

Chapter Twelve

Bethany's Gates

Chapter 9 of this book mentioned that the Son of Man was a *friend*. He was especially close to a man named Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. The first time we meet them is at a dinner party they are hosting for Jesus and His disciples—

“As Jesus and His disciples were on their way,
He came to the 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 all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’
‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered,
‘you are worried and upset about many things,
but only one thing is needed.
Mary has chosen what is better,
and it will not be taken away from her.’”

Luke 10:38-41

Their story would make an incredible stage production—Scene One finds Martha in the kitchen, rattling pots and slamming pans. The green Jell-O salad stuck to the mold, her gravy has lumps, and the turkey is dry. To make matters worse, Mary is in the bonus room with the guests, doing nothing to help.

“Lord, don’t you *care* that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

It wasn’t as if the guests weren’t grateful for the wonderful meal that Martha had prepared; it’s just that no one had *asked* her to. After all, “Domino’s delivers.” Martha could have passed out paper plates and joined her sister at the feet of Jesus, but she didn’t. Instead, she served a seven-course meal on their best china.

I understand Martha to a degree. Many of us find our significance not only in what we do, but in how others perceive us.

“Dinner was delicious.”

“Your home is always spotless.”

“You made the centerpiece yourself?”

In the book, *The Five Love Languages*, author Gary Smalley tells us that there are five basic ways in which we demonstrate love—*acts of service, gifts, meaningful touch, quality time, and words of affirmation*. Martha’s “love language” was “acts of service.” She showed love by what she did for others, and found her significance in their response.

My love language? “Words of affirmation.” *Tell* me that my new hair color doesn’t look like an eggplant. *Tell* me that my new song is nice. *Tell* me that you love me . . . even if I already know, let me *hear* the words.

Our son’s love language is “quality time.” He feels valued when Kerry and I stop whatever we are doing for a while and play a video game with him. Since Kerry is a guy, he loves doing that, but I have no desire whatsoever to drive with my thumbs. It makes me *nervous*, which defeats the purpose of *playing*. I tell Graham that if I wanted to drive, I’d get in my car and go around the block . . . he laughs, and then scoots over so I can sit down beside him, because he knows that I know his love language. To Graham, “love” is demonstrated when his busy parents stop whatever important thing they are do-

ing, to do something that matters to him. In the offering, Graham feels loved, valued, and validated.

I am a certified counselor, so I *should* know these things, but I can't seem to find my husband's love language anywhere in that book. Trust me, I looked on every page. He must be in the unwritten book called *The Sixth Love Language*. It would be in the chapter called, *Don't Require Anything of Me*. Having a home office means that Kerry works sixteen hours a day, so a tangible way that I can demonstrate my love for him is not handing him a list of things to do. Unfortunately, I am task-oriented. My veggies line up in the pantry by color and size: first the peas, then the green beans, and then asparagus. But while I live to be organized, Kerry has piles of paperwork all over our office. The clutter suffocates me, but to him it is all a "sophisticated filing system." God's plan is to use our extremes to bring *balance*: I am usually early, Kerry is always late, but together we arrive on time. That same kind of balance would have been a blessing to sisters Mary and Martha.

Back in Bethany, Martha's day wasn't turning out at all like she had planned. She was "cumbered about with much serving," says the King James Version. She was *perispao*, "over-occupied and drawn away." But Mary, on the other hand, was *listening*. *Akouo*. "Understanding." The thought of Mary doing nothing caused Martha to come to a complete boil. The Greek language tells us that she was "wailing in an uproar." She plowed into the room where her guests were reclining in a complete tizzy.

Stop the scene for a moment and look at this woman . . . Martha, with steam shooting out her ears, having one hand on her hip while the other was shaking a wooden spoon in a z-formation, yelled, "Jesus, don't you *care* that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?" *Can you recognize a martyr when you see one?*

Granted, Mary could have helped her sister, but maybe she realized that Martha wasn't doing the work for her guests, but for the praise it would bring her:

"*You made this cake from scratch?*"

"*Can I have your recipe?*"

"*Is there nothing you can't do?*"

Maybe Mary left her sister to glory in herself while she sat at the Master's feet, drinking in His every word.

Jesus responded, tenderly, "Martha, you are worried and upset about many things." Another translation would be, "Martha, you are disquieted and troubled in your mind because you are promoting your own interest. Only one thing is *necessary*; and Mary has chosen wisely that which is *useful, joyful, and excellent*."

Ouch.

With flour on her nose and egg on her face, Martha realized that she had been wrong. I imagine that Jesus extended His hand to her, drawing Martha into the fellowship. With great kindness, Jesus folded her apron and set it aside. There would be no more need of it for the rest of the evening.

Martha didn't miss the lesson that day. I know, because when we encounter her in Scene Two, she is a different woman. But Mary, who earlier had chosen the "better," had her faith rocked to the core.

