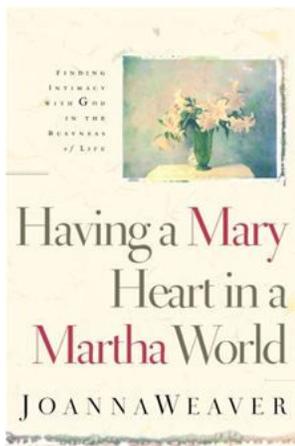


BUSYNESS & DOUBT

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter

by Michelle Fleming



Recommended reading:
Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World, by Joanna Weaver.

I have this fantasy. Whenever it pops into my mind, I cannot help but smile. In this daydream, my 12-year-old self meets my 20-something self. My imagination never makes it past the meeting, because I am pretty sure my 12-year-old self would explode in disbelief.

In the seventh grade, I was extremely shy and reserved; to the point that I hid in the bathroom during anything that required even being near a stage. Math was the bane of my existence and my “shining moment” in gym class was making a basket...for the *opposing* team!

Now, fast forward to the present: I am a 20-something middle school math teacher, a basketball coach and last month I gave my first sermon!

Some might see this transformation as mere human development. But as I see it, I have experienced the reality of God’s transforming presence and power, shaping in me a new identity as I have lived in daily dependence on him—following his calling in my life. I see parallels in my experience to what Jesus spoke about in the parable of the Great Banquet (see Luke 14).

In Jesus’ day, banquet guests were chosen carefully, because the social station of the guests reflected the importance of the host. When the initial guests in the parable are too preoccupied to attend, the invitation to the banquet is extended to the poor, lame and marginalized.

As Jesus’ parables always do, the social conventions are turned upside down with the guests of humble means being raised up to the glory of the host of the party.

I am not a big personality or prodigiously gifted in any one area, but I find myself in positions of leadership after saying “yes” to God in small situations. I see myself as a situational leader, because the catalyst most frequently to my becoming a point person, is that I notice a need and then become passionate about meeting that need.

One of my first ministerial leadership positions was the Nursery Director for a Presbyterian church while I was in college. I had the honor of creating an environment of love that would give the parents peace of mind to leave their children in the hands of our staff and participate in corporate worship.

After two years spent in community with these families, it became apparent that many of the families were struggling with transitioning from being young couples to young families. During a candid conversation with

one of the parents about the difficulty of finding time to connect with her husband and take care of a toddler and a newborn, we dreamt up a parents' night out.

The church paid the nursery staff to watch the children once a month, while the parents went on a group date to strengthen their marriages and build community with one another.

Giving up a Friday night may not seem like a big deal, but getting college students to dedicate a Friday night of their precious time is a sacrifice. As

God always does, he takes the little we give him and multiplies it many times. As the children in the families spent more time together, our times in the nursery had a deeper sense of joy. We also had new families join the church, after joining the parents’ night out group.



The Great Banquet

As I progress in ministry, I see how easy it would be to be one of the guests originally invited to the banquet. The process of preparing for the banquet that Jesus described would have taken months. Most likely, the initial invitees were aware of the banquet long in advance, but were distracted at the last minute by various responsibilities and relationships.

As emphasized by the demon Screwtape in C.S. Lewis' book *The Screwtape Letters*, it is not the acts of extreme evil that are the most detrimental to living out the Christian life, but the gradual slippery slope of distraction.

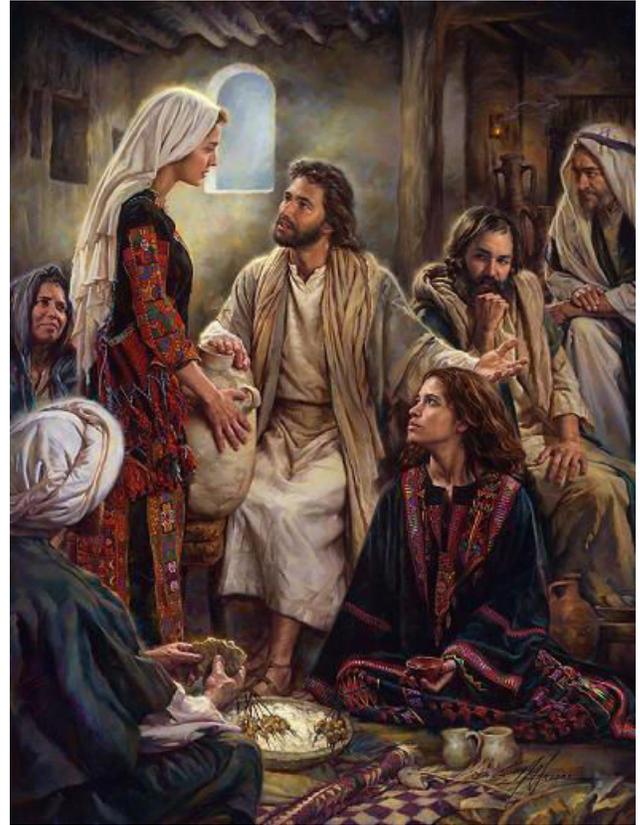
In my life, the two distractions that plague me the most are busyness and doubt. In my early 20s, I learned that our society has lost the distinction between being busy and accomplishing tasks with value.

Due to the distraction that comes in times of busyness, God's "still small voice" grows even fainter. In such times, instead of hearing his voice calling me forward, I hear the doubt-filled musings of my twelve-year-old self, wondering if I can ever be strong enough to accomplish all that God has set before me.

A book that has helped me to learn the importance of discerning between busy and valuable tasks is *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* by Joanna Weaver. The premise of the book is that although Martha tackled the tasks of serving Jesus, Mary selected the better part by choosing to sit and spend time with Jesus.

Though I have never been an impulsive person, I gleaned from this book the importance of intentionally setting aside time to discern God's will before making commitments, no matter how good-intentioned they seem to be. Thankfully, God has always been faithful with encouragement through his word and the voices of others to drown out my 12-year-old inner voice of doubt.

As we continue to say yes to Jesus in the small things, I look forward to seeing how he will multiply what we give him to the glory of the Father's Kingdom.



Jesus with Martha (standing at left) and Mary (seated at Jesus' feet)

Discussion Starter Questions

1. How would you describe your leadership style?
2. How do you battle doubt?
3. How do you safeguard your ministry from the business of life?