



TRISH
DONOHUE

YOU ARE
WELCOMED

DEVOTIONS FOR WHEN LIFE IS A LOT

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INTRODUCTION

IT HAD BEEN A PARTICULARLY HECTIC DAY, and I was looking at the trellis on my deck when it hit me: all those obedient little wooden Xs lined up in straight rows were covered by wisteria branches that grew all over the place, up and down and sideways with abandon. My epiphany was brief: life will always be a lot. The wild, meandering wisteria running over and around the trellis was a picture of the way my life often feels—beautiful but also difficult to manage. It's not organized in predictable rows, uniform and orderly. It's unpredictable, moving in many directions at a time. It can be both dazzling and also a tangled mess at times.

Life will always be an unruly combination of responsibilities, relationships, interruptions, dreams, and drama, no matter what stage we're in. Part of that is God's good design, and part of it is the long shadow of sin that stretches all the way back to Eden. The good news is that it is right in the middle of this tangle of joy and strain that God wants to meet us. And he gave us the gift of his Word so we could know him and navigate life's challenges rightly. But how do we apply the Word to the full and varied lives we lead? How does it map on to our pressures and fears and busyness?

That's what this book is about—applying God-breathed words to our God-ordained moments and finding Jesus in them both. In these ten weeks, we'll explore biblical stories of people like us who had the same questions as we do.



They were not model citizens who always got it right, but instead were real people who encountered an all-sufficient God in their weakness. Their imperfect but redemptive stories can encourage us in the middle of the strains, demands, and burdens we face. From these passages of Scripture, we can learn what it looks like to more fully depend on our heavenly Father and trust him more deeply, right in the middle of the chaos of our lives.

The chapter titles in this book are verbs—action words—which may seem exhausting at first glance. You might assume that getting help from God is hard work, but that’s not true. God has done the work for us so that all we need to do is freely come to him—something we are curiously bad at doing. Jesus knew we were bound by sin so he took care of it for us on the cross, paying the debt we couldn’t pay to fling the gates of heaven wide and present us to God in joy. The verbs that mark each chapter are invitations from our dear Father to live in the good of all that he is.

Would you like to put down your burdens and come to a God like that? The promise of the peace you can experience is as infinite as God’s love. He welcomes you to come to him at every point in your life—at every turn, at every time—and he promises to receive you.

The format is simple. Each week we’ll study a theme, passage, and character that together point us to God in a particular way. Reading the Scripture will be the key to understanding the material, so don’t skip that part. God’s words are better than my words. The questions offered at the end of each entry will help you to live what you learn and identify steps to real change. If you use this devotional five days a week, you’ll be done in ten weeks, but you can go at whatever pace you like. There isn’t a ribbon to run through at the end—just a Savior with open arms.



WEEK 1

Come

A Follower's Frustration





A full life is a blessing, but the sheer volume of tasks, lists, and responsibilities can make that blessing feel like a burden. Stress smothers joy, and we wonder how to prioritize the God we love in the lives we manage. This week's readings show us a woman like us and the Teacher who loved her.



DAY **1**

READ *PSALM 36:5-9*

Deep and Wide



IDENTIFY

Which of the following feels overwhelming in your life right now: tasks to accomplish, emotions to manage, choices to make, or relationships to tend? Or is it all of the above?

IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, flying should be easy: just board the giant jet that lifts you to the skies and soars like a falcon to your happy destination. But it's not. At times, it requires the multitasking skills of a circus performer.

Take, for example, going through security. Shoes off, laptop out, luggage lifted, children herded, conveyor belt stopped, suitcase searched, underwear out (why didn't I pack that on the bottom?), license dropped, people pushing, employee yelling—I get the sweats just thinking about it. And let's not even talk about boarding the plane with carry-on, coffee, purse, and—heaven help us—babies.

Whoever we are, sometimes life can feel like an international airport, as if we need an extra arm or extra brain to get anything done. Besides tasks to accomplish, we have emotions to manage, choices to make, and relationships to tend—often all at the same time. Even the starkest minimalist can't escape some of the complexities of life. If you're still unconvinced, here are a few more everyday zingers: Balancing the budget. Parking in the city. Working through conflicts. Navigating healthcare. Planning dinner menus for the month. I rest my case.

Some of the most frequent comments I hear from women are “I'm overwhelmed” or “I'm exhausted.” Spiritual conversations share a similar tone: “My relationship with God is hard to fit in.” “It's not super meaningful.” “I'm stretched thin.”

Thin. It's the word Bilbo the hobbit uses in *Lord of the Rings* to describe

himself after carrying the burden of the ring for too long. “Sort of stretched. Like butter scraped over too much bread.”¹ I’ve felt it. Have you?

Life can be a lot to handle, and some of that is our own doing. If we idolize productivity, saying yes to every extracurricular activity, fitness program, and business opportunity that comes our way, we may need to evaluate our priorities. But part of the fullness of life is also God’s doing. He has placed us in a world dripping with stunning detail. Featured in the garden of Eden was a tree of life, not a rock or cube of life. A tree is a complex work of art. It moves. It grows. Its systems are so advanced that we can barely understand them, involving sunlight and water and minerals and magic. Its seeds house resurrection power. Both above and below the ground, trees are complicated, like the lives our Creator has entrusted to us—lives that reach and grow and move and bear fruit. A life meaningfully engaged with pursuing Jesus and loving others is rarely simple or tidy, but it certainly can be beautiful.