"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one who loves you is sick.'

When He heard this, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son be glorified through it.'"

John 11:1-4

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. Because they had seen many of the miracles He performed, they had faith to believe that Jesus could make their brother well.

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick,

He stayed where He was two more days.”

John 11:5-6

Jesus *waited. Meno.* He “tarried.” Then after two days, He said to His disciples, “Let us go back to *Judea*,” which translates, “He Shall Be Praised.”

Did you get that?

Jesus *waited* until Lazarus was dead.

“‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.’ His disciples replied, ‘Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.’ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.’”

John 11:11-15a

Jesus rejoiced, not *in* Lazarus’ death, but *because* of it—not only would the Father be glorified in Judea, the place where “His Name Shall Be Praised,” but His followers would attain a new level of faith in Him.

“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.”

John 11:17-20

Mary stayed home. The sister who in Scene One had “chosen the better” wouldn’t even walk out the door to greet The Master. She was disillusioned and disappointed. “He could have kept Lazarus from dying, yet he didn’t come,” she must have

thought. Lazarus, whose name meant “whom God helps,” hadn’t been helped at all . . . *he died*. How befitting that they lived in the town of Bethany, which means “house of misery.”

Mary’s heart grieved. The One whom she trusted had let her down. The One she had given everything to had withheld His healing touch. When the sisters heard that Jesus was coming, Martha ran to meet Him before He could even reach the city gates, but Mary stayed home.

“‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know even now God will give You whatever You ask.’”

John 11:21-22

Martha called Jesus *Lord*. *Kurios*. “The One to whom all things belong. The One who has the power of deciding.”

“If only You had been here . . .” Martha was fully persuaded that Jesus had authority over sickness and disease. But she had mistakenly limited His power to what she *knew* He could do. Jesus, desiring to both glorify His Father and grow her faith, was about to offer a fresh revelation of Himself—

“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.’”

Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”

John 11:23-27

Jesus offered Martha insight into His Divine nature. He shared with her something that no one else understood until after He had risen from the dead on the third day. But Martha missed it. Her response to His supernatural invitation to be-

lieve was met with finite understanding. "I know He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." With that, Jesus responded,

"I AM the Resurrection and the Life.
He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies;
and whoever believes in Me will never die."

John 11:25-26a

Jesus *is* Life. He is *Zoe*, "the absolute fullness of life." And whoever *believes* on Him will never die. Jesus asked Martha point blank, "Do you believe this?" "*Are you utterly persuaded that this is true?*"

"Yes, Lord,' she told Him,
'I believe You are the Christ, the Son of God
who was to come into the world.'"

John 11:27

"*Jesus, could You hold that thought?*" Martha didn't say those words, but she might as well have, because in this moment of great revelation, she leaves Jesus standing at the city gate while she runs home to fetch her sister.

Have you ever noticed that when a woman gets a revelation of the Lord, she can't keep it to herself? The woman at the well *ran* through town, telling everyone, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" The women at an empty tomb *ran* to tell His disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. And Martha *ran* home to fetch her sister . . .

When Martha reached the house, she took Mary aside and said, "The Teacher is here, and He is asking for you." She said that Jesus was *pareimi*, "present and ready." When Mary heard those words, she ran to where He was—

"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.'"

The feet of Jesus . . . a place Mary was familiar with. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” How often the sisters must have said those words to one another over the course of that week.

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who
had come along with her also weeping,
He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.”
John 11:33

Though Jesus knew what was about to take place, His heart still ached for Mary who was weeping at His feet. And in that moment, the Son of God wept with His friends.

“... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... Surely
He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”
Isaiah 53:3, 4a

“For we do not have a High Priest who is unable
to sympathize with our weakness.”
Hebrews 4:15a

At first, the onlookers thought it compassionate of Jesus to cry. Then some murmured, “Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have *kept* this man from dying?” Which translates, “*Was He not strong enough? Couldn’t He have provided a way for this man?*”

Jesus again was deeply moved. The word *embrimaomai* tells us that “He groaned with earnest admonition within Himself” as He arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone laid against it. Then He gave the command,

“Take away the stone.”

What a defining moment. The Lord’s command would either bring conflict or build faith. Martha said to the Lord that after four days, their brother would surely smell from decay.

Pause this scene for a moment and examine the dialog: *Take away*—a phrase that comes from the word *airo* that means “to lift up. To raise. To elevate.” *Stone* is the word *lithos*, which translates “a stumbling stone,” which is a metaphor of Christ. Now allow His words to resonate in your heart. Jesus was saying, “Raise up The Stone!” The “Stone that makes men stumble and the rock that makes men fall” of Isaiah 8:14. The “precious Cornerstone” of Isaiah 28:16. The “Stone that the builders rejected” of Acts 4:11. In Judea, the place where “His name shall be praised,” Jesus was imploring, “Lift Me up!” *Why?*

“But I, when I am LIFTED UP from the earth,
will draw all men to Myself.”

