

Be Still and Listen

A Bible Study for the Busy

by Jessica Bordeleau

This Bible study is designed to be a personal study for adult youth workers. Youth workers are busy people! We work long hours to serve others and sometimes feel like we are running on empty. If you feel like you don't have the time to do a personal Bible Study...this is for you! While this study has the adult youth worker in mind, it can also be used as a group Bible study for adults or teens. May God bless your time of meditation!

Part One - The One Thing

Read Luke 10:38-42

Have you ever read this account and been a little baffled, maybe upset? Martha is working hard to serve the Lord (just what we all strive to do in response for what He has done for us) and she is told that Mary has chosen the "one thing" that is needed and better. What a hard blow! We read in numerous other passages that the Lord wants us to serve others, put their needs before our own, and give Him our time and talents. Martha is doing just that, so why did Jesus tell her that Mary had chosen the "one thing" that was better?

As always, when a Bible passage is confusing we search out its meaning by looking at other verses and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Let's look at other passages that may shed some light on this situation. What is the "one thing" that Mary chose?

Read Psalm 27:4

It looks like David's "one thing" matched Mary's. David writes of his desire to be in the presence of God, to seek Him and bask in the beauty of His love. Read the rest of this psalm. We see the theme of quietly waiting for the Lord and trusting in Him no matter what chaos and trouble surround us. The Psalm closes with this verse: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." When we come into God's presence we are fed, provided for and built up. We wait, rest, and sit at His feet. He serves us the rich goodness of his gifts. Martha was serving her Lord, but Mary was being still while her Lord served her.

Martha and Peter

Martha wasn't the only one who had difficulty allowing Jesus to serve her. Peter couldn't rest either. When Jesus was washing the disciple's feet, Peter stopped him. He couldn't imagine his Lord serving him in such a humble way.

Read John 13:1-17

Again, Jesus points out to a busy servant the need to be still, sit back down, and receive from the Lord's hand. But it doesn't stop there. Jesus doesn't tell Peter to stay in the chair forever; He serves Peter so he can serve others. Only by resting and receiving God's gifts can His servants have anything to give others. Peter and Martha had the right idea, but the wrong order. Like them, we want to work now in order to rest later; but God gives us rest in order that we can work later.

Read Matthew 22:34-40

Instead of pretending that our fabulous acts of service come from ourselves and must be done before we spend time resting in God's Word, we see that our acts of service flow from God and we must be served by Him before we can fully serve others. The greatest commandment is to love God with our heart, soul and mind. Our focus is on Him, our eyes fixed on Jesus. When we see the ways He serves and feeds us, we are ready, equipped and enabled to more fully live out the second greatest commandment; to love our neighbors.

How can we learn to be still in God's presence and cease our work when given the opportunity to come into God's presence and receive His gifts? Start by securing your oxygen mask. Every time you fly on a commercial flight you hear the speech: "If oxygen levels are low, masks will drop from the overhead. Secure your own mask before assisting others." It may seem terribly selfish, but think through the reasoning behind it. You can't help anyone else if you are dead! You can assist many more people if you are able to breath yourself. The healthier you are, the better you are able to serve others. That's true spiritually as well. How often do you make time to sit quietly at the Lord's feet and be served? Prayer, works of service, and acts of love are very important, but they are spiritual exercise. When do you receive spiritual food? You need to eat if you want to run!

The Lord offers His gifts to you in Word and Sacrament. He offers you forgiveness, renewal, refreshment and guidance. Are you too busy to notice?

Be still, rest and wait.

Stop yourself and slow down. We all struggle with the temptation to skim the verses, rush through our Bible reading time and go on to the next thing we have to do. Find a peaceful place where you feel comfortable and free from distractions. Say a prayer that God will guide your time of quietness. Read the following passages three times each. The first time read the verses silently to yourself. The second time read them very slowly, wrapping your mind around the concepts, and the third time read them out loud. (yes that's right, out loud!). Then be quiet. Spend even ten minutes if possible, sitting quietly without talking, praying or singing. Let the verses sink in. Listen.

It sounds crazy, it seems like a waste of time. Try it. Allow yourself the quiet time to process what God is saying in His Word. We come to this time in God's Word so that we might rest as Mary did, and be prepared for service as Peter was.

Zephaniah 3:17

Job 6:24

Exodus 14:14

Psalms 37:7

Psalms 46:10

Mark 4:39

Psalms 23:2

Part Two - Heavenly Manna, Our Daily Bread

Heavenly Manna

We see repeated examples in the Bible of God's provision for His people. Over and over again He provides consistent and complete care to meet the needs of His children.

