**Table Manners Week 3: Listen Well**

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Over the last week, most of us have spent a lot more time around a table with family than we anticipated. Through this sermon series, Table Manners, we have been looking at the interactions that Jesus shared around the table in Luke’s Gospel.

As you join in through our Online Campus, maybe you could post some of the things God has said to you or has been teaching your family through your extra time at home together.

We have several online campus pastors in the chat, so please connect with us during the service.

We are a family of families, and your family stories might encourage others or give them great new ideas of how this time at the table can be formative and enriching as we seek to transform our world, one family at a time.

Last week we learned about the interactions Jesus had surrounding a meal in an open field with 15,000 of his closest friends.

This week’s table is a much more intimate setting. Jesus is at the table with a small family and dinner is being prepared.

If Jesus popped by for dinner at your house, how would you respond?

Frantically clean before you open the door? Act calm and flatter him with compliments on the outside but secretly panic on the inside? Smile and throw open your arms along with your front door and sit down for a chat?

What would you do? What would your family do?

Open your Bible with me to Luke’s Gospel.

If you are new to the Bible, then open it up about a ¼ of the way from the back. There are four Gospel accounts that tell the story of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are followed by the book of Acts that explains what the church did for the next few decades after Jesus’ resurrection.

Each book is divided into chapters and verses. The big bold numbers are chapters and the small numbers are verses.

We are going to start reading at Luke, chapter 10, verse 38.

**SLIDE 1** “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.” – Luke 10:38 NIV

I know that introduction to the story seems pretty mundane, but there is actually a lot of important information chocked into those few words.

We are told that Jesus and his disciples were on their way. On their way to where?

Just a chapter earlier in Luke 9, we read that Jesus spent some time doing miracles, healing the sick, preaching the Gospel, and teaching about the Kingdom of God. Then he sent out his disciples to go and do the same.

They came back all ramped up, ready to throw a parade for themselves because of all the miraculous stuff that happened on their journey.

Then Jesus spent a little time humbling them and refocusing them on God not their own success.

Then Jesus expands the team and sends out 72 missionaries to all the towns he wants to preach at to prepare the way.

But that’s when the Gospel says something radically changes. Jesus has trained the team. He has preached the Gospel. He has backed it up with powerful miracles. Now it is time to move on to phase two in God’s great plan of redemption. Jesus turns his face toward the end goal.

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” – Luke 9:51 NIV

**SLIDE 2** Everything Jesus does in Luke’s Gospel from this point on is purposely preparing the people around him for the cross and his departure to Heaven.

So Jesus is purposely on his way to Jerusalem, with his final mission in mind. That means his stopping here at Martha’s house must have been of great importance to him. Otherwise, he would have kept on going.

There are actually only a few verses in the next 9 chapters that deal with a specific personal interaction like this. Almost everything before Jesus reaches Jerusalem is about him performing a miracle or teaching about the Kingdom of God publicly.

Which makes this story special.

Before we go on to read the rest of the story, let me point out one more thing in this introduction. We are going to learn in the Bible that a family of at least 3 adult siblings live in this home: Lazarus who is mentioned in other passages, Mary, and Martha. But the Bible says, “Martha opened her home.”

There is something going on with Martha. She is clearly comfortable with being in charge and calling the shots. It may be the family home, and by culture Lazarus should be its head, but it is Martha that runs it.

Let’s pick up in verse 39 and read some more of the story…

“She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”

– Luke 10:39 NIV

Have you ever seen a picture of The Last Supper, painted by Leonardo Da Vinci?

**SLIDE 3** This classic work of art pictures all the disciples seated around a table and 500 years after its painting, it still inspires people to imagine that final meal.

Unfortunately, the seating arrangement is more reflective of the artists time than it is of Jesus’ setting.

*In biblical times, people seldom ever sat around a table on a bench or chair.* They reclined on small couches, similar to what we might call a chase today. They traditionally reclined on their left elbow, allowing them to eat and pass food with their right hand. They reclined with their heads toward the table and their feet angled away, making room for others next to them at the table.

This position also made it easy to talk to people who instead of being seated at the table, were sitting at your feet.

Jesus is reclining at the table, enjoying the evening in the family home of Martha and Mary. He is doing what we see him do most frequently in Luke’s Gospel, he is teaching.

Mary is not in the place everyone hearing the story would have assumed.

*In those days women didn’t sit at the feet of a teacher.* Women were not expected to be well educated and were not welcomed to learn from a man in that setting. But Mary seldom does what anyone would expect.

And neither, does Jesus.

Jesus keep sharing the Word of the Lord at the table, and Mary is invited to soak up the truth of God’s Word.

This is emphasized by the intentional over use of the title, Lord, in this passage. It begins saying Jesus was on his way, but Mary sat at the Lord’s feet, and Martha will exclaim, “Lord, don’t you care…” and “the Lord” will answer Martha.

