

SITTING OUT THE HOLIDAYS

Sitting Out the Holidays

by Nicole Whitacre

While the kids napped on Saturday afternoon, Mom, Kristin, Janelle, and I had a conference call to plan the Thanksgiving holiday.

We reviewed the menu from last year. I suggested a few changes (as usual) and they vetoed them (as usual)—“Why mess with a good thing?” they ask. Good point. But I still might try to sneak in a new dish (don’t tell!).

We had a friendly argument (as only female members of the same family can) over whether we should play take-two or five hundred after the meal. It ended in a stalemate: two vs. two.

We hoped the weather wouldn’t be cold and rainy—after all, Dad insists we hold the Turkey Bowl, rain or shine, warm or cold, pregnant or not.

As soon as we finished the call, my mind was off and running with all that needed to be done: Get to Michaels before the Christmas decorations overtake the Thanksgiving stuff (I might already be too late)...find a Thanksgiving book for the kid’s story time.... print out Thanksgiving coloring pages....assemble the coupon books...pull out the recipes...make a grocery list....

But on that same phone call (because we never talk about just one thing) Mom reminded us of the story of Mary and Martha, and the importance of sitting at Jesus’ feet. We decided to make it our next series on the blog.

You know the story well:

"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. but Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

The holidays might seem like an odd time to talk about sitting and listening. But maybe it’s the most important time. When are we more “distracted with much serving”? When do worldly lights most threaten to obscure our vision of the Greatest Light of all?

So, come with us to Bethany this holiday season. In the midst of all the distractions, let’s sit at Jesus’ feet. And listen.

A Martha Moment

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. but Martha was distracted with much serving." Luke 10:38-40

Sitting is hard work. As women, we are doers by nature, not sitters. How can we sit when there is so "much serving" to do? Then the holidays hit. And we thought sitting was hard before.

After thirty five years of loving, reading, studying and meditating on God's Word, I still have my Martha Moments: I am tempted to serve rather than sit.

Sadly, it doesn't take much to distract me. It can be as simple as a breakfast bar wrapper.

I'll be in the kitchen pouring a cup of coffee to have with my devotions when....

I notice the breakfast bar wrapper on the kitchen table that my son neglected to throw away the night before.

I throw it away and discover that the trashcan is full.

I take the trashcan to the garage to empty.

When I return the emptied trashcan to the kitchen, I discover that we are out of trash bags.

I go to the basement to get new trash bags only to remember the load of laundry in the dryer that I forgot to fold.

As I fold the laundry I realize I need to iron Chad's school uniform for school that day.

Which reminds of the note I need to write to his teacher.

As I'm jotting a note, I hear CJ on the treadmill.

"I should hop in the shower now, because he's going to need get in the shower as soon as he finishes exercising."

By the time I get out of the shower it's time to wake Chad for school and make his breakfast and pack his lunch...

Poof! Gone is that precious time to sit at the Lord's feet.

But that's not my only Martha Moment. I'll share another one tomorrow.

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My other Martha Moment? I sit, but I don't listen.

Martha had trouble sitting because she was distracted with much serving. But she also had trouble listening.

“Martha, Martha,” our Lord lovingly addressed her, “you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

We can't listen if we are anxious and troubled about many things.

I've squandered my fair share of devotional times worrying rather than listening. I sit on the living room couch with my Bible, journal, reading plan, books, and coffee, but I fail to listen.

I rehearse a difficult conversation from the night before: What could I have said? What should I have said? What will I say next time we talk?

Or I consider the day ahead: What time is Chad's soccer game? Oh, I almost forgot I'm babysitting Kristin's boys. And I need to get C.J.'s shirts from the cleaners before he goes out of town....

Or I notice an empty corner in the living room and begin to redecorate in my mind: If we move this chair to that corner and purchase a small table and lamp to go over here...

All the while, my Bible is open on my lap.

But I'm not listening.

