



# Life in the Family

How Jesus Prepares  
Us for Kingdom Life

through the story of  
Martha and Mary

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At Your Pace Series

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*You can either print out this study so you can fill in your answers, or you can save the PDF to your computer and use the typing option available on most PDF programs to record your answers and input.*

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

### Why This Study?

Since we live in God's family, I often wonder how He wants us to live with each other. This study helps us look at a famous family in the Gospels. This family is used to help us understand God's work in our lives and how He wants us to live with those He chose for us to grow up with and life with.

Most of us who have followed Jesus for a while, especially we women, know the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10 when Jesus comes to visit. We see Mary sitting at His feet and listening, while Martha is fuming because her sister isn't helping with the work. Martha lashes out at Jesus, assuming that He is unaware of what is happening and that He doesn't care.

Then Jesus tells Martha to be more like her sister.

As observers to the scene, especially if we're hard workers, we end up wanting to be like Mary and shaking our finger at Martha for being what we often don't like about ourselves.

For a long time I've wondered about how Martha responded to Jesus' words, because Luke doesn't tell us. Whenever we see Jesus speak with other women in the Scriptures, He is having conversations with them—but why not with Martha? I've wondered how the rest of the evening went in this tension-filled home.

What is *the rest of the story*?

So I decided to plunge into the Martha and Mary story from Luke's and John's Gospels to discover the Martha Jesus knew. Through the process I discovered so much more to the sisters' story than what I had heard about or had pieced together. Their story is one that each of us wants to be able to tell: the story of what happens when we come face-to-face with Jesus and bring Him into the problems and issues we face every day, especially into the area where we find the most stress—our families.

Whether we're male or female, the Martha/Mary story is our story. It's a story of conflict, hard-to-hear truth, choices, changes, hope, and new perspectives. It's a story of God reaching out to us, helping us change so we become like Jesus. It's a story of how God wants to work through the families He's placed us into. It's a story of change for the better.

No matter where we find conflict in our lives, the Martha/Mary story is one we need to know and experience. Because once we invite Jesus into our lives, our relationships, and our conflicts, we'll never be the same.

Sounds like hope to me!

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

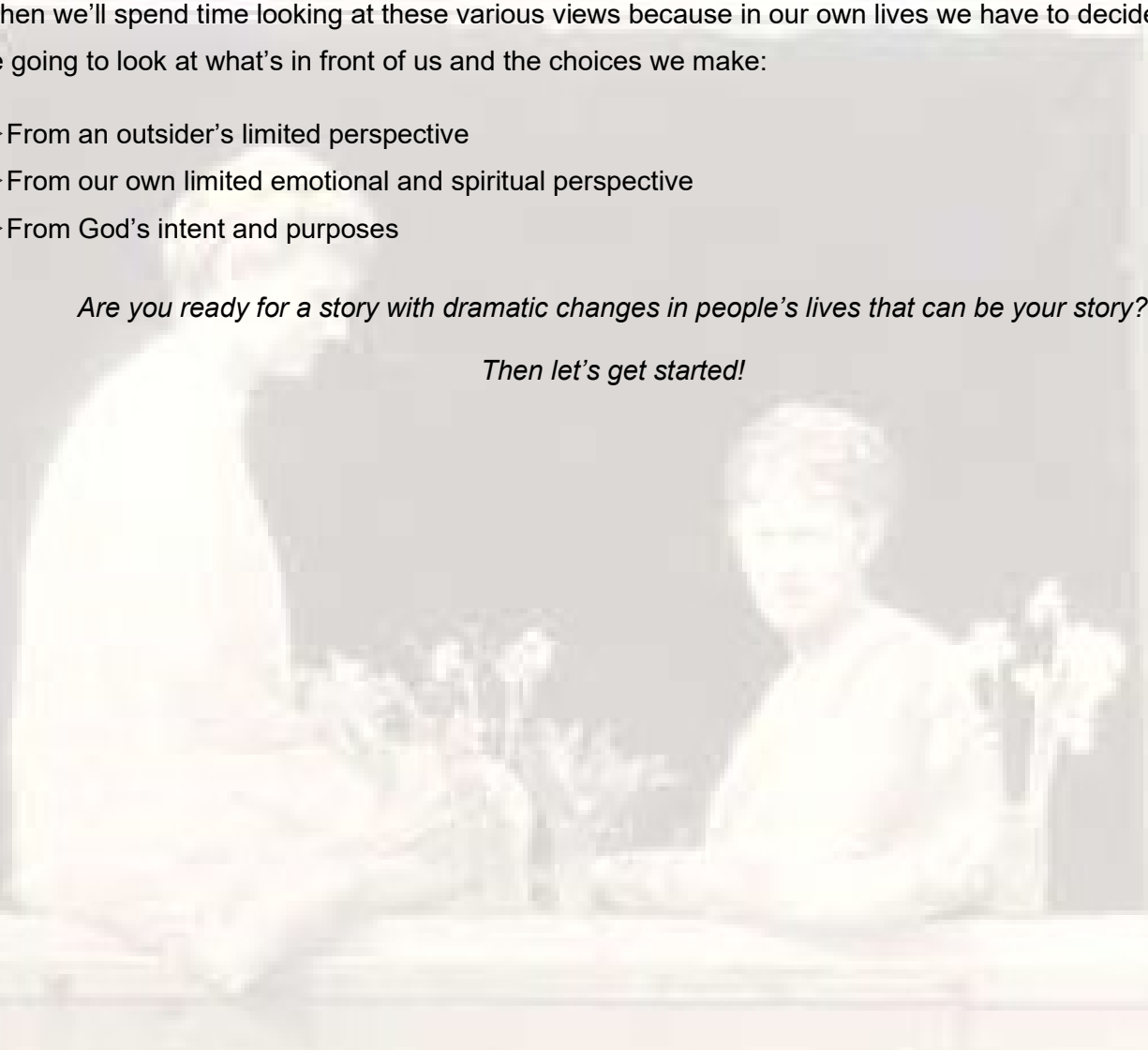
In this study we're going to look at how the sisters interacted with each other and with Jesus. Between these interactions, we're going to sneak a glimpse at diary entries Martha *could* have written. Finally we're going to take a *heavenly* look at events surrounding this family and the sisters' choices: we're going to look at life from our heavenly Father's perspective and see how He was involved in the events and was working through Martha and Mary for our benefit.