By shifting to his formal title, Luke points out that the Lord himself is sharing his eternal Word, and Mary is *listening*.

How many times this week have you caught yourself fixing a meal, eating a meal, cleaning up after a meal, and doing dishes, with no help from someone else in the house?

There are days when that cycle of fixing food, cleaning up, doing dishes and prepping the next meal can consume your whole day.

It’s nice to have a little help.

It can be really frustrating when people who are perfectly capable of helping find an excuse as to why they shouldn’t have to help.

Sadly, the more over worked we are, the easier it is to stop empathizing and become a little jaded about not expecting anyone to help.

Que up Martha.

“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!” – Luke 10:40

Luke doesn’t leave us guessing about the point of most stories. He is pretty clear to spell out the problems for us. The problem laid out here is that Martha is busy and distracted.

She is so worn out by her business and distracted by her frustration that she even starts to take it out on the Lord.

“Don’t you care!”

“Lord, don’t you care” … that I’m doing everything I can but it doesn’t seem like enough?

“Lord, don’t you care” … that I am the only one who seems to be taking the work seriously?

“Lord, don’t you care” … that I want this to be right and to go well?

“Lord, don’t you care” … that I am exhausted and at my whits’ end?

It is interesting though, that the “preparations” Martha was distracted by, are translated from the exact same Greek word used in the rest of the new testament for *ministry*.

**SLIDE 4** Martha saw her preparations for dinner as ministry, literally her way of serving Jesus and investing in God’s coming Kingdom.

Martha was doing the very best thing she knew how to do to serve the Lord in her setting.

Can I ask an honest question? Have you ever been so wrapped up in doing the right thing that you let your attitude go to the wrong place?

Have you ever let your desire for excellence suck the joy out of your service?

Sometimes when doing what we know to be a right action, we can get really self-righteous and indignant that other people aren’t joining us in doing what we think are the right things.

What usually follows is a whole lot of ugly.

“Lord, don’t you care!” “My sister abandoned me.” “Tell her to help me!”

Wrapped up in “ministry,”

Martha doubts God’s concern for her,

blames her sister for her problems,

and tells God how he should be handling her situation.

Like I said, a whole lot of ugly.

But as ugly as it is, it is also familiar. Sin always paints the same picture.

* We try to do what we think is right.
* We forget or neglect to consult God on what He says is right.
* When it doesn’t go well we doubt God, blame others, and try to tell God how to do his job.

Then we justify the whole thing by saying were trying to do the right thing, trying to serve, trying help.

It’s easy to see the drift from the outside, but we are pretty good at overlooking it in ourselves.

When we find ourselves spiraling out of control, God comes to us.

**SLIDE 5** “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things…” – Luke 10:41 NIV

Jesus begins his response in an unusual way; he doesn’t normally repeat someone’s name.

This repetition serves dual purposes: He draws attention to his great concern for her, and does so in the familiar fashion of a Jewish lament.

A few chapters later, Jesus will cry a similar lament when he reaches his intended destination…

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” - Luke 13:34 NIV

Jesus laments the distance that Martha’s attitude has caused between who Jesus has called her to be and who she is in actuality.

She is marked by distraction and worry, distress and blame. This is not the life the Lord desires for Martha, and he *laments*.

He doesn’t lament her desire to serve. He doesn’t lament her ministry. The Lord made Martha and gave her gifts and desires that drive her to be helpful and hard working.

He laments her attitude.

**SLIDE 6** God will always lament a self-righteous attitude.

God will always lament when someone gets so wrapped up in trying to do good things, even necessary things, that they forget He is the One they are serving.

It breaks God’s heart.

* Maybe even in all if this Corona Virus response you have been working hard to keep your family safe, and doubted God’s care for you.
* Maybe you have been trying to keep your business afloat and are blaming everyone else’s actions as the cause of your situation.
* Maybe you have been trying tell God how he should be working.

Maybe like Martha, you have forgotten it is God who is in charge.

And it breaks God’s heart.

He is singing a lament over you.

*My child, my child, you are worried and upset about many things.*

One of the things I admire so much about God’s care for us is that no matter how bad things may seem, in just a few words God can point us back to where we need to be.

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.” – Luke 10:42

Just that quickly, the Lord brings Martha back home.

There was nothing wrong with serving. There was nothing wrong with wanting help.

But she can’t assume that her act of service or her ministry is more important than anyone else’s. She can’t assume that her way is the only way.

Jesus is the way, and each of us are called to follow him. Jesus comes first.

Some will worship him through serving with excellence.

Some will worship him through quietly listening and being in awe of him.

Some will worship with ecstatic praise.

