

# Christian Book Summaries

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**Volume 3 . Issue 16**

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## Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World

### A Quick Focus

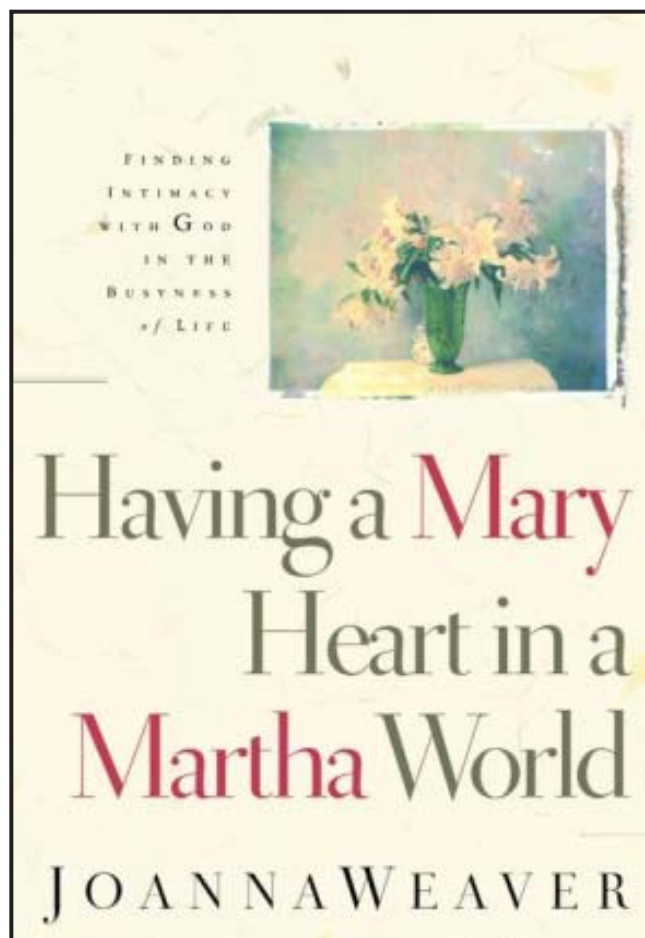
#### The Book's Purpose

- Explain what Jesus meant by the “better part” (that Mary chose) and how to attain it
- Demonstrate the consequences of being ruled by distractions and busyness
- Reveal God’s plan of how intimacy with Him naturally leads to serving others
- Help believers achieve spiritual balance in their lives

#### The Book's Message

In today’s hectic, hurry-up climate, it’s easy to get ensnared by to-do lists, family demands, and even Kingdom service. But in all our busyness, we often lose track of the one thing that is needed, or as Jesus put it to Martha, the “better part.”

Learning to cultivate intimacy with the Lord and keep Him in the center of our lives can be a challenge. But once we develop this relationship with Him, we’ll discover a greater satisfaction, fullness, and balance to our lives than we’ve ever known.



**by Joanna Weaver**  
**WaterBrook Press**  
**ISBN: 1578562589**

### Six Main Points

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**Luke 10:38-42 tells a story of two very different sisters. Mary and Martha have nearly opposite personalities, characteristics, and in response to the arrival of Jesus in their home-actions. As Christians it's easy to find ourselves caught in a tug-of-war as we strive to worship like Mary, yet handle the busyness and pressures of the day like Martha.**

**A Picture of Mary**

As Martha scurried to handle all the arrangements of hosting a houseful of men, Mary became so enthralled by Jesus that she made herself unavailable to help her sister serve. She was so enraptured by His teaching and His presence she simply could not pull herself away from sitting at His feet to go help Martha. Due to the customs of the time, this was a very bold choice. Mary chose to ignore the traditions of her day and break social rules just to be as close to Jesus as possible.

Mary was probably more mellow by nature than Martha. More than likely she took the unexpected in stride and didn't allow circumstances to fill her with stress. Because of her personality, she no doubt found it easier to respond the way she did. Martha, who tended to be a perfectionist at heart, needed to be sure that everything was "just right" for Jesus and His disciples.

**A Picture of Martha**

Martha truly had the heart of a servant. She was honored to have Jesus and His disciples in her home, and she wanted to be the best possible hostess she could. To her that meant taking care of every detail in preparing the food and making her home comfortable for her guests.

