

BUSYNESS: THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING YES TO WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT (Luke 10:38-42)

By Bob Young

The story of Mary and Martha intrigues me (Luke 10:38-42). Mary chose what was best. Mary said yes to what was most important. I wonder if we have seen the context, imagined the rest of the story, applied the story well in our own lives.

Saying yes to what is most important begins with saying no to what is less important. How do we learn when to say no, so we can say yes? Good is often the enemy of the best.

Shortly after Jesus began the “Jerusalem journey” (Luke 9:51), he had occasion to make a trip to Jerusalem. (Based on the context, this trip is not his final trip to Jerusalem.) Jesus is coming to Bethany. People everywhere are following his movements. He often travels with an entourage including his disciples. He attracts curiosity-seekers and those who want to see him. On this occasion, we know that his disciples were with him.

Martha was so preoccupied with the busy tasks of hospitality that she overlooked what was most important. Do not be too hard on Martha. She is seeking to be a good hostess. Many people are coming to her house. There is food to prepare, possibly lodging to be arranged, hospitality details. She wants to take care of everyone’s physical needs. Do we not applaud such today? Do we not expect it? Hospitality involves décor and delicious food and details.

Mary saw a spiritual opportunity. The people are not coming for physical sustenance but spiritual. The priority is spending time with Jesus, inviting all to sit at the feet of Jesus, avoid the distractions. Mary chooses correctly. She sees the priority. She values the blessing of simply spending time with Jesus. She wants others to have the same blessing.

Mary said no to tasks that would take her away from what was most important, the spiritual dimension of Jesus’ visit. Martha’s preoccupation caused her to focus on the physical needs of the moment.

Application time. How often do we try to reach out to people by imitating Martha rather than Mary? Mary believed the people would come to see Jesus – whether there was food or not! If people really want to encounter Jesus, they will go where he is, whether there is a party or not! We try to attract people with Martha matters, but if they really want to encounter Jesus, they will go where he is without the trappings.

Whatever happened to simply inviting people to church? To small group? To spiritual retreats? To Bible studies? How often do we depend on the physical—food, fellowship, fun? Folks, attractional church has never been God’s long-term solution to bringing people to Jesus!

Trying to attract people with attractive things buys into the values of the world. Welcome to the world of Martha! What about focusing on the presence of Jesus? What about bringing people face to face with spiritual realities as we together sit at the feet of Jesus? Welcome to the world of Mary!

Do our outreach activities ever look like a lot of busyness? Does the focus look like Martha or Mary? Martha did not intend to say no to Jesus. She opened her home to him. But she inadvertently said no to the opportunity to spend quality time with him. Her focus was misplaced. If we misplace the focus, what should we expect will happen with those we try to reach? Will they not also misplace the focus? Certainly so!

If disciple-making is the goal, we must examine our yesses and our noes. We must learn the lesson of Mary and Martha. Even better, we must learn the lesson of Jesus. He gave us a model of how to make disciples that make disciples. Constantly spend time with those you would teach and influence. Heavily invest time in disciple-making, focusing on spiritual life. Spend time together with God the Father. Life is not centered on what we eat and drink. Life is centered on obeying God’s Word and investing consistently in those he entrusts to us.