But no matter the method,

**SLIDE 7** Jesus says only one thing is needed. What is it? Putting God first.

Mary listened at the feet of Jesus as he reclined at the table. Her attention wasn’t on herself, or even on the work that could be done.

Her attention was fully on Jesus.

Where is your attention today? Is it on the to-do list, the ministry you serve in, the Corona Virus, the latest news update or presidential announcement?

All of those things are worth paying attention to, but they don’t deserve first place in your life.

Only the Lord deserves that.

Ok, here is confession time. For years I have read this passage and wondered if it could really be that simple.

Could this passage really just be a reminder to keep first things first? It seems too simple for how important this story is in the flow of Luke’s Gospel.

Isn’t it more complicated than this?

Then I started to wonder if that was just the preacher in me trying to make simple things complicated.

We try hard not to, but sometimes preachers can do that.

But as I kept reading and rereading this passage, I couldn’t get past the feeling that God was telling me I was missing something.

Jesus is resolutely heading to Jerusalem. Every interaction is on purpose.

So why did Luke put this story here?

I don’t just mean in his Gospel, but right here, following Jesus’ decision to go to the cross, before a long series of preaching, teaching, and healing that will take him all the way to Jerusalem?

That question kept burning in my heart. Why here?

So I backed up a few paragraphs and re-read yet again.

We see an expert in the Old Testament Jewish Law standing up publicly to try and test Jesus. Which automatically tells us a few things about this guy.

He publicly challenged Jesus so he was trying to gain honor by shaming Jesus in his knowledge about the Law of God. In retrospect, he challenged God to a contest about who knew more about God’s law – that was pretty stupid. But he didn’t know so we’ll give him some grace.

We also know he saw himself as a superior teacher because he tried to give Jesus a test assuming Jesus wouldn’t pass. The test was this…

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” – Luke 10:25 NIV

It was set up to be a trick question, because no matter how Jesus answered, the teacher could have argued with him about it.

Jesus nobly gives the man the chance to answer first, and gain honor in the eyes of the crowd – which allowed the teacher to look pretty good for about 5 seconds. He answers the challenge well.

“’Love the Lord your God will all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” – Luke 10:27 NIV

Then Jesus praises his response and seems content to move on. He didn’t need to prove himself.

But the teacher knows Jesus let him off easy. He wanted to shame Jesus so he pushes the test harder.

“And who is my neighbor?” – Luke 10:28 NIV

Jesus responds by telling the story we find right before the interaction around Martha’s table.

It is the parable of “The Hurt Man.”

I call it that instead of the parable of “The Good Samaritan” because nobody listening to Jesus back then would have ever believed a Samaritan could be good.

Jesus tells the now familiar tale of how two Jewish religious leaders saw a hurt Jewish man in the ditch on the side of the road, and refused to stop and help him. Then a Samaritan, those people that the Jews hated, saw the same man. He stopped and helped him, and offered to pay for his ongoing care.

Then Jesus asked who was a neighbor to the man in the ditch? The poor teacher was caught so flatfooted that he can’t bring himself to actually say a Samaritan was better than a Jew, even in a fictitious story.

He simply says, “The one who had mercy on him.” – Luke 10:37 NIV

Jesus told the teacher he got it right. How was a faithful Jew to inherit eternal life? Love God and love your neighbor – not just with words but with action.

As I studied this passage, the connection hit me hard.

Jesus told this parable to explain what it looked like to love our neighbor as our self.

Then he went to Martha’s house and invited Mary to sit at his feet and soak up his teaching to show us what it looks like to Love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Martha was busy and distracted.

**SLIDE 8** She loved God with her strength as she worked hard in ministry to serve him. But she forgot to love God with her heart, mind, and soul.

Martha was blaming and bossing.

Mary was listening.

Not striving, not blaming, not bossing, not talking. *Just listening*. Do you see how peaceful that is compared to the worry and dismay Martha was carrying?

Maybe that is finding simple on the other side of complicated.

**Closing**

When was the last time you set aside the to do list, allowed your worship to cut through the busyness and distractions that drag you in different directions, stopped trying to obtain so much, and just *listened* in God’s presence?

**SLIDE 9** When is the last time you told the world to *stop* so you could soak up time with Jesus?

When is the last time you allowed the Word of God to breathe *life* into your soul?

Right now, many of you have had your world turned upside down and your normal routines ripped apart. What better time to find a new normal?

What better time to focus on the one and only thing that Jesus himself said was necessary?

Instead of giving Jesus a reason to lament over you, why not accept his invitation to rest in his presence and *listen* *well* as you soak up his Word?

**Let’s Pray**

**Response**

Table Talk with your family.

Family Bible reading and prayer time.

Engage resources sent out by children’s ministry, student ministry, and small groups to help your family spend time with Jesus and listen.