Find a peaceful place where you feel comfortable and free from distractions. Say a prayer that God will guide your time of quiet. Read Exodus 16:11-18, 35. Then be quiet. Spend several minutes, even five or more if possible, sitting quietly without talking, praying or singing. Let the verses sink in. What could you learn from these passages?

Read Exodus 16:11-18, 35

The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a land that was settled. They ate manna every day until they reached the border of Canaan.

The Israelites didn't have to hunt, farm or trade for their food. For 40 years they only had to walk out of their tent and gather up what God had provided for them. They were told to take only as much as they needed for the day and wait for the Lord to provide what they would need for tomorrow. Every morning God's mercy was new for them in a very tangible, edible way! They could literally taste and see that the Lord is good.

The food that the Lord provides is better than any earthly food. When Jesus turned water into wine, the master of the banquet couldn't believe how good the wine was! "You have saved the best until now." (John 2:10) The same proves true for the spiritual food our Lord offers. There are all kinds of ways we should be refreshing ourselves for ministry, but the best, tastiest food we could find comes from our Lord. His Word and Sacraments are what our souls desperately need to survive and thrive. God's Word offers us the opportunity to rest in His promises, be recharged with His love, and be renewed by His guidance. In the Lord's Supper we are absolutely assured of eternal life and complete forgiveness. It's so real...we can taste it.

God provides His people with food...but they have to eat it! Sometimes we are fed baby's milk that is brought right to our hungry mouths in a bottle...other times it is up to us to cut and chew the food. Feeding on God's Word sometimes requires some chewing! God's Word is beautifully complex and gloriously rich. Sometimes we can become overwhelmed with its depth. By reading passages in context and allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture we can better digest its meaning. If we cut our food with utensils such as knives and forks, it makes chewing a lot more productive. In the same way we can use tools to help us read Scripture as a whole. If we use commentaries, dust off our doctrine books, and work with Bible dictionaries we can use them to aid our study. It isn't always easy to dive into a Bible study and make use of tools that aid our understanding, but God doesn't leave us alone in the task. The Holy Spirit is sent to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify us. As He enlightens our hearts and minds to understand His Word, new doors of learning are opened. He provides the food and even helps us eat it. We can truly rest in Him!

Let's Pray: Heavenly Father, please send your Holy Spirit to guide my time of spiritual renewal in your Word. Please open my heart to understand your Word. Enable me to be diligent in my study and be open to your conviction during my meditations. Show me how to be still and listen to your voice in your Holy Word. If it be your will, enlighten me and feed me! In Jesus Name, Amen

Daily Bread

Our Heavenly Father provided manna in the wilderness to feed His people and provides us with daily bread as well. More than physical bread, He has given us spiritual bread in Scripture. If that weren't enough, He has also sent the Holy Spirit to help us chew and digest His Word. We see physical examples of this amazing provision in His Son's earthly ministry. Jesus provided so much for the hungry people that He encountered. He talked with them, taught them, and ate with them. He forgave their sins, cast out demons, healed their sicknesses, and sometimes He even brought them lunch. In John 6 we read about five thousand plus hungry people who went away full. Jesus fed all of them. The next passage occurs after that huge feeding. Don't rush this lengthy reading. Take a few calming deep breaths before you slowly chew on these verses. Wrap your mind around them and listen.

Read John 6:25-59

Our God is so good. He knows what we need. So often we see Him come to us in very real, "hands on" ways. He knows we are concrete, tactile, physical beings. He helps us understand abstract, spiritual ideas by connecting them to things we can see, touch, and taste. In the Old Testament He led His people by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. He gave them physical proof of His provision for them in the form of daily manna. In the New Testament we see examples of His love in ways so real, physical and tangible that we see His love become tactile. He fed crowds with bread. He filled nets with fish. He calmed storms. He washed feet. That same love comes to serve you today. In Holy Communion we are given spiritual nourishment that we can touch, smell and taste. Not only does He feed us bread, He is the bread. He doesn't just change water into wine, His blood is the wine. He serves us... Himself. He gives Himself to us in every possible way...even in impossible ways. He is our nourishment. Our God loves us, serves us, and gives Himself to us for our sustenance. We can be still and rest in Him.

Take a few minutes of solitary quiet to process the enormity of God's provision for you. Sit alone and just let it wash over your thoughts. Be still. You are surrounded by the evidence of God's love for you! Rest and listen. Sit quietly at Jesus' feet and be served!