Then we'll spend time looking at these various views because in our own lives we have to decide how we're going to look at what's in front of us and the choices we make:

- From an outsider's limited perspective
- From our own limited emotional and spiritual perspective
- From God's intent and purposes

*Are you ready for a story with dramatic changes in people's lives that can be your story?*

*Then let's get started!*



# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## Chapter 1 Background

Every story has a background, so let's look at what happened *before* our story takes place. As Martha and Mary's story begins in Luke 10:38–42, the first words are "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way. Questions abound! Where was He was going? Where had He been? What is this journey about? Let's answer these questions so we can see how this journey led to Jesus challenging Martha.

In the Gospels, Jesus travels around Israel and Samaria without any observable plan. However, because of the first sentence in this Luke 10 passage (Luke 10:38), His schedule seems to have a purpose. Jesus is now intentional in where He's going. *Perhaps He's always been intentional?*

In looking backward from Luke 10, the first reference to a physical location comes in Luke 9:10. Please take the time to read all of Luke 9:1 - 10:37. As you read these words, be sure to look for the *big picture* of what's happening, not just at a snapshot of one encounter. If you can find a map of Israel during the time of Jesus (it may be in the back of your Bible), you can see where Jesus walked.

*Let's go exploring. The answers aren't as important as the process of investigating. (If your Bible has section headings, you can use that information.):*

Jesus' location in Luke 9:10	_____
Major events in:	
Luke 9:1-9	<u>Jesus sends out the 12</u>
Luke 9:10-17	_____
Luke 9:18-27	<u>Peter's confession of Christ</u>
Luke 9:28-36	_____
Luke 9:37-45	_____
Luke 9:46-50	_____
Luke 9:51-56	_____
Luke 9:57-62	_____

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Luke 10:1-24      Jesus sends out the 72

Luke 10:25-37

*Now let's go into detail.*

In Luke 9:28-36, Jesus walks up a mountain to pray and is described as being *transfigured*, changed from what He is to what He will be—His glory is revealed. Matthew and Mark also write about this astounding event in their Gospels (Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9:2-13), and both men mention that He's been teaching in Caesarea Philippi. (The traditional site of the transfiguration is on Mt. Tabor, while the other possible site is Mount Hermon. This location isn't critical to our story, but it is interesting.)

*Let's do some more exploring:*

Who did Jesus ask to go with Him as He walked up the mountain?	
Who met with Jesus while He was praying on the mountain?	
Why do you think God sent these <i>particular</i> men to meet with His Son? (If you're not sure, ask a friend who is familiar with the Old Testament.)	
What did they talk about with Jesus?	
What city did they mention as they were talking? Locate this city on the map.	

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<p>Since we know that Jesus was fully human while He was here on earth, put yourself in His place as He's beginning to anticipate the hardest thing He would ever face. Why do you think God had these two men meet with His Son?</p>	
<p><i>(Who encourages you?)</i></p>	
<p>The two men appeared in glorious splendor while talking with Jesus because they had already been resurrected (Elijah hadn't actually died but had been taken to heaven and wasn't seen on earth any longer. For more information on him, see 2 Kings 2:1-18). How do you think that Jesus could be seen in His glory since He hadn't died yet?</p>	
<p>What do you think God the Father wanted Peter, John, and James to know about this meeting on the mountain?</p>	
<p>What/why do you think God, wanted <i>us</i> to know about this meeting on the mountain?</p>	

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

### *After the meeting*

After Jesus comes back down the mountain, He comments about the belief of those around Him in Luke 9:37-45. What does He say?

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How would you describe the emotions behind His words?

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How do you think the experience He had on the mountain explains these emotions?

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This episode about the transfiguration is recorded in two other Gospels (Matthew 17 and Mark 9), but Luke's Gospel is the first time that Jesus talks about what is to come. According to Luke, what new information does He tell His disciples in Luke 9:37-45 that He hadn't spoken about before?

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In the first verse of Luke 9:51-56, we read about Jesus' attitude about the rest of His life. How would you describe it?

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*Now how about you?*

When you have a definite direction to go in, whether it's one you've decided on yourself or one God has given you, how do you react when people seem to get in your way?

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Read Luke 10:1-37. How would you explain Jesus' actions and involvements with people as He travels toward Jerusalem, knowing all that the city holds for Him concerning His coming death and resurrection?

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While Jesus probably isn't going to arrive in Jerusalem within the next couple of weeks or even months, everything He does from now on is done with His death and resurrection in mind.

Now that we have the *big picture*, let's see how this information can help us. After answering a few more questions, we'll start watching Jesus interact with Martha and Mary and observe how His interactions with them are a picture of how He wants to live with us.

*So, what about you?*

Are you going through some hard times? Did they come after being greatly used by God? Do you see an end in sight to these hard times?

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Jesus began facing the hardest part of His life *after* a mountain top experience when He was transfigured. Perhaps this example will help you (or someone you know and care about) as you (and they) face the difficulties of life. Some of what He experiences with His Father during this time includes knowing the following truths and responding to them:

1. God has a plan in mind and allows us to be part of it.

*Do you want to be involved with God? Even in the hard times? How about telling Him so?*

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2. Before, during, and after hard times, God provides encouragement and perspective through a variety of means.

*Are you willing to spend time with Him so He has the opportunity to meet with you? Then will you and accept those He brings along to encourage you? How about telling Him so?*

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3. God wants us to walk by faith and not be distracted by what's around us.

*Are you walking with Him, or are you allowing yourself to be distracted by anything and everything?*

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4. The people He puts in our path are part of His plan.

*Do you see others as hindrances and interruptions, or do you walk with Him as you interact with others?*

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Perhaps you'd like to take a new look at your circumstances through His eyes because of what we've looked at in the background to Martha and Mary's story. I've found that writing a letter to my heavenly Father can be one of the healthiest things I can do for myself.

*How about taking this space, and this time, to talk and then listen to Him?*



Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*Father,*



# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## Chapter 2 Act 1: The Conflict

*Read Luke 10:38-42 first.*

As we discovered in Chapter 1, Jesus is now on the long road toward His death and resurrection. We've seen the importance He put on counting the cost of discipleship, sending His followers out to those who need to know about Him, and having His people help those who need help when and how they need it.

The rest of our story is like a 3-act play:

**Act 1: the conflict**

**Act 2: a moment of choice**

**Act 3: the obvious changes.**

*Do you ever feel that your life is like a play and others are watching, waiting for the conclusion?*

You're right! The heavenly hosts are watching and cheering us on when we make decisions that further God's kingdom on earth. And other believers are also watching and learning and being encouraged when we choose faith instead of fear.