Although there was nothing inherently wrong in Martha wanting

to serve, her personality allowed this situation to produce stress and anxiety. As a result, she became quite irritated with her sister for not lending a hand. She just couldn't understand how sitting and listening to Jesus teach was more important than serving Him; and essentially, she told Jesus as much: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

**Our Response**

Just as the "better part" was available to Mary and Martha, it is also available to each of us. When Jesus calls us to come sit at His feet, we shouldn't view it as just one more thing to cram into our already busy day. Instead, we need to understand that time with Jesus is that "one thing that is needed." Jesus was never in a hurry and was never "held hostage to the world's demands or even its desperate needs." The key to His success and peace was that He only did what His Father told Him to do. As we choose the "better part," we, too, will have success and peace in living a balanced life.

MARY VS MARTHA

**Jesus' Response**

Instead of sympathizing with Martha, Jesus rebuked her, saying she was "worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed." He continued by commending Mary, saying that she had chosen the "better part." Jesus tried to get across to Martha that, although she "opened her home to [Him]...that doesn't automatically mean she opened her heart. In her eagerness to serve [Him], she almost missed the opportunity to *know* [Him]."

Jesus didn't become angry with Martha. He understood her pain, but He loved her enough to tell her what she needed to hear. He also realized Mary and Martha had very different personalities and gifts, which certainly could have contributed to the way they responded to the moment. But even so, each was faced with the same choice: to work or to worship. Jesus still said, "Mary has chosen the better part."

Even though the world constantly screams at us to do more and be more, God says to us, "Be still and know that I am God."

**"It isn't 'more' He requires of us. In fact, it may be less."**

He doesn't want us to perform *for* Him. He wants us to commune *with* Him. We must learn from Martha and be careful that in our eagerness to serve Him, we don't miss out on knowing Him.



# the CAUSE and CURE for WORRY

The Bible commands~not merely suggests~that we do not worry. God knows how destructive the assault of worrying is against our faith and devotion to Him. Yet, many Christians spend too much time in a state of anxiety. It's critical that we recognize the roots of worry and learn to overcome them if we ever hope to live with a peaceful heart.

## A Distracted Heart

When the Lord rebuked Martha, He told her she was "worried and upset about many things." How did Martha get to this place of worry? Scripture says she was "distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." She allowed her busyness to draw her heart away from God. This is a good place for Satan to launch his attack against us. **"If we're overly worried and bogged down by duties, chances are good our hearts will not hear the Savior's call to come...getting our eyes off of what is important will certainly make us more vulnerable to attack."** It's not that what Martha was doing was unimportant. In fact, she was ministering to the Lord. But, as Dutch Sheets says in his book, *The River of God*, **"even pure ministry for Jesus can become a weight we drag around. It's called the 'treadmill anointing.'"**

Distractions lead to discouragement. Discouragement is a precursor to self-pity and depression. When we get overwhelmed, we feel hopeless and useless. Soon we lose all hope and vision for our future. And, most dangerous of all, when we're discouraged, we start doubting that God cares about us or even loves us. Doubt is deadly to our faith because it can easily turn into unbelief, which the Bible calls sin.

## Elements of Worry

Jesus warned us of the futility of worrying in Matthew 6:27. Yet, it turns out, worrying is not only a waste of time, but also dangerous~physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Worry is closely related to anxiety and fear. And the Bible tells us over 350 times not to fear. God must be trying to tell us something about the harmful effects of worrying.

Worry hurts us spiritually by drawing us away from God and eventually deteriorating our faith. Medical researchers have connected chronic worry to weakened immune systems, cardiovascular disease, depression, and other physical and psychological dysfunctions.

We must be careful, however, to differentiate between worry and concern. We all face real concerns every day; and there are situations requiring action on our part. Concerns can be healthy as they bring us closer to God and cause us to rely on Him for guidance and wisdom. Worrying is never healthy because it puts us in fear, which chokes our faith. The difference between the two is that concerns involve legitimate threats, are specific to one thing, lead to addressing and solving problems, and look to God for answers; worries are usually unfounded, generalized, lead to obsessing about, rather than solving problems, and look to self or others for answers.

## Overcoming Worry

In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul gave us the antidote for worrying: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and peti-

tion, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." According to Paul, we must choose to not allow anxiety and fear inside us, but choose peace instead. We must pray about everything, no matter how big or how small. And we must maintain thankful hearts, giving God praise, no matter what our situation.

To walk in Paul's steps of victory, we need to focus on what we allow into our minds and endeavor to change our perspective of the problem. By doing so, God will become bigger than the problem.

**"The war  
of worry...is won  
and lost on  
the battlefield  
of our minds."**

We must follow Paul's advice in Philippians 4:8: "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable... think about such things."