I might even read my Bible, but because I am distracted, I have no idea what I just read.

I'm still not listening

Do you have your own “Martha Moments?” Do you find it hard to sit? Do you find it difficult to listen?

God knew Martha was anxious and troubled. He knows when we are anxious and troubled. He lovingly spoke to Martha; and through her story He lovingly speaks to us today: “only one thing is necessary.”

To-Do List of One

by Carolyn Mahaney

"But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.'" Luke 10:41 (emphasis mine)

There are "many things" to do before next Thursday's turkey dinner. (You may be scribbling a mental list in your head right now!) But the Savior's wisdom can radically simplify our holiday. For, as he told Martha: "only one thing is necessary."

What is this "one thing?" What are we to "sit and listen" to? Our Lord's teaching.

There is nothing more important than hearing the Lord speak. It's the one essential thing, the only thing that is necessary.

Mary understood. She longed to know Jesus, to learn all she could about Him. She wanted to hear everything He said. She didn't want to miss one word that came out of His mouth. So she sat down right smack in front of the Lord so she could listen to His teaching.

Now Jesus wasn't suggesting that Martha's serving was wrong or even unimportant. I'm not suggesting we skip Thanksgiving dinner and encourage our family to "hit the pantry" instead.

Serving is important. Our Lord also taught us: "The greatest among you shall be your servant."

But serving is not the most necessary thing.

There is only one thing that is truly necessary—listening to the Lord speak.

So as we head into the holidays, as we face the temptation to be distracted with much serving, or tempted about many things, let's remind ourselves of Jesus' words.

Should I be serving? There is one thing more necessary!

Should I be worrying? This is completely unnecessary!

There is only one thing that is necessary.

And what is that?

To sit and listen to the Lord's teaching, that's what!

For Our Profit

by Carolyn Mahaney

What is this teaching we are to sit and listen to?

It is God's Word, the Bible.

God's Word is like no other book we read: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16

How do we profit from Scripture? God's Word...

Gives us peace (Ps. 119:165).

Fills us with hope (Col. 1:5)

Strengthens our faith (Rom. 10:17)

Revives our soul (Ps. 19:7)

Provides us with wisdom (Pr. 1:1-7, Matt. 7:24-27)

Guides us (Ps. 119:105)

Warns us (Deut 32:46)

Corrects us (2 Tim 3:16)

Comforts us (Ps. 119:50)

Enable us to fight sin (Ps. 119:11)

Most importantly, God's Word leads us to Christ. (Heb 1:1-2)

So why do we neglect to read, study, memorize, and meditate on this precious, life-giving book?

As John Piper comments on Ps. 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul":

"Even on days when every cinder in our soul feels cold, if we crawl to the Word of God and cry out for ears to hear, the cold ashes will be lifted and the tiny spark of life will be fanned. For 'the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.'"

O may God help us to sit and listen to the Lord's teaching!

Profitable for Mom

by Kristin Chesemore

The other day, my three boys tramped downstairs to the kitchen. They were arguing.

"He took my quarters!" my seven-year-old pointed to his brother.

"No, Mom, I brought these quarters home from Mom-Mom's house!" the accused brother defended himself.

As I tried to get the story from them, one...at...a...time, the words of blame kept flowing, with frequent interruptions and scowls.

My temptation in these moments? I want to bring swift resolution through my commands and directives: "Boy #1 is wrong. Boy #2 is right. Case closed." I want peace for myself more than I want to teach my children God's Word. This temptation is especially acute over the holidays.

But my words—although very important!—are not sufficient. My children need to hear God's Words. They need Scripture, which is "profitable for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). They need God's promises and commands sown like seed into their little hearts. They need the words from God's mouth, which never return empty (Is. 55:11).

So we return to the most often quoted verse in the Chesemore home—Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

"Is corrupting talk coming out of your mouths?" I ask my boys. "What words would give grace to your brother?"