Before we look at Martha's part in her play, let's look at how Jesus lived while here on earth. John in his Gospel makes some very interesting observations about Jesus' way of thinking, deciding, and acting that should profoundly impact us. Write down the main point you see in these verses that describe Jesus' life with His Father. (Be sure to understand what is happening when Jesus speaks.)

John 4:34	
John 5:19	
John 5:30	
John 7:16-18	

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

John 12:49-50	
John 14:9-10	
John 16:13-20	

What is the common thread in these verses?

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What conclusion(s) do you make from these statements for yourself?

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*Read Luke 10:38-41.*

As Jesus comes to the village of Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem, He chooses to stay at Martha's home. From what we've seen about how Jesus lived, why do you think He comes to *this* town and stays at *her* home on *this* particular evening?

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Now Martha has a sister (Mary) who is a major player in this scene and a brother (Lazarus) who isn't even mentioned in this first encounter. Interesting. From other passages in the Gospels we'll see that Jesus and His disciples often stay in this home and that He is good friends with this family. But let's make some observations on what we read about here.

<i>Martha opened her home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No parents are mentioned.</li><li>• Women rarely owned anything, so commentators think that Martha was a widow and that her sister and brother were living in the home left to her when her husband died.</li><li>• All three are single.</li><li>• She's probably the oldest.</li></ul>
<i>Martha had a sister, Mary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who sat and listened to Jesus</li></ul>
<i>Lazarus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• He isn't mentioned in this episode; perhaps because he isn't important to the story—or to his sisters? Perhaps he's a younger brother?</li></ul>

What do you observe about the sisters' personalities?

Martha: \_\_\_\_\_

Mary: \_\_\_\_\_

*Do you have siblings? Are they older or younger? Describe each one's personality (if you're an only child, describe your personality when you interact with friends).*

More than likely you've probably experienced a situation similar to the one in Martha's home. The tension caused by the conflict between the sisters was probably so thick it could have been cut with a knife. Instead of caring for, supporting, and helping each other, Mary did whatever she wanted to do whenever she wanted to do it, but she did it quietly and behind the scenes, while Martha fussed and fumed over all the activities and preparations she thought she *had* to do, refusing to sit down and listen to Jesus—or probably to anyone else who came to visit. Maybe.

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Mary probably saw her sister as irritable, prickly, always busy, bossy, proud, and a know-it-all.

Martha probably saw her sister as lazy, selfish, not at all helpful, and passive.

*Sound familiar?*

So what does Martha do in our story?

- She doesn't talk to her sister about the problem (maybe she's thinking "been there, done that, doesn't work").
- She interrupts Jesus as he's talking because she doesn't like what's happening (and it's probably happened before).
- She blames Jesus for her sister's behavior and accuses Him of not caring about her (because we always blame others).
- She thinks she's making herself look like the one who needs help.

**But** she does go to Him . . .

and then she listens to what He has to say.

*So, what do you do when someone irritates you? Be honest now.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Was one of your responses that you go to Jesus with your irritations? Or do you just let them swirl around in your mind, gathering momentum?*

*Do you listen to what Jesus has to say? Or do you keep saying the same things over and over—to Him and to anyone else who might listen?*





## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Now that we've all been honest with ourselves, let's look at what Jesus said to Martha, because He's probably said—or is saying—the same thing to us:

*“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset . . . ”*

Do you hear His loving, gentle, but truthful voice? He says her name twice (when we get upset with someone, we say a name only once—and usually use the person's full name).

*Can you hear Jesus lovingly saying your name twice  
and then naming the issues you haven't been facing?*

*I can.*

*What is He saying to you?*

Jesus then goes on to compare the two sisters, something that every parent knows *not* to do. He tells Martha about a quality in her sister that He values and knows that she has developed over the years, because it comes so easily to her—a quality that He sees lacking in Martha. How harsh and critical His words must have sounded. I wonder about His tone of voice.

Did you notice that Jesus ignores Martha's complaint—*“Mary isn't helping and You don't care”*—but commends Mary to her for the very action that so maddened, irritated, frustrated her: choosing to listen to Jesus over helping *her*?

Now Jesus didn't talk to Mary about her own weaknesses, probably because she hadn't approached Him; and He certainly didn't talk to Martha about Mary's weaknesses since Mary's issues are Mary's issues. He only spoke to Martha about Mary's strengths.

Both Martha and Mary had fallen into the same trap as the religious leaders had in Luke's story of the Good Samaritan that's told just before Jesus stops by to visit the sisters. These religious leaders said they loved God, but they wanted to be comfortable and used own standards for living, failing to love others as much as they loved themselves.

*Sound familiar?*

Jesus had spoken. As He looked into Martha's eyes, what do you think she sees? The compassion He feels for her was probably close to overwhelming her, but His words were so hard to hear. We don't know how Martha reacted to His words. He just looked at her as He spoke with a look of heavenly love, longing for her to really hear Him. And He let her digest His words.

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*How have you responded when others have spoken honestly but lovingly to you? It's so hard, isn't it, not to be defensive, proud, and ready to accuse when we're confronted. It's so much easier to ignore what is said and stay the way we've always been.*

*These times of conflict and choices are so common for us, aren't they? We have no idea what's at stake when we're faced with hard choices. And we'll never know His amazing plans as long as we hold on to our anger, blame, self-righteousness, desire to control, and setting standards for others to conform to.*

The tension that ends this short section of Scripture is so important because of what God wants to do with this family. So much depends on Martha's choice at this moment, and she doesn't even know it.

- Will Martha see herself through Jesus' eyes?
- Will she respond humbly and openly?
- Will she change?

*Did you notice that Jesus interacts first with the stronger person in the story and with the one who comes to Him instead of staying apart? Perhaps in a tension-filled relationship, it's the stronger personality of the two, or the more mature person of the two, who has to change first.*

*So, what about us?*

If Martha's story is your story (and I bet it is, at least in some regard), then the choices you make today will affect your life tomorrow and next week and next year.

