

## "It Takes 2 to Tango!"

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Luke 10:38-42

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Some of you may be familiar with something called the Myers-Briggs personality test. It is employed by many Human Resource departments at corporations, not-for-profits organizations, school districts, colleges, universities, and, lest I forget, seminaries. It seeks to help establish a person's "cognitive style" of personality; meaning how one tends to live life, tackle problems, relate to others, and so on. It informs a person of the dominant tendencies in his or her personality and behaviour.

At Brite Divinity School (located at Texas Christian University) all first year seminarians (or entering) seminarians are required to take this test and then consult with a faculty member. The results and subsequent analyses help the seminary identify what, if any, challenges each student may face during seminary study. The results also alert faculty as to which seminarians may be unsuited for pastoring a church and pastoral ministry.

Each individual has basically four personality characteristics. In a way, they become one's "ID"; one's type of personality. Of all the things I remember from seminary... and of all the even more things I have managed to seemingly forget...one thing I *do* remember is my Myers-Briggs personality type...my "4 numbers." My ID or type was (and still is) INTJ.

- I = introvert
- N = iNtuitive - enjoys exploring future possibilities
- T = thinking - appreciates facts & logic;  
good at organizing & processing
- J = judging - plans before doing; task-oriented

In today's story it seems obvious Mary and Martha are "different personality types." Some people are natural dynamos—ripe with

activities and undertakings. Some are castles of "quiet and repose." It can be difficult for each "type" to understand the other. The contrasts between Mary and Martha are obvious in today's story. Neither is better or worse. Myers-Briggs researchers would most likely suggest there *is* no right or wrong with this. There is just *difference*.

A prolific British writer of the late 1800 and early 1900's was Fay Inchfawn. In one of her poems she writes,

"Lord of all pots and pans and things,  
Since I've no time to be  
A saint by doing lovely things,  
Or watching late with Thee,  
Or dreaming in the dawnlight,  
Or storming heaven's gates,  
Make me a saint by getting meals  
And washing up the plates."

Martha was a woman of "pots and pans." Her sister, Mary, was a woman of "a quiet castle."

Every scholar I researched seems to believe that Martha disregarded the Lord while Mary focused on Him. I differ from them (which in itself is not unusual). I cannot help but feel that *both* women, in their particular way, were genuinely and earnestly giving their all to the Lord; and that God needs *both* "Mary's" and "Martha's."

I *do* agree, however, that at this particular moment in Jesus' life, what He seemed to have needed, and what He sought, was more what Mary offered; calmly sitting at His feet, listening and learning, resting in comfort and silence. One could make the case that what Jesus needed most was the rest and repose offered Him by Mary. Why do I say that? Well, let's briefly look at what was happening in Jesus' life prior to his visit to Mary and Martha's house.

He was living an "inner battle" on His way to Jerusalem. His struggle was how to submit *His* will to *God's* will. He had set His face to Jerusalem, as we heard about a couple of weeks ago with the Lectionary text. He had told His disciples that *this* journey was all

that mattered at this point. A Samaritan village turned Him away, and He emotionally and spiritually had to deal with their rejection. He also had to arbitrate a disturbing argument among His disciples as to which of them was the greatest. He busily prepared and sent seventy followers ahead of Him with only the clothes on their backs, encouraging them in His work. Would-be followers were constantly encroaching upon His space. A zealous lawyer confronted Him, trying to trap him in a conversation about "who is a neighbor."

Jesus was *surely* ready for some tranquility. So He travels to Bethany to visit the quiet home of close friends. It was an auspicious occasion. Martha put her best foot forward, made the house presentable, prepared a fine and abundant meal, offered the grandest hospitality she could, tidied up everything, and worked happily in the kitchen. She did all this for her Lord! After all, her behavior was the accepted *and* expected behavior in that time and culture. A woman hosting a notable rabbi was to "pull out all the stops!" A woman's place was to do what Martha did!

In so many things, our instincts take the lead. Our instincts tell us Mary really should have helped her sister. Our instincts tell us Martha was not doing the right thing. Our instincts tell us we are not sure Jesus did the right thing in chastising Martha. After all, as recorded in Luke 22:27b, Jesus Himself said He was among us as *one Who serves*, and we should do likewise. Our instincts tell us Mary was the one who best honored Jesus, not Martha. Our instincts tell us that if this story has a heroin and a villain, Mary is the heroin and Martha the villain (though we would probably rather avoid that language).

We can see this story from several viewpoints. For example: (1) Martha was distracted from Jesus by her busy-ness, but Mary was not. It was she who was attentive, not Martha. (2) Mary was bold in her behavior. Sitting at Jesus' feet put her in direct opposition to Jewish law, which forbade a woman from being a rabbi's disciple. A *proper* woman's place was in the kitchen. Yet wasn't Martha also bold? Did she not have the audacity to charge forth from the kitchen into the main room, angry at Mary just sitting there and not helping; and insisting Jesus reprimand Mary for not helping? (3) When Jesus chastised Martha and praised Mary, He punched a hole in the "social

wall." Or how about this viewpoint. (4) All working, or planning, or preparing, or serving, and such things, even when done for the Lord, must be balanced with listening to the Word.

Sidebar. Also interesting; in verse 10 we read that Martha's preparations distracted her. The literal translation of the ancient Greek here would be "...distracted by much service" (*diakonia*). Jewish society placed a very high value on hospitality. Martha was a sterling example of it, thus fulfilling Jewish law.

Question: Could both Martha and Mary have provided the proper service to Jesus?

I remember when I was in high school I took a dance class for a while. I think I was the token son who had to sign up. It was not at school, but in a private dance studio. We did, however, receive extra credit for the classes. At one point our teacher took us, with some parents as chaperones, to the Mississippi River riverfront. We spent an evening on a huge 5-level river boat named "The Admiral"; docked at river's edge. The Admiral was a very popular destination for dinner, dancing, sightseeing, and entertainment—with a live band in the huge second floor ballroom. We students spent the next two hours or so dancing with each other...samba, fox trot, waltz, tango, the cha-cha, and others.

As many of you may recall, back then one did not tread onto a dance floor without at least these two things...

- # 1. the intention to dance, and
- # 2. a dance partner

A partner was expected... that's the way it was. In other words, it *always* "took 2 to tango." This is what I hear in this story; that *both* Mary and Martha are important to a life in the faith. They dance together!

There are those among us who love to sit and listen and cogitate and learn from our Lord and His word. There are also those among us who love to be doing: working on a VBS, or in the kitchen, or painting a room, or helping move furniture, or fixing an electrical or plumbing problem, or teaching, or being a church leader, and so on. It takes

*both*: the "hearer" and the "doer." The "quiet one" and the "busy one"...

They are partners in ministry and service to our Lord and to all people. Said another way... in the context of this story and in the context of faith, both are needed to dance the dance of faith. Said still another way, in the faith it "takes 2 to tango." One commentator put it this way, "Our service to others [and to the Lord] must be in a relation of constant alternation or rhythm with our sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His word." (from "The Interpreter's Bible," Vol. 8, p. 197)

Both Mary and Martha did something good. Both "welcomed Christ" in their individual ways. Both "honored and served" Him. Both showed Jesus "hospitality." Both of these two women, in their individual and particular way, "gave their best" in serving Christ.

Again, my instincts tell me *both* were "dance partners" in the life of faith and service to Christ. So the question I place before you is, "What do your instincts tell you about Martha and Mary?"

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!