

— Chapter 6 —
Misery Wants Company
Jesus and Martha

The Big Picture

Martha struggles with her sister's abandonment as she works to provide dinner for Jesus and his associates. Jesus' response to her complaint surprises her: rather than praise Martha's service, he warns her against making it her focus. It is all too easy to fall into the trap of making our service for God our reason for being rather than loving the God we serve.

Discuss

"If our service does not come out of our love for God, it is likely doomed to become all about us. As we serve, we easily slip into seeking a sense of significance from what we are doing, rather than finding it in our relationship with him...The service becomes "our baby", something that defines us and our meaning, and not about God at all."

How can we define ourselves and our meaning from a healthy perspective?

"Service in itself is not bad. It's a God-given mandate, an essential part of living our lives for Christ. But if we neglect the good part, loving him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, our service will not be joyful or fulfilling. It will eventually become a burden. Rather than filling us with contentment and satisfaction, service will suck the life out of us."

Why is loving God so foundational to having a healthy attitude about service? Think about the ways you struggle at times when you serve. Do you see a connection?

"When we fall in love with the Lord, our cup overflows. He fills us with his love in an abundance so great it spills over into the lives of others. We begin to see people through his eyes. He loves them deeply, and wants us to love them too. No longer can our work be about us—it is now done for the benefit of others."

What do you know about God that influences your tolerance for the faults of those around you? What has he forgiven you? How can you express your gratitude for his mercy in how you treat others?

"I think we can assume Martha did exactly what Jesus advised the night of her first big dinner party. She made it her business to get to know Him. What she learned enabled her to trust him even when his chosen absence caused her beloved brother's demise. She knew his character, and she knew who he was. So in spite of the devastating circumstances, she trusted him."

How important is your understanding of God to your ability to trust him despite discouraging circumstances? How can knowing him better give you confidence in his ability and desire to work on your behalf?

Moving Forward

1. Martha's bad attitude was made apparent by three things: a critical spirit, the word "me" taking center stage, and in her need to control. Read the following verses. How are each of these red flags contrary to what Scripture says are godly attitudes?

Critical spirit: Romans 12:14-18; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Philippians 2:14

Self-focus: Philippians 3:7-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 7-11; 1 Peter 4:11

Need to control: Romans 12:18-19

2. What is the ultimate goal of our service? Paul viewed even his imprisonment as a service that would be used in the lives of others. Read Philippians 1:12-14, 2:17. How can you adopt Paul's attitude in your own service?

3. Contentment no matter what our circumstances is a secret Paul learned. Read Philippians 4:11-13. How did Paul achieve contentment? How, practically speaking, can we do the same today?