As we take our thoughts captive and choose not to dwell on the negative, anxiety will lose its grip. Our former thoughts of fear and worry need to then be replaced with God's Word. Meditating on scriptures relevant to our situation will renew our minds to see our circumstances from God's perspective. The more we practice this, the more we train our minds to stay focused on Jesus, which will ultimately bring us peace.

Another way to defeat worry is to defeat distractions—those things that continually sidetrack us from intimacy with God. Jesus told us His burden is light, yet many of us carry very heavy loads of our own making. As we come to the Lord for daily direction, He will show us what He requires of us for that day. Anything else we take on results in undue burdens and distractions. Our job is simply to focus on the "one thing" that is needed.

# from the LIVING ROOM to the KITCHEN

God expects us to maintain a thriving relationship with Him (our time in the Living Room) and to reach out to others who need His touch (our time in the Kitchen). But before we jump into serving, it's essential that we are living lives of intimacy with Jesus. Otherwise, our works will be unfruitful, our motives impure, and our lives unfulfilled.

## Barriers to Intimacy

Jesus has made it so easy for us to fellowship with Him. He paid the price for us on the cross, so all we have to do is make ourselves available. So why is it often difficult for us to maintain intimacy with Him? For one, Satan constantly lies to us, telling us we don't deserve to fellowship with the Lord. After all, we're always messing up and falling into sin. We're not good enough to be with God. The guilt and shame we feel from listening to his lies keeps us away. Second, our lives are just too busy to make time for God. Satan loves to keep us running in circles and full of emotional and physical stress to the point that we just don't feel like coming to God. Third, we tend to fill the spaces in our lives with other things besides the Lord. We'd rather read a book or call a friend, for instance, instead of spending our free time in His presence.

## Secrets to Achieving Intimacy

Jesus tells us if we abide in Him, He will abide in us. We must stay connected to Him as a branch is connected to a vine. He doesn't want us to have an on-again, off-again relationship with Him, but rather to dwell with Him on a continual basis. We achieve this place of abiding by spending time in prayer and in His Word. Through prayer we share our hearts with Him, asking for our needs or others' needs, and praising Him. In turn, He will share His heart with us. He shares with us mainly through His Word, which reveals His love for us, His direction, and His desires for our lives. All of this takes time—a critical component to any relationship.

To maintain intimacy with Jesus, we must do all we can to ensure a pure heart toward Him. It's easy to allow unkind words or wrongful attitudes to pile up. For this reason, we need to regularly confess our sin so no barriers are formed in our relationship. We cannot produce holiness on our own, but as we spend time with the Lord and work to maintain our intimacy, all the fruit of the Spirit will naturally flow out of us.

## Into the Kitchen

One byproduct of maintaining quality time in the Living Room is that our service to others will bear much fruit. We will be full of God's love, which demonstrates itself in selfless acts of service. God expects us to reach others with His love and live like Christ, not just call ourselves Christians. We must be the supreme example of His love in this world. As Dwight Moody said, **"Of one hundred men, one will read the Bible; the ninety-nine will read the Christian."**

The Bible talks about the fruit of our lips, the fruit of our deeds, and the fruit of our attitudes. But we cannot manufacture this fruit on our own; it happens automatically as we stay connected to the Vine. This connection helps us joyfully serve with the heart of God. Fruitful service involves making ourselves available to God, allowing Him to choose our service, and joining Him where He is already at work. It also means going above the call of duty and laying down our lives for others.

**"Service without spirituality is exhausting and hopeless... spirituality without service is barren and selfish."**

It's not how much activity we engage in, but our obedience to do what God shows us to do. And we get our instructions from Him during our time in the Living Room.

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## practicing the BETTER PART

Although we all have busy lives and many responsibilities that continually crowd our hearts and minds, our job is not to allow those things to become the central issues in our lives. In order to achieve the "better part" that Mary found, we have to make sure Christ stays in the center of our world and everything else revolves around Him.

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**Practicing the Better Part**  
continued from page 4

### Making Room

Keeping our hearts centered on Christ requires time and an act of our will. We must be willing to make time~to make room~for God in our everyday lives. We may need to actually schedule time with God into our day, and then make sure that nothing interrupts it. Everything else needs to come second place to our relationship with Christ. When we don't make room for God, we will begin to notice the effects, as we start feeling empty and frustrated. Because we may not even realize how much we're missing God's presence, it's important to take a regular spiritual account of our lives to evaluate our relationship with Him. **"Sometimes we have to realize how empty we are before we're willing to be filled."**

### Don't Limit God

God wants to fill us with all His fullness. He wants us filled more than we do! Being filled with God requires us being stretched out of our comfort zone. If we are serious about achieving the "better part," we'll need to take an inventory of our lives to see what's holding us back from spending time with God. Many of these things could be good, even holy things. But if they are keeping us from God, they are sin because the very definition of sin is separation from God. We are the ones responsible for limiting God's presence in our lives. He will meet us wherever we are.