John 12:32



Jesus was always trying to grow the faith of His followers. Scene Three finds us in a boat, in a storm—

“One day Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.’ So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’ He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.”

Luke 8:22-25

That’s me. I’ll admit it. With great drama, I would have cried, “Master, don’t you *care* that I am drowning?” It seemed that in the Disciples’ greatest moment of need, the Lord was doing nothing.

Mind you, His stillness didn’t mean that He didn’t care. It’s just that the storm did not affect him. They still don’t. Jesus

had Perfect Peace because He knew that they would reach the other side, though the night's crossing meant facing adversity.

The Lord slept. There is something reassuring about His Rest. Yet in the storm, we have difficulty understanding that the Lord isn't silent for silence's sake—He is just quiet in His *knowing*.

“Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and
said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ Then the wind died
down and it was completely calm.”

Mark 4:39

When the storm ceased, Jesus turned to His followers and asked, “Where was your faith?” *Faith* is simply the “assurance and conviction of belief.” So in essence, Jesus was asking, “*Where was your assurance in Me?*”

Like Mary and Martha, the disciples had seen the miracles of Jesus and understood that He had authority over sickness and disease. But in the midst of a storm-tossed sea, Jesus was offering a *new* revelation of Himself—not only did He have authority over sickness and disease, He had authority over the *elements*.

Did they learn the lesson?

No.

How do I know?

Because in Matthew 14:22, Jesus put them *back* in a boat, *back* in a storm. And *this* time, Jesus wasn't with them.

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus sent the Disciples on ahead of Him by boat while He dismissed the crowd. Afterwards He withdrew to a solitary place on a mountainside to pray.

When evening came, a storm arose. From where the Lord was praying, He “saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.” Isn't that precious? Their struggle had not escaped His watchful eye. During the fourth watch of the night, “He went out to them,” walking upon the water, and when He stepped into the boat, “the wind died down.”

Two different storms brought the Disciples two different revelations:

- When Jesus stilled the *first* storm (Luke 8), the disciples marveled, saying, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and water and they obey Him.”
- But when Jesus stilled the *second* storm (Matthew 14 and Mark 6), the disciples “*worshipped* Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”

Did you catch that? After the *first* storm, the men marveled at what Jesus *did*. But after the *second* storm, they marveled at who Jesus *was*.

Have you ever viewed the storms of life as an opportunity to learn something new of the Lord? They are the perfect backdrop for the glory of God to be revealed. But He doesn't just teach us in the storm. For Mary and Martha, it was at a graveside. Maybe for you, it is in a hospital room, or in a prison cell. Wherever you are, wherever you hurt, wherever you have need—that is the place of opportunity to learn of the Lord.

After the second storm, a little time passed. Two chapters, to be exact. Matthew 16 records a conversation that Jesus had with The Twelve.

“Who do people say that I am?”

“Some say John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you? Who do *you* say I am?”

Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

The Christ. That is exactly what Martha called Jesus—

“I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” (John 11:27).

“Did I not tell you that if you believed,
you would see the glory of God?”

John 11:40

It's the closing act. Mary and Martha are standing near the grave stone that has been rolled away, and they hear the Lord cry out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Wrapped in strips of linen, Lazarus emerges from the tomb, made alive by the Word of the Lord.

Sickness and disease, the wind and waves, even death and the grave must bow their knee to the Anointed One. Everything is subject to Him.

Everything!

“For He has put everything under His feet.”

1 Corinthians 15:27a

“In putting everything under Him,
God left nothing that is not subject to Him.”

Hebrews 2:8

What in your life needs resurrecting? The Lord can raise a marriage to newness of life. He can restore a ministry, and rekindle a dream. Do you know Him as the all-powerful One who speaks His *Zoe* to broken hearts and lives? Do you believe that with Him, “all things are possible?” Then in Jesus name,

Raise up the Stone!

Praise His Name!

See His Glory!

“Did I not tell you that if you believed,
you would see the glory of God?”

John 11:40



You're The Same

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We all have a story to tell.

At times a little heaven.

At times a little, well, you know just what I mean—
Sometimes we live in between
seasons of joy,
seasons of pain.

But You're the same.
There's no shadow of turning.
You're faithful to Your promise, Lord,
that You never change.
Though life is uncertain,
one thing remains . . .
You're the same.

Life can be like shifting sand.
The only thing that's certain
is that You'll always be there for me.
Lord, You're all I need.
There's comfort in knowing
when I call on Your name

You're the same.
There's no shadow of turning.
You're faithful to Your promise, Lord,
that You never change.
Though life is uncertain,
one thing remains . . .
You're the same.



