

Martha's Dilemma



What relationships can tell us about our faith.



Let me tell you of Martha's dilemma. Martha had two suitors and was torn in her heart as to whom she should choose. "The time has come," she thought, "I have to decide, or I'll never truly be close to either." Reluctantly she had set a deadline for herself and wrote in her journal, *Judgment Day the first of May*. She had been dreading this day for weeks. She knew that the very act of choosing would forever alter her life. One path, one door, would be forever closed, and she wanted no regrets.

"I've got to get away." She muttered staring at the calendar. The first of May was only two brief days away. Judgment Day was almost here. So with her overnight bag in hand she walked out of her small apartment to the parking lot out front. After opening the door to her pick-up truck she settled in and checked her purse for the keys to her parents' cabin. She always kept the keys on a penlight key-chain, tucked safely away in a side pocket of her yellow purse. The purse was enormous, and its size was a source of constant teasing by her friends. Yet, it was her purse of choice, and almost the only one she carried. It was just slightly smaller than a backpack, but still it suited her. She believed in being prepared, and the purse and the flashlight had on more than one occasion come in extremely handy. In it she stored everything from food, to sewing supplies, from pepper-spray, to super glue, and she still had room for make-up! The keys of course were there and she was as ready as she would ever be.

The drive was not overly long so she still had a lot of daylight when she let herself into the cabin. She was resolute now and immediately pulled out the pen and notebook she always had with her, and sat down to write. She decided to carefully compare these two men using a side-by-side list. Then she could choose between them. This is what she wrote:

PHILLIP	MARK
Calls often to see how I'm doing. Called this morning as a matter of fact.	Rarely calls, then only when he needs something. He wants to borrow the pick-up Sunday
We spend a lot of time together.	I haven't even heard from him for about two months except when he called about my truck.
He has met all of my family, and doesn't even hold that against me.	Avoids mom and dad like the plague, though I have told him how important my family is to me.
Passed up on an opportunity to fly to the Bahamas for a week to sit in the hospital with me after dad's heart attack.	Once canceled our date (it was my birthday) to go bowling with his buddies.
Knows my favorite color, flower and movie.	Keeps calling me Sally.
Treats me like a lady.	Owes me money.
Says I'm smart.	Has a t-shirt that says, "I'm with Stupid."

"OK" she thinks, " I have more than enough info to make a good decision." But her deliberations lasted only a few seconds before she began to laugh. It wasn't a chuckle either, it was a roll-on-the- floor, can't-hardly-breathe, burst of pure merriment. Martha, after regaining some composure, pulls her backpack purse close.

Now, she reasons, is as good a time as any to make a few cell phone calls. She had finally decided. Who do you think she chose?

Seems to me Mark's about to receive a phone call from a giggling Martha. She will tell him she's in a serious relationship with a guy named Phillip, and doesn't want to see him again. He might shrug and wonder why he always thought her name was Sally, before he goes back to the football game on the TV. I wonder why Martha thought she had any kind of relationship with Mark in the first place.

Most of us easily realize what would pass as a close bond between two people. We know what we would want. We would insist on their time, and demand that they care about our feelings. We would want them to honor what we deem of worth, and listen to us when we want to share our heart. Anything less than this level of commitment would be called a casual friendship at best. None of us want anything casual or indifferent from family, or friends. Our expectations are even higher when we choose a husband or wife. We rightly expect devotion from those who profess to love us. Where there is no devotion, we then have a right to call in question the validity of confessed love.

We know what the yardstick of loving is, and we measure instinctively every relationship we see. Well, maybe not every relationship. Seems we forget sometimes to test our bond with our faith. We neglect to measure our Christianity. Our professed love of Christ should be evaluated the same way we appraise every association we have. If we don't give Him our time, if we don't honor His values, and have no fidelity and devotion, then the Christianity we think we have is unreal. Love has tell-tell signs and Christianity too has its proofs. If we are Christian (a follower of Christ), we by definition will value the things of Christ. So now I ask you, Is your Christianity real or imagined?

Help! I just found out I don't know Jesus at all!

I have one question then, “Do you want to know Him?” Think carefully before you answer. Would it surprise you to learn that Jesus himself often discouraged people from following Him. What He promised us was peace, purpose, joy, and life eternal. But He made sure that people knew that to be a follower, a disciple, would be a costly choice.