**"We are as intimate with God  
as we choose to be."  
~Cynthia Heald**

### Keys to Staying Centered in Christ

Once we are determined to clear things from our lives that rob our time with God, we then must willfully choose to meet Him in the Living Room every day. We can't wait until we're feeling spiritual to spend time with Him. We just need to make the decision to do it, then the feelings will follow. Struggling with our will can be a difficult thing. But as we put forth the effort, the Holy Spirit will offer us the needed power and desire to be with God. There are three keys that can help us win the battle of our will and stay centered in Christ.

First, we must make it a regular practice of seeking God on a daily basis. To become accomplished Christians, we must learn to practice being with God. It doesn't matter what time of day we choose, but we need to find a time that will work for us consistently. It's okay to take small steps at first, and it's okay to not be perfect. The important thing is that we never give up attempting to meet with God every day. Consistency brings familiarity, which ultimately moves us closer to the Lord.

Another key is to apply creativity to our time with God. It's easy to fall into habits or rituals that may eventually cause our quiet time with Him to grow stale, keeping us from being consistent. Just because we have done something one way, doesn't mean other avenues can't~and shouldn't~be explored. There are many ways to spend time in the Living Room with God. If we begin to get slack in our quiet time, we need to

look for ways to energize and add creativity to the way we meditate, pray, and study Scripture.

A final key to staying centered in Christ is to make sure we have on-going two-way dialogue with Him. Oftentimes our quiet times involve mostly one-way communication~us telling God our needs. But He desires to speak to us as well. One way to allow God to communicate with us is to read the Scriptures as His personal letters to us. By taking small portions of Scripture and meditating on them, the Holy Spirit can show us how to apply those verses to our lives. As we apply God's truths, He will begin changing us into His image.



## martha's TRANS FORMA TION

**Martha's life changed forever the day Jesus came to her home. And even though she probably didn't realize it at the time, it was Jesus' rebuke of her attitude toward Mary that changed her the most. Later in the Gospel accounts, as we witness Martha's amazing transformation, we can look back on that day of new beginnings and realize it holds lessons for us as well.**

### Hearing Jesus Out

When Jesus rebuked Martha for being worried and anxious instead of at peace in His presence, He was going after a change of heart, not just a change of action. Jesus chose to confront Martha's attitude because He knew this was a root in Martha's heart that needed to be pulled out. Martha felt valued because of her productivity, but Jesus wanted her value based solely on Him.

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## Martha's Transformation

*continued from page 5*

To Martha's credit, she didn't storm from the room or argue with Jesus. She simply stayed put and quieted herself long enough to hear what He had to say. When we're **"busy in the kitchen, the rebuke sounds harsh and demanding, just one more duty to fulfill. But when [we] listen from the Living Room, [we] hear the love in God's voice."** It benefited Martha greatly to stay in the Living Room and receive Jesus' reprimand. Based on Martha's subsequent transformation, it appears she humbled herself before the Lord that day, receiving His rebuke and allowing Him to change her heart.

### The New Martha

In the story of Martha and Mary from the book of Luke, Martha is seen as impatient, anxious, and bossy. She had allowed the cares and worries of her duties to consume her, leaving no space for Jesus in her heart. But later, in the story of Lazarus's death, we witness a new, improved Martha.

When Lazarus died and Martha heard that Jesus had finally arrived in her town, she left a houseful of guests and ran to meet Him. Nothing mattered to her at that moment but seeing Jesus. She poured her

heart out to Jesus when she saw Him, exhibiting a new vulnerability and intimacy with Him that we did not see before. Additionally, there was great faith now evidenced in Martha's life as she tells Jesus, "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

### Having a Teachable Heart

The reason behind Martha's transformation is her teachable and humble heart. If we want God's power to change us, we, too, need to be teachable. There are three keys to having a teachable spirit.

First, we need to be willing to listen. The Bible offers countless examples of how God couldn't do His work in people because they did not listen to Him. With us, we either deliberately don't listen, we subconsciously don't listen because we're afraid of what God may require of us, or we get too busy to listen. Whatever the reason, when we don't listen to God, we miss the opportunity to teach us and transform us.