*What circumstances and conflicts describe your world today? Be specific.*

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*What if you were to see these circumstances and tension through God's eyes? How do you think your choices could affect your life and the lives of those around you, positively and negatively?*

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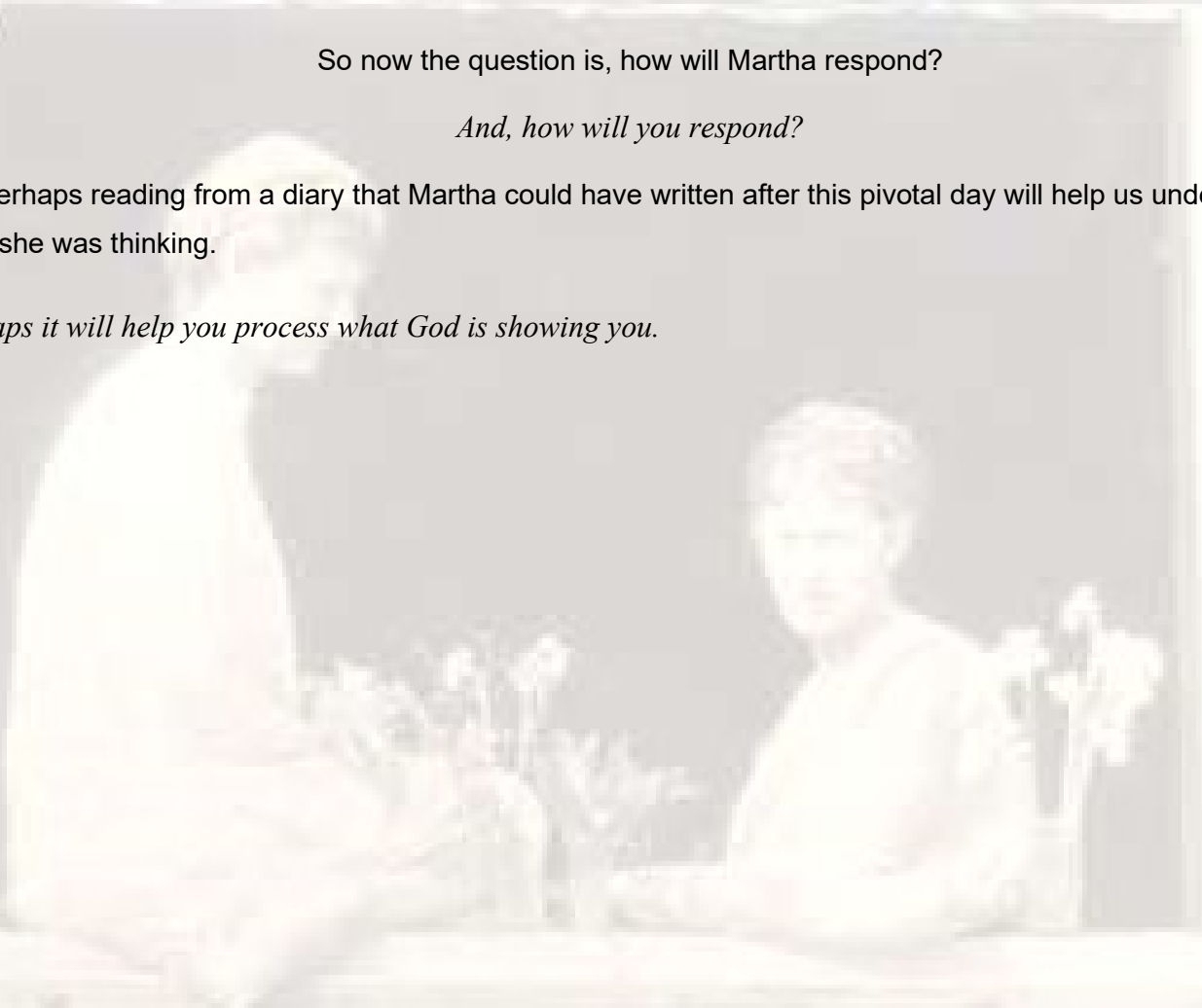
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So now the question is, how will Martha respond?

*And, how will you respond?*

Perhaps reading from a diary that Martha could have written after this pivotal day will help us understand what she was thinking.

*Perhaps it will help you process what God is showing you.*



## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary



Dear Diary,

I am so mad at my sister that I could spit nails! Jesus arrived unannounced again today. I really do like these men—they treat me with the respect I'm due and I know they appreciate what I do for them, especially Jesus, but they create so much extra work for me.

Lazarus and my lazy sister just sit around, listening and talking with him. They all laugh a lot too, but I'm not laughing! I've had it! I'm going to say something to Jesus about Mary not helping me—she always listens to him, never to me, especially when he's around.

M-

Oh Diary,

It backfired! I called Jesus out of the room and told him that if he really cared about me, he'd have my sister come and help me. But what does he do? He compares me to her and says she's doing what's right and that I'm worried and upset over things that aren't really important. He says there's a better way and Mary's doing it. How could he say this to me, especially after all I've done for him? He's always been so loving and supportive, but today he was cruel.

His words sounded so harsh, but he did have tenderness in his voice when he said my name. No one else is tender with me. And no one else has ever told me to my face that I'm not perfect. I wonder how others see me?

Is there something in what he's said that I need to hear? Could it be that his words were true and meant to be helpful, not harsh?

M-

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Dear Diary,

I can't help but think that Jesus is right and I'm wrong. Things rarely go the way I think they should. And our friends always seem to like being around Mary more than me. I guess I'd better take a good, long look at myself. Maybe if I write down what I see about myself that I don't like, the guilt and embarrassment that came with Jesus' words will go away. Okay, here goes. I'm going to be honest for a change.

- My priorities are wrong—I don't value what's really important.
- I'm selfish.
- I think the world should revolve around me.
- I'm angry because my husband died and left me all alone.
- I expect others to be like me.
- I want to be the center of attention.
- I want to be noticed and valued.
- I'm too concerned with things, status, and appearances.
- I really don't care about the welfare of others, unless caring for them makes me look good.
- I impose my schedule and wants on others, especially my family.
- I have a demanding spirit.
- I accuse people (and even Jesus) of not caring about me just because they don't want to do things my way.
- I create tension.
- I assume the other person is wrong and I'm right.
- I'm critical of others because they don't live up to my standards.
- I keep score.

There, I've said it—all of it. You know, I do feel better. I think that when Jesus said those horrible words to me, he saw all of this in me, but yet he spoke to me so tenderly and lovingly. I guess if he knows me this well and still loves me, I shouldn't hold onto the guilt and embarrassment of his words. I'm beginning to think that he really does care for me. He's not just being nice to me because of my brother and sister.