Luke 14 25-33

25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. KJV

We are cautioned not to begin our Christian walk if we aren't willing to pay His price. His basic requirement is to choose to honor Him above any other responsibility or relationship. Your faith then becomes the center of your universe and all the other things in life revolve around it. It's a change for the better, but it's not without some pain. It may be scary contemplating the commitment He requires, but believe me it is worth it. What you have to gain is your hearts most fervent desire; and with your allegiance you acquire the power and joy of sharing life with others. This giving all, to receive all reminds me of a story:

A certain man decided what he wanted lay beyond a vast desert. So he planned his crossing carefully seeking to prepare for every contingency, every possibility. When he was satisfied that he was ready; he began his journey with confidence. Unfortunately things didn't go as he calculated. His horse died, and the first three way-stations marked on his map had long been abandoned. Their deep wells were dried up and the pumps were useless. Water was becoming a problem. All his hopes now rested on the well and hand pump that should be at the next station. His thirst, he knew would be critical at that point, if there is no water he will die. For three days more he walked, and two of those days were without water. The outpost that he finally stumbled into was also abandoned. Parched and desperate he approached the pump house. Much to his relief there was a small jug of water setting near the pump handle, and he rushed to pick it up. Before he could drink though he spied a note tied to the jug marked "*Urgent! Read before drinking.*" Afraid now that the water might be bad he turned over the note to read what was written there. It said, "*Trust me, take all of this water and use it to prime the pump. If you do, you'll get all the water you need now, and for the rest of your journey. If you use any of the water in the jug for your thirst, it won't be enough to satisfy; the pump will not work and you're doomed to die. There are no other way-stations between here and the other side of the desert.*"

He could tell the note was written a long time ago, and so he had doubts. What if it doesn't work? Maybe there are other stations now, and maybe this is enough water to get me where I want to go. For what felt like an eternity he wrestled with what to do. Would he, could he, trust what was written? At length he made his decision. Nervously and carefully he poured every last drop of water into the pump; then he grasped the handle and worked it frantically. After a few tense moments a thin thread like stream began to flow from the spout! Still he pumped, and the trickle became a gushing stream of cool, life-giving water. Finally he began to drink. Again and again he plunged his head beneath the flow pausing only when his need for air drove him to.

Eventually, his thirst satisfied, he filled all of his empty water bottles. After carefully closing them, he filled the old jug that he had found when he first entered and placed it near the ancient pump. He then turned to go but stopped short and turned around. He picked up the note, pulled a pen

from his pocket and added his own post-script.

P.S.-- This note is true, you won't be disappointed!

Christianity has been passed from generation to generation by people who have given what they had, to obtain what they've longed for. The Bible, like the old note makes a great promise and warns of the consequence of unbelief. To unlock its promises will take faith. The kind of faith that will give its all- for the hope of what is yet unseen. But you have more than just the scriptures to rely on. You have the testimony of everyone before you that gave everything, only to receive more than they ever dreamed.

P.S. You won't be disappointed, if you give all!

If you have decided to give all, or are still undecided let me encourage you to go to church. These next chapters will give you good reasons I think.

Why Christians value the Church

Ever wonder why some folk drag themselves regularly out of bed on a Sunday morning. Why they make the time on a perfectly good sleep-in-go-on-a-picnic-day, to go sit in the church of their choice? For many their motive is love, love of God. I know some folks have other reasons, but that's their loss, they won't, and can't, get the full benefits of the time they spend with their local congregation. It's sad really. But for those who go to church for the right reasons, church is a big deal.

Why do dedicated Christians always stress church attendance? Here are a few reasons why.

Quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Christ founded the Church at great cost.

The most He could give, that any could give, was His life, and that was the price He paid *just* to establish the church. The church was bought and paid for with His blood

Ephesians 5:25 **Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it;**

Anyone who has seen Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" should walk away with at least an idea of what this verse means. He was safe and happy with God the Father but accepted a rendezvous with pain, humiliation, and death to redeem a people unto His self. He gave His self freely to save us from death and sin. We call this assembly of the redeemed, the church. It is made up of people He has saved by His sacrifice, and is the culmination of His efforts. The very existence of the church is proof of His love. So tell me how can we say we value Him, and not hold highly what He paid for so dearly. To honor the church is to honor the memory of His sacrifice.

The Church is where Christ manifests Himself.

To be with God's people is equal to being in the presence of Jesus.

Matthew 18:20 **For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.**

I would define a church as the place where Jesus is. It is a place where He is *felt* and not just talked about, experienced and not just remembered. It is a chance to be together to touch His hands so to speak, to know His thoughts. How could we lightly put aside this opportunity of fellowship with our Savior? A good church literally allows us to be with Him.

The Church performs the work of Christ in our life.

The body of believers is equipped to help when we have need, heal our hurts, provide guidance, and give us divine purpose in our lives. It is empowered and authorized to do all the works Jesus did. It would be arrogance on our part to think we have no need of the gifts the church could offer. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and varied (see 1 Corinthians 12), and are given for the uplifting of the church congregation.

