

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 1, January, 1998

“Choosing the Best”

by Sharon K. Griffiee

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

As this story opens, we find Jesus staying in Martha's home, where there is a conflict going on between Martha and her sister, Mary. We see that Martha is busy working. She is caught up in the details of serving an elaborate meal, while Mary is simply sitting at the feet of Jesus engaged in fellowship with Him.

I can see how Martha was trying to use her work as a demonstration of her love for Jesus. In all of her works, however, Martha was not enjoying herself. She was upset that Mary was sitting in the company of Jesus and not helping her with the meal preparations.

Finally, in agitation, she went and questioned Jesus as to whether or not he even cared that she was left to do all the work by herself. Picture the scene. Here was Jesus, the Son of God, the most loving, caring person who ever lived in a human body and Martha was accusing Him of not caring about her. Martha's work was obviously going unnoticed by Jesus. He was not responding to her efforts as she had planned.

Jesus could have tried to calm Martha down by patting her on the back and saying soothing words to her. He could have asked Mary to go inside and help her sister serve the meal. He did neither of these things. Instead, Jesus gave her a lesson in "Spiritual Growth"!

He said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is

needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Martha found out the hard way, that good works by themselves don't impress Jesus. There is only so much serving you can do, only so many deeds that you can perform. All mean nothing, if you haven't taken the time to spend in close, intimate fellowship with the Lord. Sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His Word, is the essential first step in any service we perform.

Serving, or performing good works, without first seeking the will of God, is often done for our own glory and self esteem. Doing so will often cause us to feel frustrated and eventually burned-out.

Matthew 7:21-23 (KJV)

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

In our story, it is important to notice that Mary was the sister who took the time to get to know Jesus. She was not too busy with other things (as Martha was) to spend quality time with Jesus, sharing with Him, listening to Him and seeking to know His will for her life. If we are only trying to do what appears right -- the outward, showy things that others will see -- we may be doing good works, but we will miss out on developing a close relationship with the Lord.

In essence, as Jesus taught in **Matthew 7:21**, we are not truly *servicing* our Lord, as individuals, until we do the will of our Father in Heaven.

There was a time in my life when I was torn between the characteristics of Martha and the characteristics of Mary. In my heart I wanted to spend all of my time sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His Word. That is what really made me happy. I thrived on listening to His counsel,

seeking to find out what He wanted me to do with my life. Yet, I was also influenced by the voices of other good intentioned Christians who thought I should be spending more time doing the outward works.

I was caught up in a lifestyle of participating in endless church activities. One could accurately say that I would do *anything* from cleaning the bathrooms at church, to teaching a Sunday School Class, to singing in the choir; I just wanted to be doing works for the Lord. The only problem is that I was getting physically and mentally tired from all of my serving. I was even beginning to sound like Martha in our story. I wasn't enjoying myself and I wasn't sure the Lord even noticed how weary I was getting.

One icy-cold winter day, I found myself standing in front of a window, looking out from a hotel room, in upstate New York. Alan and I were attending yet another church function, and it was during the afternoon break that I went back to the room to rest for a while, before the evening services began. I had promised the pastor that I would stand and bear my testimony at the worship service that night.

As I stood in front of the window looking out, I noticed that the tree directly outside from the window, had no leaves on it. This was no startling revelation, in itself. Everyone knows that trees shed their leaves in the winter so the tree can go through a resting period. Suddenly I felt envious of that tree. I began to cry out to the Lord in my spirit and I said, "Lord, I'm so tired from working all the time. There are so many church functions to attend, I love you Lord, but there is so much work to do, I can't keep up!" I begged the Lord to let me rest, like that tree was resting. I wanted to shed my responsibilities, like that tree had shed its leaves. I had even made up my mind that I was not going to go back to the church to bear my testimony that night. There were others who were going to give their testimonies, I reasoned, they didn't need mine.

As I stood staring out at the tree, with tears streaming down my face, I felt the burden of my responsibilities being lifted, one by one. Then I

heard the voice of the Lord for the first time in months, while the voices of the good-intentioned Christians faded into the background. As I stood there listening, I realize now that my spirit took on the characteristics of Mary. It was just my Lord and me, and I could clearly hear what the Lord wanted me to do. He said, "I want you to go to the worship service tonight and I want you to stand and bear your testimony. Tell them about me." It seemed like I had only paused for a few seconds to think about my response, when the Lord continued, "DO IT FOR ME!!!"

How could I refuse? It was the *Lord's will* for me to go to the service and bear my testimony. That night I boldly stood and shared my testimony about the power of Jesus Christ at work in my life. People came up after the service to tell me that my testimony would change their life. I know it had certainly changed mine. I learned an important truth that has set me free. Our strength to serve God comes from doing the Lord's will in our life. Choosing to put the Lord (His Word) first, above all other voices, is the best decision I have ever made in my life.

Now when the distractions of the world come my way, I remember what Jesus told Martha, except I read the verse as if Jesus is speaking to me personally. I substitute my name for Mary's name. This is what I hear Jesus saying to me in my spirit, "... only one thing is needed. Sharon has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her!"

As I close this lesson, my brothers and sisters, I would like to leave you with the same challenge that Jesus gave to Martha in our scripture from Luke 10:42. Choose the Best! Choose Jesus! He will never be taken away from you!