M-

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

### Chapter 3 Act 2: The Moment of Choice

As I think over Jesus' words to Martha, I can't help but be amazed by His interaction with a woman. Normally in that culture and time, such a conversation would never happen—especially with an unmarried religious man. Even today, most men don't have the nerve to speak honesty with a woman, because they don't want to hear her angry response. And if they do have the nerve to speak honestly, they find it hard to speak with love and care for her that she needs and deserves.

But Jesus cares about people, not rules. And He cares deeply for women.

If Martha were a widow, then her husband, who probably had been the love of her life, had died. Her dreams as a young woman are gone. Her forever-companion, the one who listened to her and helped keep her laughing, was gone and she was lonely.

Of course this description is just conjecture. Maybe Martha had always been abrupt and demanding. But knowing someone's story can often help us understand a present conflict. If you're having conflict with someone, do you know this person's story? Do you know what's happened in his or her life up to this moment? Often knowledge brings understanding, which encourages love.

On with our story.

# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## SCENE 1

Read John 10:40-11:16.

Let's see what's been happening with this family since Jesus visited.

- Lazarus**
- Was from Bethany
  - Was very sick
  - Was the brother of Mary and Martha

**Bethany** • Referred to as the village of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*Note: The order of names in Scripture is important; perhaps Martha owned the home, but the village identified with Mary, who was the more social one (as we'll see later).*

**Mary** • She's identified by an act of worship that hasn't happened in our story yet but would have been well known by the author's readers.

- the sisters**
- *They sent word*—the sisters are working together now.
  - They must have been very worried about their brother to have sent for their Friend.
  - If anyone could help with Lazarus' illness, it was Jesus. They probably thought that since He had cured so many others, of course He would come and cure their brother, His own dear friend.
  - They didn't presume on their own friendship with Jesus; they asked for this favor because of Jesus' friendship with their brother.

*Perhaps their concern over their sick brother helped them learn how to work together.*

**Jesus**

- Was across the Jordan where John the Baptist had been baptizing
- Stayed where He was for *two more days* after He heard of Lazarus' illness

Let's see what Martha would have written in her diary at this point in the story.

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary



Dear Diary,

*Lazarus is so sick, and I'm worried. Mary and I don't know what else to do. All of our tried-and-true methods aren't working. We can't even figure out what's really wrong with him.*

*I think we should let Jesus know that he is sick and may even be dying (I can't believe I finally said that word). Jesus has helped so many others; I'm sure he'll help us. I know it's dangerous for him to come back to this area, but I don't feel like we have a choice. We've lost our parents; we can't lose Lazarus too.*

M-

Dear Diary,

*I can't believe Jesus hasn't come—from what I've heard, he's not that far away. He could have at least sent a messenger to let us know he cared.*

*I'm so tired and worried. I want to give in and cry, but Mary needs me to be strong. I'm really starting to worry about her too. She's not talking much these days.*

M-



## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Remember what we learned in *Chapter 1* about how Jesus knew what to do and when to do it? From John 11:4-6, what is Jesus' perspective on what was happening?

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Sometimes Jesus' words and actions are so confusing. Jesus tells His disciples that Lazarus will not die, but he does. Jesus loves this family but stays beyond the Jordan for two more days.

*Even though Jesus says things that don't always make sense, and even though He waits much longer to act than we're comfortable with, Jesus does love His friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus—and He calls us friends if we've made Him Lord in our lives. Also, Jesus is tuned into a heavenly plan that is far beyond anything we could ever imagine and will make sense of all that is happening once He lets us in on what He's doing.*

Did you note the order of names John uses in vs. 5?

\_\_\_\_\_ and her sister and \_\_\_\_\_.

Our storyteller knows that the story revolves around this one sister, and he also knows that Jesus cares about her and her family.

Do you know why it was a big deal for the sisters to ask Jesus for this favor? At the end of John 10, our storyteller tells us that Jesus is across the Jordan where John the Baptist had been baptizing in the early days, and where Jesus is having a great time of ministry. Have you found this spot on your map? It's quite a way from Bethany where the worried sisters lived.

Jesus had gone beyond the Jordan because \_\_\_\_\_ (John 10:22-42). His disciples knew of the danger (John 11:8). From Jesus' response, do you think He was worried or afraid? Explain:

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When Jesus receives the sisters' message, Lazarus is still sick. Nothing final has happened yet, but Jesus knows the future. He describes what was going to happen in a way that thoroughly confused the disciples (and probably us too), but it was confusing only because they didn't know the reality and purpose behind the circumstances—what Jesus knew all too well.

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

So, Jesus tells them plainly what is going to happen and why. He says, “Lazarus is \_\_\_\_\_,  
and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may \_\_\_\_\_.”

Hmmmm. A story behind the story.

*So what is going on in your life that you don't see a bigger purpose for? Are you beginning to see that Jesus has a meaning and purpose that will benefit both you and many others for the sake of the kingdom? Because that is who Jesus is and what He does.*

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*Are you willing to wait for what He wants to unfold through the circumstances? What will this waiting cost you?*

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# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## Chapter 4 SCENE 2

Read John 11:17-37.

Let's set the scene:

*Messenger* — Would have had to walk a long distance to deliver the message to Jesus

*Jesus* Had waited for \_\_\_\_\_ after He got the message before starting to walk toward Bethany

*Lazarus* Has been in the tomb for \_\_\_\_\_

So we see that the sisters have lived for days with their concern, worry, and grief over their brother while waiting for the messenger to find Jesus and then return. But Jesus didn't come right away as they expected. Probably their disappointment with Him turned to anger when He didn't come and do for them—His own friends!—what He had done for so many others that He didn't even know.

*Isn't it amazing how unmet expectations can create hurt and anger when we don't give friends room to act the way the Father tells them to?*

Now the sisters' friends from their hometown of Bethany and nearby Jerusalem have come to comfort \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the loss of their brother.

Note the order of the names. Perhaps a change has happened in Martha that affects how she relates to her friends and neighbors.

Let's check out her diary.

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary



Dear Diary,

Lazarus died, and four days ago we buried him. I thought that if Jesus came as soon as we sent for him he would heal Lazarus like he's healed others. But now it's too late.

All of our friends are here from Jerusalem, and it's good to have them around. I don't even mind the extra work, especially since so many of them are helping out—I can't believe I'm even letting them do anything in the house; this isn't like me. I'm glad we have so many friends that we don't have to hire professional mourners to grieve over Lazarus the way others have had to do.

I've never felt so helpless, scared, out of control, or defeated. I don't understand why we haven't heard from Jesus.

M-

Dear Diary,

A messenger just came, and I'm so relieved—our friend, and some say the Messiah, is coming!