And surprise, surprise—Scripture serves me too. I need the life-giving words of Scripture as much as my sons. I too need the encouragement and correction of Ephesians 4:29.

This is one reason why I must sit and listen to Jesus' teaching every day. So that I—and my boys—can profit from His Words.

Location, Location, Location

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Mary...sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." Luke 10:39

We're still "Sitting Out the Holidays."

What are we sitting and listening to? Jesus' teaching. It is the one thing, the only thing, that is necessary.

The next question is where: Where should we sit and listen?

Mary chose the floor. She literally sat at Jesus' feet. Now obviously we don't have to sit on the floor to have our devotions—not unless we want to!

Mary's choice to sit at Jesus' feet revealed the location of her heart.

It displayed her eagerness to listen to His teaching. It revealed her zeal to learn and grow. She wanted to hear every word, absorb every word, and submit to every word that came from her Lord's mouth.

The floor was simply the best spot for that to happen.

Sitting at the Lord's feet doesn't imply what position our body should be in; it represents what position our heart should be in. Where we sit has nothing to do with body posture and everything to do with the posture of our heart.

Mary approached her Lord with a posture of humility. She sat before her Lord as a hungry learner, an eager student. We should come to God's Word in the same way.

So where's your heart this holiday season? Is it running frantically through the mall? Is it gazing longingly at an unwrapped present? Is it mingling with guests at a holiday party?

It's not enough just to sit. There's a special place we must sit. We must sit at the Lord's feet. We must come to God's Word with a humble heart: eager to learn, ready to receive, and determined to obey.

A Matter of Life

by Carolyn Mahaney

“And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’” Luke 10:40

According to Martha, Mary picked the wrong time to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching.

“C'mon Mary”—you can almost hear her say—“after dinner, when the crockery is put away and the floors swept, then you can sit and listen to Jesus to your heart's content. But right now there's work to do!”

Sounds reasonable to us. But Jesus disagreed. He thought Mary's timing was perfect.

Let's take our cues from Mary. We shouldn't wait until things settle down after the holidays. We shouldn't postpone listening to Jesus until January 1. We must choose to sit and listen to the Lord's teaching today: right in the middle of the Christmas crazyness. And we must strive to do so every day after.

We can't afford not to. "Man does not live by bread alone," God declares in Deuteronomy 8:3, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Just as we can't survive without physical food, neither can we thrive without spiritual food. We cannot live without God's Word. As our bodies require daily physical nourishment, so our souls need daily spiritual nourishment.

Our morning bowl of cereal won't sustain us for three weeks. Neither can our souls subsist on one dose of God's Word. As D.L. Moody explains:

"A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it."

We can't truly live unless we sit and listen. So let's daily "take in a supply of grace" through God's Word and prayer.

Sitting Says Something

by Carolyn Mahaney

Did you wake up this morning and say to God: "I don't need to read your Word or pray or listen to your voice today. I am competent on my own. I can do this all by myself, thank you very much."?

Of course not! We would never dare say these frightfully arrogant words.

But if we neglect God's Word and prayer over the holidays (and when is it more easy to do!), we are saying with our hearts and actions: "I can do it all by myself."

Jesus has a different perspective: "Apart from me you can do nothing." He says in John 15:5.

We can't ice one cookie, trim one tree, sing one carol, shop one minute, sew one stitch, or wrap one gift without Him. None of these things—no matter how hard we work at them or how beautifully we pull them off—will have any "eternal value or...produce spiritual fruit" without God (ESV Study Bible).

To bear fruit, we must sit at His feet.

We must renounce our self-sufficiency.

We must repent from our arrogant independence.

We must come to the God of mercy who is eager to forgive.

And we must sit.

When we sit at Jesus' feet, we are saying: "I need you! I can't obey you without your help. I can't serve you in my own strength. I can't walk in a manner worthy of the gospel by myself. I need your grace."