How do we, as limited human beings, live complex lives of wide responsibility without letting our souls grow thin? Today’s reading in Psalm 36 tells us. We come to the deep one, whose love “extends to the heavens,” and “faithfulness to the clouds,” whose “righteousness is like the mountains of God,” and “judgments are like the great deep.” We come to the one who is everything we aren’t, not only taking refuge in him but happily feasting on all his abundance and drinking from his river of delights.² If that sounds like a party, it is. He welcomes us to come to him for refreshment, abundance, and delight.

A song I sang in the kindergarten class of my childhood church sums it up: “Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.”³ It’s the fountain of life from Psalm 36, wide enough to cover all our needs, responsibilities, inadequacies, and sins, and deep enough to never run dry. Best of all, the fountain is found “with you,” with God himself, and he beckons us to wade in.

The Christian life is not lived watching from the edges, being careful not to get wet. God invites us into a vibrant, interactive, personal relationship full of life and honesty and conversation. He knows who and how we are, loving us and calling us to love him in return. In fact, let’s take a step into the fountain right now by asking God to show us more of himself through this study and to change us from the inside out.

Life does at times feel overwhelming, but when we step, then wade, then run into God’s fountain of life, we find ourselves refreshed, splashing around in nothing less than the sheer delight of knowing him. What are we waiting for?

CONSIDER

Does your soul feel “thin”? If so, what are the reasons for that?

How can a full, complicated life be a beautiful one?

Do you believe God can refresh you in his fountain of life? Ask him to do that for you this week, and jot down a verse from today’s reading to review later.

BELIEVE

Psalm 36:7–9: How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

The View from a Window



IDENTIFY

Have you considered that productivity can be an idol when it promises peace and joy?
Have you found that it delivers the joy it promises?



WE LEARN ABOUT PEOPLE by the things in their houses. If you came to my house, you'd learn that I love throw blankets and hate clutter, and that I have kids who like to leave open bags of pretzels in the basement (don't ask me why).

We don't usually like people to observe what goes on within our walls without being invited, thus the invention of curtains and shades. We'd rather manage people's view of our lives, straightening cushions and refreshing our smiles. But sometimes God rips open the curtains before we're ready, and the spotlight shines straight on our least shareable moments. Readers have been peering through the window of Luke 10 into Martha and Mary's living room in Bethany for two thousand years, and it sheds some light on a struggle we all face.

As the curtain opens, we see Martha dashing around, dishrag in hand, glancing in irritation at her younger sister sitting cross-legged on the floor listening to Jesus with all the other guests. Martha feels anxious about all she has to do, and bitterness is brewing. She's stuck with all the work again, and Mary is sitting there with the visitors without a care in the world. As viewers, we feel the tension build, and our sympathies go out to this harried woman.

Jesus loved this little family with all their different personalities (John 11:5). We know that Martha, likewise, loved Jesus and welcomed him into her home, using her gifts of hospitality to bless the Teacher time and again. What a wonderful way to be remembered. We also know that after he came in, "Martha was distracted with much serving" (v. 40). She opened her door to Jesus but had a harder time enjoying his visit with all there was to do.

A friend and I lead an intro to Christianity course at a local drug rehab.⁴ This week one of our discussion questions asked, "If you had an opportunity to meet Jesus, what would you say to him?" We all leaned back on the plastic chairs, trying to formulate thoughts appropriate for such an

occasion. Answers were wistful. “I’d ask him why the road had to be this hard,” one said quietly. Another decided she’d hug him. I’m still stumped after having led these conversations many times. I really don’t know what I would say.

Poor Martha had this opportunity fall into her lap, and the first words the Bible records her saying to Jesus are a complaint. She’s a firecracker with a lit wick when she approaches the Lord, blasting him not with questions or requests, but with accusations and orders: “Lord do you not care . . . ? Tell her then to help me.” Martha carries wide responsibility and significant gifting, but she’s thin in this moment: thin-skinned and thin-souled. The Son of God may have been enjoying pita chips in her living room, but she had a load of work to do, and Mary wasn’t helping. Can a girl get a break? How do you commune with someone and serve him at the same time? How do we?

It’s a real question. Christian women have plenty to do. Besides activities of family, work, and social lives, we have churches, devotions, and serving opportunities. Sometimes the sheer number of good things on our plates can feel counterproductive. But we can do it! We’re strong, and if we eat right, organize well, drink coffee, and complain a little, we’ll get it all done. At least that’s what we tell ourselves.

Productivity has its place, but as we race through our agendas, do we enjoy God? Do we pursue worthy goals but not God himself? Do our friendships with others squeeze out friendship with Jesus? Is he sitting on our couch while we scurry around with checklists, complaining?