M-

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Jesus arrives, and who comes out to meet him? Is it Mary who had sat at His feet listening and who Jesus had commended because she chose the better way? Or is it Martha who took her anger and hurt to Jesus but let His words of loving truth penetrate her heart? \_\_\_\_\_

A house full of guests and responsibilities, and Martha leaves it all behind and goes to the only One who understands her completely and loves her anyway. Her sister stays home with her \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_.

But Martha is still in the process of changing (as we all are!). While she accuses Jesus of not caring (where have we heard that accusation before?), she also knows that He has the power and the ability to do something because of \_\_\_\_\_

While she blames Him for letting her brother die, she still has a *general* kind of hope that Jesus can do something—sometime.

Jesus responds with a *specific* promise that she will see her brother again (and He knows that it will be *today*).

Martha says in effect, “Sure, sure, I know of the final resurrection that will happen—sometime.”

Now the Jews did have knowledge of this future hope, but not all of the religious leaders (the Sadducees) believed it. (Matthew 22:23) Martha was picking up on the general knowledge of her time.

I think it’s hard to put ourselves in Martha’s place. These three adult siblings lived together and had to depend on each other. In that culture, women were dependent on the men in their families for almost everything, just as in many Middle Eastern countries today. Martha’s needs came out of an emotional, cultural, social, and perhaps financial dependence. And strong people don’t like to admit to their needs. *Do you?*

Jesus knew all about her needs and her struggle with control. But Jesus also knew of a bigger plan that was ready to unfold.

Out of His love and concern for Martha and her sister, and out of an eternal perspective that He and His Father wanted to give His disciples (and us), Jesus tells Martha information that no one else had ever heard. (Remember Mark 9:10?) Astounding! To this woman He brings the *then* of a future resurrection to the *now* of her life and tells her that He is what she is waiting for. He says, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and he who lives and believes in me will never die.*”

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Jesus offers her a new way of living and then asks, “*Do you believe this?*” He gives new information to a woman who’s in the depths of intense grief and then asks for a response. This is so unlike what we’re told to do with grieving friends, isn’t it?

*Are you in the middle of intense grief or pain? Is Jesus giving you some new-for-you information? Are you responding to this truth, or are you staying in your emotions far too long? The choice—and its results—are up to you.*

Martha chooses to respond in faith without seeing any proof! She chooses to put her faith and her future in this Man because He’s the One who has been sent by God into her world. She chooses to believe while still in her pain. This is resurrection life.

And what does she do next: Fall at His feet and worship? Tell her friends what had just happened? Go back home and put a meal on the table? No, she goes to her sister who’s also experiencing intense grief but who hadn’t gone to Jesus when word came that He was coming. Mary instead stayed where she was, physically and emotionally. Here’s what happens:

- Martha calls Mary aside instead of talking to her in public where others can interrupt.
- Martha tells Mary that the Teacher is asking to see her.
- Martha sends Mary to the One who can give hope when hope seems to be missing.

What a different relationship we see between these sisters: no longer do we see competition, criticism, or conflict. Their old way of relating is replaced by love and a tender care that leads to hope. Martha being tender, you ask? Yes, a transformation has happened in her heart and soul that has washed over her motives and actions.

When Mary does come to Jesus, she says the exact same thing to Him that Martha had, words the sisters had probably said over and over to each other as they had waited for Him to come. But notice Mary’s pose: she’s fallen at His feet and looks at the ground, overwhelmed; Martha, however, looks into Jesus’ eyes when she speaks to Him, confident and expectant.

Can’t you just hear the anguish and grief in Mary’s lament? Jesus even weeps with her, even though He knows what He’s going to do next.

*Isn’t it amazing that even though Jesus knows the future, He still suffers with those who are suffering—He’s not emotionally distant? What an example for us!*

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

As a side note, did you notice the accusations of the friends who had come to mourn with the sisters? They might as well have said, “They may think that he loves them, but he’s not willing—or even able?—to do more for them than he did for a blind man he didn’t even know. Does he really care? Is he really able to do miracles that help his friends? If not, what good is he?”

*How often we agree with these accusers and say, “Jesus, if you cared, you would have \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*What do you wish you would say instead? \_\_\_\_\_*



# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## SCENE 3

Read John 11:38-44.

Here's the scene: everyone's at the tomb, Jesus tells the men to remove the large stone covering the entrance, Martha is back in her here-and-now reality (bad smell after four days), the men probably look to her to see what to do. And Jesus asks her again for a response of faith before He'll act.

Previously Jesus asked her to believe while in the middle of her grief and emotional pain; now He looks her straight in the eyes and asks her to believe Him in the face of human impossibility.

*Is He also asking you to believe Him in the midst of a situation that seems to be impossible? If so, then you know how hard this question was for Martha to answer. What are you going to say?*

Martha again chooses to believe and tells the men to roll away the stone (action based on faith). Jesus then begins talking to His Father. What do we see in His prayer?

*Thankfulness* that His Father always hears Him.

*Purpose* that those who are going to see what happens will believe that the Father has sent Him.

*Confidence* in the Father without first seeing proof because Jesus knows His Father and how He works.

In John 10, the author describes the relationship between Jesus and those who know Him. What common truth do you see in these verses?

John 10:3

John 10:4

John 10:11

John 10:16

John 10:19



## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Jesus calls out for his friend, and Lazarus obeys and walks out of the dark tomb because \_\_\_\_\_

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(Commentators write that it's a good thing that Jesus called Lazarus by name or all of the dead who heard Jesus' voice would have walked out of their tombs!)

Jesus asks the people to remove Lazarus' grave clothes, and they all see that Lazarus is as good as ever! It didn't take any time at all for him to recover. He is the same old Lazarus, without any side effects of having been dead for 4 days. He is able to immediately rejoin his sisters and his friends in Bethany.

Now, reactions to Lazarus' resurrection were mixed. Read John 11:45-57, and summarize these reactions:

Many of the Jews: \_\_\_\_\_

The religious leaders: \_\_\_\_\_

*We've looked at Martha's and various others' reactions to Lazarus coming back to life. How would you have responded?* \_\_\_\_\_

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*What if a dear friend dies before what you thought was his or her time? Perhaps you've had a spouse or child die, and your dreams for the future are dashed? Then what if the Messiah, the Promised One of God, brought this person back to life—how would you react? What would your relationship with Jesus begin to look like?*

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Let's see how Martha might have responded to Lazarus' return to life as she writes in her diary:

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary



Dear Diary,

I can't believe it—Lazarus is alive! He's as good as he was, and he's back with us. But let me slow down and start at the beginning.