And you know what, He will give it! God didn't correct Martha's self-sufficiency to push her away. He wanted to draw her near to sit and listen. He wanted to speak to her, to teach her, to give her grace to bear fruit.

So let's say—with our words, our hearts, and our actions—I need you, Lord, today!

The Gift of Peace

by Carolyn Mahaney

Sitting says to God: I need you!

Often, we don't feel our need for God as much around the holidays. We might get a little anxious about all we have to do, but we figure—with a little help from family members—we can handle the Christmas baking and shopping and decorating pretty well on our own. I mean, what to get our father-in-law for Christmas hardly seems important enough to bother God with.

Come to think of it, wasn't that what our friend Martha was doing?

She lost sight of her need for the Lord's help. She was just bent on getting the help of that sister of hers!

Yet the Lord lovingly reminded her that needed His help. She needed His grace to serve. She needed to hear His voice to not be anxious.

Martha, Martha He tenderly chided her. I am the one you need to come to for grace and help in time of need – any need, no matter how small or great!

Notice that God didn't wait until Lazarus' death to encourage Martha to come to Him. He didn't tell her to sit and listen only in time of great trial or difficulty. He spoke these words to her in the midst of the general busyness of her home.

"Take one step at a time, every step under Divine warrant and direction." exhorts Charles Bridges. It's holiday advice we've shared with you before, but worth repeating:

"Ever plan for yourself in simple dependence on God. It is nothing less than self-idolatry to conceive that we can carry on even the ordinary matters of the day without his counsel. He loves to be consulted...Consider no circumstances too clear to need his direction. In all thy ways, small as well as great; in all thy concerns, personal or relative, temporal or eternal, let Him be supreme. Who of us has not found the unspeakable 'peace' of bringing to God matters too minute or individual to be entrusted to the most confidential ear?"

No circumstance is too clear. No matter too minute or personal or temporal to bring to God (even your father-in-law's present!). God is not bothered or offended by our ordinary, mundane requests. He loves to be consulted about the ordinary matters of our days, and our holidays!

Let's bring our anxious souls to Him and receive the gift of "unspeakable peace."

A Good Meal

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:42

This week, I'm planning Christmas dinner. I went to the grocery store yesterday. I'm going again today. And tomorrow. And Christmas Eve.

Actually, it's a dinner that Jesus is referring to in Luke 10:42. The Greek word for "portion" here means "meal."

He tells Martha--who is busily preparing a meal that fed the body--that Mary has chosen the good meal. Mary was eating a meal that fed the soul.

But not only that—Jesus said it was a meal that would not be taken away from her. Wow! Now that's a really good meal!

It might take us twenty minutes to eat Christmas dinner. It will take our body 24-32 hours to digest that meal. The benefits won't last for long.

But when we make the Lord's teaching our meal, when we feast on His Word, the benefits from that meal will last for a very long time.

So long in fact, that Jesus said, it will not be taken away from us. Not in 24 hours, not in 24 years, not even in eternity.

Think about that. Every time we read, study, meditate or memorize God's Word we are ingesting truth that will never be taken away from us.

That's astounding!

That's a meal we don't want to skip!

How We Sit

by Carolyn Mahaney

To recap our "sitting" series, we've considered:

WHAT we are to sit and listen to: Jesus' teaching. It is the one thing that is necessary.

WHERE we are to sit and listen: at Jesus' feet, with humble hearts, eager to listen and learn.

WHEN we need to sit: even in busy seasons we must consistently seek God through His Word and prayer.

WHY do we sit: because we need God's grace, not as a way to earn His approval.

The final question is HOW. How do we sit at Jesus' feet?

Then answer is in Luke 10:42: "Mary has chosen the good portion."

Mary didn't just think about sitting and listening or talk to others about it. She chose to sit and listen. We must choose to sit and listen.

"It's easier to serve than commune" observed the great preacher Charles Spurgeon. It's easier to do what Martha did than what Mary did. So we need "great grace" to follow Mary's example—to choose to sit and listen.