Second, when we do hear God, we must act on what He says. If we do not take action once we receive His instruction, we may prevent ourselves from hearing Him again. Disobedience is sin, and sin

can plug up our spiritual ears. Jesus tells us if we love Him we will obey Him.

**"To disregard the voice of God is worse than not listening at all. Especially if we say we love him."**

If we desire change in our lives, we must put feet to what we hear.

Finally, we need to respond to discipline. The Lord disciplines those He loves. It's a good thing when God corrects us. The more teachable we are, the better and quicker we will respond to God's discipline. When we are teachable, God can discipline us in a fairly minor way. But when we are not teachable and do not accept the Lord's rebuke, His discipline will increase in order to drive rebellion from our hearts. It is always in our best interest to quickly respond to God's correction.



# finding the BALANCE

**It's imperative to arrive at a balance between the two sides of our Christian life~work and worship. We must learn to walk the tight-rope between having a quiet Mary heart and using our busy Martha hands. Looking to Scripture, we can find help in achieving this balance.**

### Love God and Love Others

When the expert in the law confronted Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus threw the question back at him, asking him what the law said about it. His correct response gives us a clear picture of God's way to achieve balance between worship and service: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27).

When we combine our passion for God with our compassion for people, our lives will fall into balance. We were created both to worship and to do good works. To do both effectively requires a deep love for God and for others. The worship and service created by this love flows to and

from each other interconnectedly. God's design is that worship and service not be separated. Our love for God and others keeps them connected.

### Just Say Yes

In recent years society has taught that it's okay to say no when requests are made of us to keep ourselves from becoming overcommitted. It's true that we can't say yes to everything that comes our way, and we need to prayerfully consider each commitment. But we also can't always say no in an effort to protect our own best interests.

Sometimes when we say no, it's not to people or ministries, but to God Himself.

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**“Saying yes to [God] releases his power and his joy to our souls. It’s what gives us the strength and energy to do what he wants us to do.”**

Considering each request separately and praying as each comes into our lives will help us determine what God’s will is for us at that time. Then when we say no, it’s because God’s will is leading us in a different direction and not because we just don’t want to get involved. Walking in this type of obedience produces balance.

### **Finding Your Rhythm**

In trying to balance our worship of God with our service to others, we need to realize there’s going to be an “up-and-down” rhythm involved. Each day may look very different from the next: one day may be spent almost entirely in prayer and Bible study, while the following day may involve nothing but service. Even the seasons of our lives may fall to one side of the balance scale: there are seasons when it’s necessary to separate ourselves to the Lord in prayer for an extended period of time, and there are seasons when having small children, for example, makes it difficult to leave home to volunteer or to get blocks of time with God. Each of our rhythms will differ from one another, thus we can’t compare ourselves to what another person is doing.

God created two principles that give rhythm to our lives~Sabbath

rest and hospitality. The Sabbath provides the worship side, while hospitality provides the balance of service. For the Sabbath to be effective, it must involve three things: (1) it must be a day that’s set apart or that noticeably contrasts with the rest of the week; (2) it should be a day of devotion where we focus our attention on God; (3) it should be spent with our biological families as well as our family of faith.

God also commands us to practice hospitality (see Luke 14:12-14; 1 Timothy 3:2; Romans 12:13)~opening up our homes and lives to others~and, doing so “without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is not always easy. It’s challenging amidst a busy schedule to make space for others. But God never wants us to get so busy that we don’t have time for other people.

### **Remaining Intimate with Jesus**

The most important thing we can do to achieve and maintain a life of balance is to develop and grow our relationship with Christ. This relationship is the fulcrum that makes balance possible; the stronger the relationship, the more stable the balance. As we surrender each day to the Lord, asking Him for direction, He will make sure that our lives reflect the perfect balance of worship and work.

**“My strength is not found in how intensely I struggle... but in how completely I surrender.”**

**Ken Gire in  
*Intense Moments with the Savior***

Our job is to focus on Him and let Him focus on the balance.

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Volume 3, Number 16

#### **Publisher**

David & Catherine Martin

#### **Editors**

Michael & Cheryl Chiapperino

Published on the World Wide Web at  
**ChristianBookSummaries.com.**

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Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World, by Joanna Weaver, © 2000 by Waterbrook Press, 12265 Oracle Blvd., Suite 200, Colorado Springs, Colorado. 241 pages. Trade Paper, \$13.99. ISBN: 1578562589. Available at most bookstores or your favorite online bookseller.

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