

antidote to WORRY

by Florence MacKenzie

We all form impressions of people around us and, in doing so, we often assume that someone who possesses a particular personality trait is likely to have other characteristics that correspond with this.

Social psychologists call this implicit personality theory. For example, we might expect someone who is a worrier to be quiet, nervous, and introspective. In some cases, this may be so, but not always. Reading the biblical account of Martha of Bethany, with her practical, take-charge personality, we might be surprised to discover that, underneath it all, worry had gripped her heart (Luke 10:38-42).

Her words to Jesus don't immediately come across as those of a worried woman. They sound more like someone complaining about perceived injustice. But Jesus, as always, delves beneath the outward appearance and tells it as it is. "Martha, Martha... you are worried and upset about many things..." (vs.41). Could this be said of you?

Worry is not the same as legitimate concern. Concern can be productive if it is solution-focused and drives us to take corrective action on behalf of ourselves or someone else. But worry is concern that's gotten out of control. The word worry encompasses the idea of being pulled in different directions, like Martha, who is also described as being "distracted." Her mind was on other things – "all the preparations that had to be made" – which impaired her ability to effectively focus on what was really important.

There was no doubt about it, Martha was engaged in something good and admirable – she was serving her Lord. But perhaps her priorities were out of balance. For Martha, doing something *for* Him was secondary to spending time *with* Him. None of us can be expected to worship *instead* of work, but we do need to be reminded to worship *before* work. This inversion of priorities might have been Martha's problem because Jesus' response is to direct her attention to what her sister Mary was doing by sitting at His feet – worshipping. It's not a case of being either a Mary or a Martha – worshipping or working – but in which order we do them.

Worry can cause us to momentarily lose sight of the big picture. It distorts our view of life and sometimes of God Himself. Like Martha, it might lead us to question His love and concern for us: "Lord, don't you care...?" At times like this, we need to remind ourselves of how precious we are to the Lord. He has lovingly watched over every step of our lives to the present time and will continue doing so to the end. At other times, worry can drive

us to make demands of Him, as Martha did: "Tell her to help me!" Do you sometimes think other people are the source of your problems and you imagine you need to tell God what to do? If this sounds like you, try the following:

- Insert your name in place of Martha's (verse 41) and delight in the fact that He knows you and calls you by name.
- Acknowledge His diagnosis that "you are worried and upset about many things." When we refuse to admit we're worried, we can't take steps to deal appropriately with it.
- Appreciate that worry isn't necessary, but listening to Jesus' words is. This focuses our attention on the priority of worship.



Martha is often presented as a flustered hostess and, on this occasion, she probably was. However, later on, following the death of her brother, Lazarus, she shows herself to be an astute theologian. No longer distracted in service, she addresses Jesus and confidently proclaims that He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 11:27). What brought about this dramatic change? Likely, she had reflected on Jesus' words and appropriately prioritized her work and worship. No one could make such a profound statement of belief without having taken the time to listen to what Jesus had taught about Himself. Listening to God is as much a part of worship as is praise and adoration.

Some of us, partly because of our personalities, are prone to worry more than others. Yet, for Martha, this was no personality issue, but a faith issue. We read in the Bible that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Hearing the words of Christ through worship can go a long way in helping us if we are overcome by worry. Just ask Martha!