

SESSION 1

EVEN CHRISTIANS COLLIDE



What is the silliest argument you've ever been a part of?

THE POINT

Conflict can arise because of different priorities.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some of the biggest fights I have witnessed have been over trivial things in a church: paint color, carpet or tile, order of service, whether to buy toilet paper in bulk or as needed. (Not kidding. It happened.) In every situation, Christians were doing the arguing. Most of the time there were two legitimate sides to the discussion, but those involved felt only their opinion was valid enough to defend.

If we step back from the source of conflict in each of the examples above, most of us can see they are trivial in light of the eternal issues the church faces. None of us wants to admit that we get upset about trivial things. They don't seem trivial. But conflict can arise because of different priorities. We want to believe we have our priorities in the right place and we are defending the right positions. Sometimes it takes a 10,000 foot view to help us see what to do. Thankfully, God understands this tension in life and through His Word we have examples of good people who struggled with conflict. The story of Mary and Martha is an example.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 10:38-42 (HCSB)

- 38** While they were traveling, He entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.
- 39** She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said.
- 40** But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand."
- 41** The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things,
- 42** but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her."

Key Words

distracted (v. 40) – The Greek word meant pulled or dragged away. It described someone too busy, or overburdened.

worried and upset (v. 41) – The first word was used by Jesus to describe the kind of anxious concern a person might have for food or clothing rather than trusting the Lord to provide (Matt. 6:25-34). The second word literally meant stirred up or troubled.

necessary (v. 42) – That which is a requirement, a requisite, a necessity.



Luke 10:38

Jesus frequently visited homes along His journey. For example, Zacchaeus invited Jesus into his home in Jericho (Luke 19:6). Matthew invited Jesus into his home in Capernaum (Matt. 9:9-13). Simon Peter invited Jesus into his home in Capernaum (Mark 1:29-34). Martha also welcomed Jesus into her home (Luke 10:38).

It is interesting that Martha did the inviting. It would be additional work to entertain Jesus and His disciples. Martha worked to feed and care for the men's physical needs.

We sometimes get the indication from this story that Mary was the more spiritual sister. But what Martha did was incredibly spiritual. She invited Jesus into her home. Hospitality shows God's love. Martha also had a right motive in wanting to serve others. She followed a biblical command to consider other's interests ahead of her own (Phil. 2:4).

Recently, I became pastor of a new church. The people have been overwhelmingly kind to me. When I accept a visit to someone's home, my wife and I are treated almost embarrassingly well. They want to know my favorite foods. They don't want to fix anything I wouldn't like. They prepare their best desserts. I can sit wherever I want to sit. (You know the man has a favorite chair, but it's never even mentioned.) I have to exercise more these days, simply because of their hospitality, but they want to honor their pastor. (They are doing a good job of it.)



***Which sister do you
most relate to? Why?***

QUESTION #1

Most of us go to great efforts to entertain guests in our homes. We can understand why Martha was upset—there was work to be done. Martha was preparing for a suddenly planned visit of 13 hungry and tired men at her house. One of those men was Jesus.

I remember how much my mother loved to entertain. She would invite family, friends, coworkers, and people from church to visit in our home. As much as my mother loved to host people, she always stressed the few days leading up to the event. She wanted things to go well with their visit.

How can our responsibilities sometimes be a source of conflict?

QUESTION #2

STEP BACK

A ministry you're involved in is growing and doing well. But it's causing tension in your personal life because it's taking time away from home.



1. Stepping back and considering God's priorities would affect me by:

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2. Stepping back and considering God's priorities would affect my home by:

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3. Stepping back and considering God's priorities would affect my ministry by:

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Luke 10:39-40

While Martha completed her many tasks, Martha's sister Mary was absent from the kitchen. The connotation I have heard people make is that Martha was the structured, driven personality and Mary may have been a little ... shall we say ... lazy. We don't necessarily get that from this event. Mary may have been found helping her sister in the kitchen on most days. We do know Mary and Martha often showed unity in their approaches. They both sent for Jesus when their brother Lazarus was sick (John 11:3).