When I heard Jesus was coming, I ran out the back door so no one would follow me—I was such a mess. He was just over the hill with his disciples. As I got to him, I started talking as I usually do, blaming him for Lazarus' death. Then I caught myself and told him that I believed that God would do whatever he asked. I'm not sure what I was asking for, but I wanted Jesus to do something, and if I had any hope for the future, I knew that Jesus had to be involved.

He told me Lazarus wouldn't stay dead, and I agreed because I do know about the Scriptures' teaching of the last day. Then Jesus said the most amazing thing. He said that the resurrection and the life were not an event but a person—Him.

I struggled with these words but then decided I might as well believe them since everything else He's said and done has been true! So I told him that I believed He is the Messiah sent by God. He smiled at me and put His hand on my shoulder. I think I made Him happy.

Then He took us all to the tomb and asked for the stone to be removed. Of course I had to remind Him of the smell that would overwhelm us, but He looked at me squarely in the face and asked if I really believed in Him. I calmed myself, turned to the men, and told them to remove the stone (what else could I do?). He called out for Lazarus, and our dear brother stepped out into the sunlight, still wearing his grave clothes.

Today I saw the glory of God. Jesus is the Messiah, and I'll follow him anywhere! I am so grateful He didn't return when Lazarus was sick, or we would never have had today. His timing is perfect!

M-

# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## Chapter 5 Act 3: The Obvious Changes

Read John 12:1-11.

Soon (days or weeks) after this miraculous event at the tomb came the time for the Passover celebration—the great event in the Jewish faith. Anyone who could come to Jerusalem for the feast, and the city is packed.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus returns to Bethany. (Since that year's Passover was held on a Thursday, the dinner we're going to be looking at happens on a Saturday night.) Jesus knows the religious leaders are planning to kill both Him and Lazarus because of the notoriety that came from Lazarus being raised from the dead. Because of His encounter with Moses and Elijah on the mountain, Jesus also knows that *this* Passover is going to be His time to die. (Remember what we learned in Chapter 1 of this story?)

We assume that Jesus is staying with his dear friends again, although the author now refers to Bethany as the place where Lazarus lived.

But where's Martha? We find her the background of the activity because she no longer has to have everything and everyone focused on her.

In Matthew's account (Matthew 26:6-13), the author says that the dinner is being held at Simon the leper's home. Obviously Simon had been cured of his leprosy since he is back among friends and in his own home. He had probably been cured by Jesus and so is now, out of a grateful and loving heart, hosting a dinner to honor his Friend.

Let's look at what our friends—Martha, Mary, and Lazarus—are doing at this social event and contrast their actions with how we saw them the first time:

	First Dinner	This Dinner
<i>Martha</i>		
<i>Mary</i>		
<i>Lazarus</i>		

Are you as amazed by the change as I am?

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Martha serves without having to be the center of attention, and she *listens* instead of lashing out in anger and frustration. She's able to serve in someone else's home, an act that a controlling person would find almost impossible to do. She just wants to be where Jesus is so she can listen to Him. I can just see her lovingly place bowls of food gently on the table so the men can continue talking with Jesus and each other without being disturbed. I can see the pleasant soft smile on her face as she looks at each one in the room. She has a peaceful countenance on her face because her inner battles are over. She's loved and forgiven, and she knows it.

*What do you see?* \_\_\_\_\_

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Mary's adoration and worship of Jesus result in *sacrificial giving* instead of passive listening. Commentators suggest that the perfume she uses either was her dowry or had been purchased from selling her dowry. If so, she is giving up her dreams for her future and putting them at the feet of Jesus as she prepares Him for burial.

*Are you holding onto what you think your future should look like, or have you given it to Jesus? Perhaps now is the time.* \_\_\_\_\_

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Lazarus (the baby brother?) now has the place of honor and responsibility in his family and in society, critically important in their world. Perhaps as his sisters resolved their own issues with Jesus and each other, they became free to let Lazarus be who God intends for him to be in their lives.

*Do you need to let someone care for you, or do you need to step up to the plate and care for someone God has placed in your life?*

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## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

The tension and competition in this family are gone. The family members are free to appreciate each other's differences and strengths and support each other. This family now reflects its heavenly Father.

*Can you say this about your home, your work relationships, your friends, and your church involvements? While we can't change others, as we ourselves change, those around us often become free to be honest with God and themselves rather than be defensive and resistant. In the process, they find that they are changing too. It begins with you. It begins with me.*

The house is filled with fragrant perfume that comes from:

- Martha's quiet and gentle spirit as she serves.
- Mary's sacrificial worship.
- Lazarus behaving like a godly man acts, taking on the responsibility for his family as he joins the group of men who are Jesus' intimates.

*And your home will be filled with the fragrance of your perfume of humbleness, kindness, thanksgiving, serving as you give up your:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Let's finish our story by reading what Martha might have written in letter to Jesus, her Lord, that evening before going to sleep:

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary



Dear Lord,

*Oh my, this is the first time I've called you by that name. For so many years I've written to my diary, but you've become so real to me over the past few months that I thought it would be better to write to You rather than to something without any compassion or power.*

*What an amazing dinner was held tonight in your honor. Simon, the leper you had healed, is now so gracious and generous as a host—what a change from the years when he was isolated and angry because of his disease. But, knowing You does change all of us.*

*When I think of that other dinner a few months ago when I was such an angry, self-righteous, and unloving woman, I'm still amazed that You came to our home when You did and said what You did. It's almost as though You stopped by our home just for my sake. And with so much on Your mind and so many people to be involved with. Looking back, I am so honored that You cared enough about me that you wouldn't leave me the way I was.*

*Your words that night stopped me dead in my tracks, but they were the best words I have ever heard—once I decided to look at myself from Your perspective instead of from my own. It's amazing to me how hard words from the mouth of the Master can provide hope. I was so demanding and quick to confront others. Thank You for not running away from such a hardheaded woman.*

*And then Lazarus died, and I was angry with You for not coming sooner. All I could do was lash out at You. But You didn't flinch or back away from me as others do. As I looked into Your face, I remembered what I had learned earlier: I knew that any hope I could ever have depended on You and Your Father, my God.*

