heart, Jesus reveals, "I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Then he asks her if she believes this.

ACTION: *Read John 11:1-27. How does Martha answer this question about belief? Are we willing to hear Jesus? When we enter into a time of prayer or Bible Study, do we come with pre-set ideas of how prayer should be answered? Do we believe Jesus has a better way? Did He actually let Lazarus die to show God's glory instead of healing him?*

We have just touched the tip of the iceberg with this book. I encourage your group to read and study it. Buy the copy that has the companion Bible study included. Go into it with a teachable heart and be ready to hear something new and fresh from a familiar story. Let the lessons learned affect your prayer life. Approach God with openhanded prayers instead of telling Him how He should answer.

G.K. Chesterton states "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and left untried."

Stepping out in prayer and Bible Study can be a rote exercise to keep these disciplines simple. They are not simple; they are difficult. But, God is calling us there to seek Him anew in order to reach out to others who are hurting and have no hope.

Prayer:

Lord, Open our eyes to see where the Martha in us can be overbearing not only to others, but also to you. Instead of turning to our own solutions and ideas, help us to hear you and your direction as we pray and study. Give us boldness to take what we hear from you to those around us who are in need. Help us to say "YES!" when you ask us to step out. Amen