What we see from the event is that Mary, on this particular visit, focused on simply enjoying the presence of Jesus. The phrase, "at the Lord's feet" indicates a posture for learning. She was gleaning from the teaching of Jesus. The customs of the day shunned many women from learning. Women were exempt from studying the Torah. This was a huge opportunity for Mary that she would have few times in her life.

Jesus was probably tired and hungry from traveling and teaching. It would seem inhospitable to ignore His needs or not care for His comfort. Without the help of Mary, Martha baked the bread, set the table, and prepared the meal. She apparently grew more frustrated the longer she thought about her sister sitting rather than helping.

This was a family conflict. There was work to be done to care for the guests. It had to be done if people were going to be properly fed. That was Martha's position. At the same time Jesus was the busy, on-the-go Son of God. He wouldn't be there long. That was Mary's position. Both women focused on good things. The conflict was over noble matters. This isn't a passage about right or wrong. This is a passage about priorities.

Jesus intervened in the conflict and brought a larger perspective.



When was a time you had to choose between studying the Bible and accomplishing work that needed to be done?

QUESTION #3

Luke 10:41-42

Often our choices of how we spend our time can cause conflict with others who would make different choices. Our conflict may be with our spouse over how we are going to spend a weekend. It could be with our work over whether to work overtime or go home early. It might be with our own schedule, determining what we can and cannot do with our time.

Every day we make choices based on priorities. That doesn't make the other choice wrong. It doesn't mean we won't have to do all of the choices at some point. It means that in the act of making decisions, it isn't always about right and wrong, as much as it is about good and better.

I have never believed Jesus was criticizing the work we do in the kitchen. I don't believe Jesus is opposed to cooking a big meal or helping guests feel at home. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus enjoyed social engagements. He was frequently found eating. This event at the home of Martha and Mary reminds us we can become distracted with seemingly good things while neglecting things of greater value. That can happen in our careers, our personal time, our family life, and our relationship with Jesus. We need Jesus to give us the big-picture perspective. This may solve much of the conflict we experience.

I like that Jesus didn't ignore Martha's concern. Jesus loved Martha and Mary (John 11:5). Instead of overlooking Martha's concern, Jesus narrowed in on it. Jesus brought perspective to the conflict between Mary and Martha by reminding Martha that, when picking options of how to best spend her time, on this particular day—in this precise moment—Mary chose the better option. Martha was not doing wrongly. Caring for Jesus' physical needs was good. But on this day, sitting to learn from Jesus was the priority.

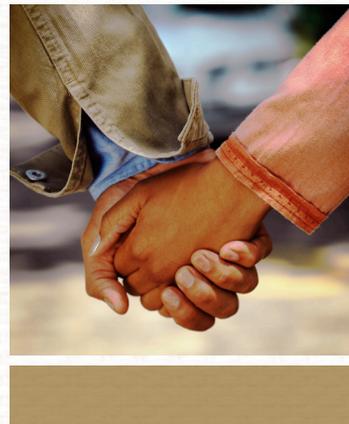
BEST

What must you consider when you are deciding between good, better, and best?

QUESTION #4

LIVE IT OUT

- ▶ **Identify what's important.** Evaluate a conflict, looking for what each party considers important.
- ▶ **Reorder your priorities.** Your stance in a conflict may be good and valid, but it may need to take a temporary backseat to a greater priority.
- ▶ **Take a half-day retreat.** Do nothing but “sit at the feet of Jesus” in prayer and Bible reading. You will gain a fresh perspective on your other priorities.



The next time an argument arises, step back to see the bigger perspective. **Choose according to Jesus' priorities.**

Fair Game



I've never been the kind of wife to create gourmet meals. I can successfully follow a recipe, but I wouldn't call myself a great cook. Very early in my marriage, I could make about four dishes. Terrell and I ate a lot of chicken and green beans. I also could bake a cake, so there was that. Somehow I perfected homemade potato soup, which quickly became my husband's favorite meal ... until the potato soup fight.



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