He purposely designed the church to be mutually dependent on one another. Like the human body, each limb and organ provides for the good of the whole, each person in the church is ordained to contribute to the well-being of all ([1Corinthians 12:12-27](#)). When we neglect the house of God, we lose access too much needed resources. The church is the place to turn for strength in the face of life's adversities.

Learning where our strengths lie is a great asset.

A boy was feeling strong and ambitious and decided to test his budding strength. Behind his house was a field littered with stones of various sizes and weights, a good place, he reasoned, to see what he could do. His dad also happened to be putting in a fence around the same field and would make a suitable witness, the boy thought, to his physical feats of prowess. So off he went to test himself, and hopefully make his father proud. He made sure his father was watching by noisily approaching the first small stone he encountered on the path from his house. He made a great show of picking up the stone (a rather small stone) and heaving it contemptuously aside and continued down the well worn path stomping as he went. The next stone he came to was a little larger, and the next one larger still. But he repeated the same ritual again, and again, grunting with pleasure at each success. He could see his

father's face clearly now, smiling brightly in the morning sun and was emboldened to try the largest stone yet. As he approached, he noticed the stone was much larger than he at first realized. He was beginning to doubt his choice; but dad had seen him looking at the small boulder so the boys pride compelled him to try this final exploit. With his father watching, he bent down and grasped the rock the best he could, and lifted with all of his might, but nothing moved. Breathing heavily he stepped back a moment and felt his face flush with embarrassment; he must not fail now, he thought, not with dad looking. So with renewed determination he tried again, only to fail miserably. Defeated he slowly rose, and stared teary-eyed at the ground. He stood still for what felt like a long time when he heard his father approaching. "Son", he heard his father say, as he rested a calloused hand on his sagging shoulders. "Did you use all of your strength?" "Yes I did." The boy said, in a hurt scarcely audible whisper. "No you didn't." The father said quietly. "You haven't asked for my help." "My strength is yours if you ask." Together, father and son moved the stone.

When you become wise enough to ask God for help, you will find that the church is often the vessel through which He works. They administer His strength, and together you are stronger than you imagined.

We do it for Him

So I wonder are any of the arguments we commonly use to excuse ourselves from the assembling of the believers valid? I have heard many of these arguments in my day; maybe you've heard them too. I don't have time, is a common excuse, others include-- I can be

a good Christian without going to church-----all they want is my money----- I live as good as they do-----the church is full of hypocrites---church is so boring!----I can't find a church where I'm comfortable----- They're so unfriendly-----They swarm over me like a swarm of bees---- the list goes on and on doesn't it. But excuses are simply what we give to justify what we want. Enough of these rationalizations! If you really love someone, you are unlikely to let his or her family chase you off. You may not like them much but learn to endure them. There are, sadly to say, lots of hypocrites, but there are also plenty of churches where people are sincere, and try hard to live a life pleasing to God. They may not be perfect but then again neither are you! Come on! I know it's hard to find a place sometimes, but keep tryin'! --Do it for Him.

Don't settle for just any church, but find one where the leadership is committed to the principles of the gospel. God's people honor God's word and take it seriously. They are committed to living by it, --all of it. Holy people live holy lives, and you can tell the difference. The pure in heart see God and are transformed forever by the light of His presence.

Hope to see you in church.

Article by

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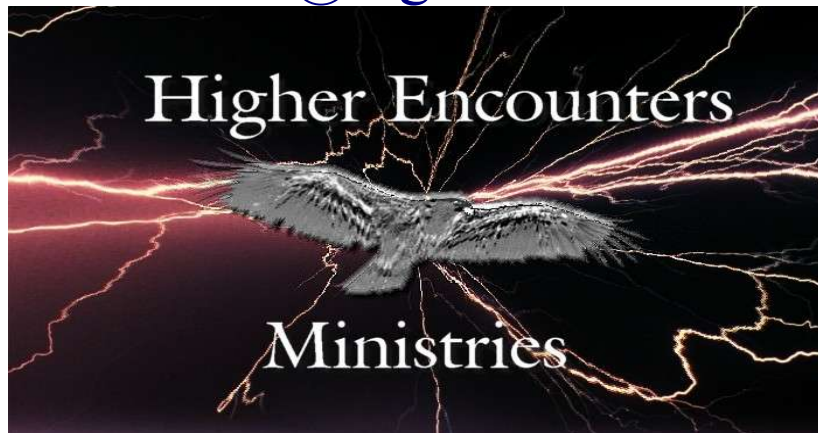
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