The familiarity of this story breeds oversimplification: Martha served too much, and that was bad so we should all be contemplative and sit at Jesus’s feet all day. Parts of that conclusion are right and other parts are wrong, but it’s a fast track to guilt and a real bummer if you are a doer type of person with a lot on your plate. Also, other parts of the Bible celebrate the kind of sacrificial service Martha gave, so what’s the problem?

The crux of this little peek inside a home in Bethany is not that we should sit in a prayer closet all day and let our laundry grow mold. It’s not that Type A people are shallow and inferior or even that Martha’s busyness was wrong. Instead we learn that although there is always unfinished business, Jesus is what we need.

Because we need his perspective, we can prioritize his Word in the morning. Because we need his joy, we can sing to him as we drive to a meeting. Because we need his peace, we can give him our anxieties in the middle of the night. Because we need his love, we can breathe a prayer before a difficult conversation. He welcomes us to come again and again because the fountain won’t run dry.

A thousand voices will tell us otherwise, but we need exactly what Martha needed. Let's put down our cutting board, our phone, or our keys and spend a few minutes talking with the Teacher who knows—and is—exactly what we need.

In what ways can you identify with Martha as she prepares dinner? What questions or accusations might fly out of your mouth if you bumped into Jesus while you were in a stressful situation?

Like Martha, do you feel “distracted with much serving” while Jesus is in your living room? What are those distractions?

In what specific ways can you pursue Jesus today in the midst of unfinished business?

CONSIDER

BELIEVE

Isaiah 26:3: You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

DAY **3**

READ *LUKE 10:41-42*

The Good Portion



IDENTIFY

Which self-help strategies and books do you tend to rely on more than God and the Bible? What do they promise you?

T HIS YEAR I switched from using a digital calendar to an analog bullet journal where one writes things down with a pen (gasp). In search of a simpler life, I predictably encountered the same complexities and lengthy to-do lists, just in handwritten ink rather than my iPhone font.

The reality is that we have a lot to do. Without shirking responsibility, there is no getting around busyness: You care for toddlers whose every step undoes what you do. You study for exams in challenging classes. You try to build, or at least keep, your friendships. You shop for your ravenous teenagers, go to work, and get the occasional much-needed haircut. And those are just the essentials!

The village of Bethany doesn't sound like a high-octane place, especially compared to our cars, schools, social calendars, and technological everything. But life in Martha's village may have been even busier than ours without all our modern conveniences. In any case, she was hosting the God of the universe for dinner. Talk about pressure. Martha is convinced that if Jesus just sees the scope of her need and the mess in her world, he will naturally agree with her assessment of what she needs—namely, relief in the form of Mary helping!

But Jesus's world is larger than the stage we play on, larger than the walls of our homes or the horizons of our towns, larger than our life spans and goals. His perspective takes into account eternal realities outside our current experience, and from this, he tells us a larger truth. That truth, written in the words of the Bible and the walls of our consciences, can feel jarring, but reality often is.

“Martha, Martha,” he says, understanding her completely. “Trish, Trish,” I mentally translate, “you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41–42).

“The good portion.” This phrase stems from a Hebrew word that refers to one’s lot in life.⁵ Jesus is saying that Mary had options and chose the right door, the best part of life. She chose him.

Jesus just accomplished in one phrase what an entire shelf of dog-eared books in my town’s library can’t quite pin down: How do we pursue the best in life? The shelf is real, and I’ve stood before it many times, mostly because even though I know the answer, the titles exercise a strange gravitational pull on me. It’s probably that they all offer a “secret” or “key” or some other magical recipe for a bowl of euphoric fulfillment with a slice of wealth for dessert. But the messages on that shelf never really deliver on their promises. Readers are left empty because they haven’t read Luke 10 where the good portion is revealed: be with Jesus.

The story merits slowing down and picturing ourselves in this scene. When we, like Martha, are stressed out and slogging through a jumble of responsibilities or emotions or temptations, what do we consider “the good portion” at that moment? Personally, what I want is to get this situation under control right now (cue bossiness) or to leave it behind (cue escapist phone usage). But my knee-jerk responses keep me from the answer I desperately need: the good portion himself.

If I truly follow Christ rather than productivity or escapism, I will stop what I’m doing and listen to the Lord through his Word. I will talk to my God. I will sit at his feet even though piles of unfinished things surround me. Sometimes that will look like taking a break to review a Bible verse or pray. But sometimes, when the demands won’t stop, it will look like a Spirit-filled heart enjoying his peace in the loud car pool, thanking him for his provision during a run into the grocery store, listening to his prompting in a challenging conversation, and shooting up prayers as I do what’s needed to keep life going.

If I truly follow Christ, I will become more like Mary and make choices to bask in the presence of the Savior.

CONSIDER

Have you, like Martha, ever sensed God calling you to stop running around and instead give him your attention? How did you respond?

What does your culture or friend group consider to be “the good portion”?

Replace Martha’s name with your own in verse 41. How are these words relevant to you right now? Consider spending the next five minutes laying down your burdens and enjoying his presence.

BELIEVE

Luke 10:41–42: But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”