

*Dependence Devotional
Delighting in the Presence of God*

I have this wonderful image of my friend Sally, all curled up in her afghan, doing her devotionals every morning, studying, listening, lifting up others in prayer. And then there's me, often barely making time to pray, and when I do, sometimes not remembering much to say...

I long for more than that. Not only that, but God delights in meeting us, in filling us, in blessing us with Himself. In this time of worship, I invite you into God's presence.

As I participate in ministry, I am convicted that I have nothing to offer if I am not filled myself. God has been convicting me that I need to connect with Him, and listen to Him, before making my plans or trying to do the work He sets before me. I confess that sometimes I get to the point where I am rushing around so much I feel I have no time to pray! I forget to listen as I focus on the tasks before me.

In one of those times, God led me to Ephesians 4:1 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* The calling I have received is, ultimately, to glorify God, and I do that by being in fellowship with God.

Although it is easier for me to "do" than to "be", I am convicted to sit and listen to God, to listen for God, to receive and be filled. That itself is more valuable than anything I will ever do, and everything that I actually do will be the better for it.

It is hard for me to start with silence; I don't want to start with silence, but when I overcome that resistance, I am ready to receive. As I practice silence, it becomes more comfortable; I am able to wait without filling up the space with my own thoughts.

So pray this prayer with me, and then sit quietly, in silence, for a few minutes before you move on to the next section.

Thank you, God, for your steadfast love and mercy. Please restore us to yourself, that we may be obedient, abide in you, and glorify you. Please quiet us now and prepare us to receive from you.

We are going to let God speak to us this morning through two passages. The first one is Luke 15:15-16, after Jesus healed a leper, and told him not to tell anyone except the priest.

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

The second is passage is Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

These are such familiar passages; it is easy for us to gloss over them, thinking we know what they're about. But let's look at them with new eyes and see what God may have for us in them.

Let's look at the first passage again.

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

Close your eyes and imagine you are Jesus. Now, imagine the crowds of people pressing around you. You see the faces right in front of you, you feel the elbows jostling your side, the hands grasping for your shoulders from behind. All crying out with needs to be met. Beyond those touching you are more, pressing in, trying to get closer. And the ring of people demanding your attention, your touch, is not just three, or four, or five people deep. The crowds fill the way, more are streaming in, even the surrounding hills are covered with newcomers, all wanting your attention. As soon as one departs healed, another steps in to take his place.

Now, as yourself, who are those faces pressing against your own? Your children? Your husband? Your parents? Demands at work? What ministry is shaking your shoulder for attention? You have God-given responsibilities to many of these. The people streaming over the hill are that long list of things to do that never ends, just changes. Personalize those faces around you. Consider the voices that demand your attention. You may want to jot them down.

Now, return to your picture of Jesus and his clamoring crowd. The next verse tells us *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.* He did heal many, but did he say, "I've got to heal them all before I leave"? No. Or "Let me just take care of one more first!" Maybe sometimes. And yet, he did manage to extricate himself, to withdraw to the lonely places. Why? To pray. In John 8:28, Jesus tells us "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." In this we see his complete dependence on his Father.

Now imagine yourself, gently but firmly slipping away from your own clamoring crowd. You arrive at a lonely place. There is so much to pray for, so many needs. And you can

pray for those, but first, ask God to call your heart to Him. Thank Him that you have felt his touch... that you are blessed to know Him... praise Him.

Thank you, Jesus for how you lived. You are the perfect example of absolute dependence on God. Help us to depend on you and be in that kind of relationship with God.

Now we move to the second passage.

(Martha) had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Imagine you are Mary. You know there is work to be done, but right now, there is something more important. Jesus is with you, and you want nothing more than to sit at his feet. You have no agenda; your heart is just open to hear whatever he has to say to you. You thirst for his every word; his voice fills and feeds your soul.

*You're not here so you can cross "listen to Jesus" off your list.

*You're not here because he might give you some good ideas on how to live your life better, or help you serve your sister, even though that may realistically happen.

*Instead, you are here because you love him. You know he loves you. And his company brings you joy.

*In a little while, you might ask him that question you've been wondering about, but for now, you just listen.

What is Jesus saying to you?

(Listen in silence for several minutes. Then you might want to write down what you've heard.)

Jesus does care about the affairs in your life. You can bring those before him, too. Go ahead and pray about the concerns of your heart.

Listen to Jesus saying these words to you:

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

How do you see God inviting you into his presence? How does this passage encourage you to respond?

Pray in response.

Remember, God loves you, and He loves it when you spend time with him. But spending time with God is not something you have to do, it is something you get to do! My prayer for you is that you will look forward to moments with God, anticipating the joy of experiencing His presence as you draw nearer to Him.

Let's spend some time now praising God.