Two things will help us to choose the good portion:

1. eliminate distractions
2. develop a plan

Dispensing with Distractions

by Carolyn Mahaney

Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet by deliberately ignoring distractions--namely, Martha and her anxious busyness.

But we need to be alert to what distracts us from keeping our daily appointment to read God's word and pray.

Maybe it's a hobby, the newspaper or a magazine, watching TV, listening to your ipod, staying up to late at night, loving sleep too much, blogging, keeping up with facebook, following twitter, texting, etc.

We must do whatever it takes to say "no" to the distractions that keep us from the one thing that is necessary: sitting at Jesus' feet.

A while back, I found that the Internet was becoming a distraction. I was using the five minutes it took for my coffee to brew each morning to quickly check my email, or headline news, or maybe a blog or two, before starting my devotions.

I'd check a headline and then I just had to read the story; or I'd check a blog I enjoy, and I just had to check out the link they recommended, or I'd get caught up not just looking at my email, but answering it.

Before I knew it, five minutes would turn into twenty minutes and then my quiet time would be cut short.

So, I knew I needed to make a choice. I had to choose to say no to this distraction! I resolved to not look at email or blogs or headline news until after my time of Bible study and prayer.

What about you? Is there a distraction in your life that you need to say "no" to?

Whatever it takes ladies, let's be ruthless about not allowing anything to distract us from seeking God through His Word and prayer.

Plan a Time

by Carolyn Mahaney

To choose to sit at Jesus' feet we need to deal with distractions and develop a plan.

"Many good things do not happen in our lives for the simple lack of planning" explains John Piper. "Most Christians neglect their Bibles not out of conscious disloyalty to Jesus, but because of failure to plan a time and place and method to read it."

So do you have a time, a place, and a method?

Let's talk about time.

There is no law in the Bible that dictates when to have a quiet time. In fact, we are to meditate on God's Word day and night! However, there is biblical encouragement for rising early to seek the Savior.

Consider the psalmist who directs his prayer to the Lord in the morning and then watches for the answer (Ps. 5:3). The Proverbs 31 woman is famous for rising "while it is yet night" to provide food for her family. Finally, and most notably, Jesus himself rose early to pray. Mark 1:35 records, "Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."

Referring to Bible reading and prayer, John Piper again offers this advice:

"I earnestly recommend that it be in the early morning, unless there are some extenuating circumstances. Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart. We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer."

Compelling logic, is it not?

We don't want to head unprepared into the daily fray. By rising early we can secure much-needed refreshment for our souls.

More on place and method this week...

(Portions of this post adapted from our book, *Shopping for Time*)

Place and Method

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Most Christians neglect their Bibles not out of conscious disloyalty to Jesus, but because of failure to plan a time and place and method to read it" John Piper

Now that we've talked about time, let's consider place and method for sitting at Jesus' feet.

What's the best place for reading our Bible? If at all possible, pick a secluded place. A quiet place. A place where you won't be distracted.

And prepare your place. Have all your "sitting stuff"—your Bible, journal, commentary, book, pen, highlighter, Kleenex, etc.—readily accessible. Maybe even put everything in one basket. That way you won't have to spend the first ten minutes (like I have before) wandering around the house to collect everything!

Finally, we need a method for reading our Bible. If we don't have a good plan for reading and studying God's Word, we will likely become discouraged or even disinterested—which can hinder us from keeping this discipline in place.

If you don't have a good plan or know how to create one, let me encourage you to ask a godly friend or pastor for help. But here are two links you might find useful.

Bible Reading: Justin Taylor links to ten different Bible reading plans offered by Crossway Books and other sites and gives an overview of a few of them. I personally am using the Discipleship Journal plan in my devotions.

Prayer: This website contains Matthew Henry's method of prayer which is simply praying the Bible. This site has been a wonderful help to me in my prayer life.

I hope these simple thoughts will spur you on to develop a good plan for sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his teaching.¹

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