*When You asked for the stone to be rolled away, I started slipping back into my old way of thinking that I knew everything that was worth knowing and that I was in charge. But, once again, Your words stopped me cold, and I had to choose whether I was going to believe You or not, and whether I was going to trust You or not. My choice? No more waffling. No more taking back the reins.*

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*So I turned to the men and told them to roll back the stone.*

*And then tonight at the dinner, everything was different. I knew this event was for You and the men, and that was fine with me; I didn't have to be in charge or included. I was happy just to be able to serve You and those You love. I got to listen to every word You said. Just seeing Your face and hearing Your voice as you talked with the others—how wonderful. Your words of love and encouragement, even to someone else, melted my heart. How glad I am that Lazarus is part of this amazing group of men who are Your friends.*

*Mary and I sense that Your end is near; isn't that what You've been telling us? The crowds are so angry; we've even heard rumors of men who are intentionally stirring them up. How could they? Have they never heard Your words or looked into Your eyes?*

*But tonight I could serve without demanding attention or getting after Mary for not helping. Her act of service—the giving up of her dowry, her future, to prepare You for burial—was wonderful and humbling to see. In some ways I wish I were more like her, but knowing You has changed me so dramatically that I hardly recognize myself. In fact, just a few months ago if I had seen her throw away her future like that, I probably would have sided with Judas over the waste of money. But now I know better.*

*Lord, I don't know what the next few days will hold—even though I think You do—but I'm still remembering the miracle You worked in my brother. Why You chose my family for such an honor, I don't know. But I will be forever grateful that You did.*

*Time for bed, but I'm so glad I can write to You and talk to You whenever I want. I have a sense that You know what I'm saying, even through You're not here physically. I also have a sense that soon you won't be around to talk to face-to-face, so I'm doubly glad that I can talk to you through what I write.*

*Your servant, Martha*

# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## Chapter 6 A New Perspective

What have you learned as you've been walking through this time with Martha and her family? Perhaps you'd like to write down your thoughts? I'd like to share with you what I've learned about life's journey from this story. Are any of these true for you too? Perhaps these truths need to change us.

- Jesus took time for Martha to get to know Him before He spoke to her heart.
- When she hit a snag in life and talked to Him, He told her what she *needed* to know, lovingly and privately but honestly.
- Martha had to make a choice because of what He said—she couldn't stay the same.
- Her choice was to soften her heart by humbling herself and listening to truth, or to harden her heart and put up more barriers.
- Martha had to take a long, hard look at herself based on a new set of standards—Jesus', not her own.
- She began to change from the inside out.
- Over the next few months, Martha had to face loneliness, sickness, death, and feelings that God didn't care, didn't want to show up, and wouldn't act on her behalf.
- When Jesus asked her to trust him in the midst of a hard situation and intense emotions, she had to choose to trust Him before she was able to see changes.
- When Martha started to think that Jesus didn't care, she chose to look into His face rather than at the ground—or anywhere else.
- She had to choose to believe that God's reality is truer than her own limited view of the here-and-now.
- At the end of our story with Martha, she became who she wanted to be: a listener, lover, and server of the One who deserves to be listened to, loved, and served.

*Time to talk with the Father again?*



## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

*Father,*



Isn't it amazing that these observations about Martha are true of our own faith journeys, especially as we learn that life isn't supposed to be "all about me"?

But what do you think God was up to during while Jesus was interacting with this family? How was He working behind the scenes (because He always is)? Let's listen in . . . .

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Son,

The time we've been talking about is near. I want you to go up on the mountain and talk with Moses and Elijah about the time when you'll be leaving earth as you're in Jerusalem. I know these two friends will encourage you as you begin to face what's ahead.



Son,

Now that the time is near for you to complete what we've talked about for so long, we need to prepare your disciples, your close friends, and the nation of Israel for what will happen.

Since they don't have any idea what resurrection looks like, let's show them what we're talking about so they can have hope when you die. I think this dear family of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus is the perfect one for us to work with to demonstrate what resurrection life and faith in us look like. I know you love them so much, and I know that if we were to ask them ahead of time, they'd be delighted to accept this honor of showing their world and future generations who you *really* are.

I'd like for you first to spend some time with Martha; her attitudes and perspective on life are not what she'd want them, or need them, to be for this assignment. So, on your way to Jerusalem, please stop by Bethany and spend some time with this wonderful woman. She is hurting and needs to be loved by you.

I so love the women I've created, and I long for them to know us so they can be free to love themselves and others as we created them to do.



## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

Good job with Martha, Son. I know your words initially sounded harsh to her, but she responded the way we knew she would. Now she's ready to know more about who you are so she can respond in faith and teach those around her by her example. She really is the perfect one for us to reveal this truth to about resurrection life. How this world ever came to the conclusion that women aren't valuable shows how full of hate Satan is.

It'll be hard for this family to go through this time of Lazarus dying; I'm glad they trust us as they do, so we'll be able to work through them for eternal purposes. Martha's and Mary's lives will be so much richer for having gone through the horrors of death and separation from their brother, Lazarus, before you go to the cross.



Well, Son, everything is in place. The high priests and Pharisees are showing their true colors, as we knew they would. As soon as Mary anoints you with oil for your burial, Judas' greed will take him over the edge, and he'll sell you out to your enemies. Murder is already in their hearts.

This next week will be horrible for you, Son; always remember why you're doing this—there really is no other way. We love these people so much and want them to know our love, but they won't be able to until we deal with the sin issue. Keep your eyes on the goal, Jesus, and thank you for being willing to lay down your life so they can know life with us.

I am so glad for this family in Bethany; without them this revelation would have been harder to set in place. This is the type of family I am delighted to be associated with. Once they understand their honored place in history, their lives will make sense to them.

Thank you, Son, for what you're choosing to do for those we love—and remember that I love you!

Your Father

# Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

## So What Now?

So, God is at work *through* us for His purposes, and His purposes are amazing! How much more then should we want to walk along with Him so we can continue being part of His plan.

Think of what could happen when:

- You think and speak well of your spouse (parent, boss, political opponents) instead of being critical.
- You change your schedule for the day for someone else's sake because Jesus asks you to.
- You choose to believe and act in obedience instead of emotionally falling apart or lashing out in anger.

What would you add to this list?

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How wonderful it will be when we get to see how our choices of walking by faith fit in with what God has been doing all along here on earth. *Then* we'll be able to see how He's been working through us and that we've been part of His plan all along.

How does this perspective help you today?

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*Can life get any better?*

## Life in the Family—a fresh look at Martha and Mary

How about a final letter to your heavenly Father?

*Father,*

