

A women's bible study on Martha and Mary – Luke 10:38-42:

The gospel of John teaches us that Martha and Mary were the sisters of Lazarus, who rose from the dead on Jesus' command. They were living in Bethany, the slums outside Jerusalem. This indicates that they were poor people, but hospitable people. My experience is that poor people are many times the most hospitable people, only because relationships are more valuable to them than possessions. Relationships are all that they've got, and anyway, it is much easier to share poverty than wealth. Reading the first part of the story, however, prompts us to choose between two types of hospitalities:

*While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town. A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house. Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him teach. But Martha was busy with all the work to be done.*  
(Luke 10:38-40a New Century Version)

Who do think was the most hospitable? This really depends on what culture you are from. If you are someone in the West (so called civilization) then you would agree with me it is Martha. You don't invite someone over to your house, for a couple of days, and just sit around chatting without engaging in any form of preparations whatsoever. With family and really close friends you might dare to do that, either because you know each other so well and are extremely close or because you don't like them and want them to leave asap (that's now family of course), but not with anyone else. With anyone else you would just not invite them. Who would invite someone over, chatting away, and when dinner comes serve the leftovers of the last week? Many men would maybe have the guts to do that, but I haven't met any women yet that would dare to do that.

Why is this the case? This has all to do with self-definition, with what defines people's worth. In the Westernised world, self-definition preys on what people possess. Self-definition turns around the type of cars they drive, the houses and suburbs they live in and the clothes they wear etc. Materialistic things make the man (and woman) and not relationships per se. The relationships at stake, however, are selfish individualistic relationships of envy and pride, otherwise how would what I possess be valued if it can't be compared to what someone else's have? Everyone is for her and him self in this Wild West of self-definition, worth/value, in the I-me-and-myself jungle. Why do people commit suicide when their businesses go bust? Only because their self-definition went bust with their businesses.

In our text, Martha's self-definition was about materialistic things in an individualistic world of I-me-and-myself. Let's be honest. Do you think she was buzzing around, because it was really all about Jesus, or don't you think it was more about herself? I think it was more about herself than anything else. What would Jesus think of I-me-and-myself if everything is not as it should be, materialistic wise?

Lets read the rest of our text:

*She [Martha] went in and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will never be taken away from her." (Luke 10:40b-42 New Century Version)*

By this Jesus struck the Westernised culture in its roots. Only one thing is important – relationships and not material things. Our self-definition should be our belonging and not our possessing. This is the case both in rural Africa and in rural Far-Eastern cultures, but not in the Western(ised) world. Do you value everyone you know just for who they are, and not what you want to be in their eyes (in the apparent comparison of material things)? If that is the case they are always welcome in your house, for fellowship, at all times. This obviously extends into my relationship with Jesus. Only one thing is important, a personal relationship with Jesus, since we are all welcome to enter his presence without first doing this and that and whatever.

Driving it home:

1. Who are you? Martha or Mary?
2. If you are Martha, what should be the change of action, in your context, needed to become a Mary?
3. Is this 'one thing', relationships, passivity, or activity on another level?
4. What flows out of this 'one' relationship with Jesus in practice?