

Grounded: in the Body in Time & Place, in Scripture

Grounded in His Lordship: Mary, Martha, and Me

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Meet the author

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Chapter overview

The author's reading of the story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10: 38–42) is grounded in her own time and place as a Malaysian Chinese Australian woman. She recognizes the particularity of her response; she does not speak for all Chinese, and yet she finds a resonance between the social context of the Lukan story, where men's and women's spaces were divided and women expected to respect the boundary, and attitudes within traditional Chinese culture. Honouring of work and hospitality also contributes to a Chinese reading of the text that sees Martha as the one who behaves virtuously and Mary as bringing shame to the family. An alternative reading of this passage that links it with the pericopes immediately preceding (the parable of the Good Samaritan) and following it (Jesus's teaching on prayer) is that it is primarily about the Lordship of Christ. Martha does not submit to his Lordship, whereas Mary does, and it is this that Jesus commends as the "better part" and the one thing that is necessary.

General Study Questions

Question 1

Give some examples of questions you have (such as why God created mosquitoes) that you cannot answer.

Question 2

The author says that being Chinese is even more complicated than being human. Do you belong to such a 'more complicated' group?

Question 3

How aware are you of your own particularity when you speak/write?

Question 4

What have you been taught in the past is the one thing needful (Luke 10:42)?

Question 5

With whom do you identify in this story?

Question 6

Do you agree with NT Wright that for Martha the real problem was that “Mary was behaving as if she were a man” (p.142)? Why? Why not?

Question 7

“A woman without ability is her virtue” (popular Chinese saying. p.143). How is this idea expressed in your culture?

Question 8

To what extent do you tend to find Martha virtuous and Mary idle or shameful?

Question 9

To what extent do you agree that Martha’s question is an attempt to “boss Jesus around”?

Question 10

In what ways do you find yourself like Martha?

Question 11

How might your church/Christian community give freedom to its members to explore and express the Lordship of Christ in various cultures and contexts?

Academic Questions

Question 1

“Academics should not talk about themselves” (p.140). Discuss.

Question 2

What do you know about ‘shame and honor’ cultures ?

Question 3

What are the arguments for and against this story being linked with the previous and following percepts by the theme of Lordship?

Question 4

“Is it possible to read the text in such a way that it affirms Mary without castigating Martha?” (p.148, quoting Christopher Hutson).

Question 5

What do you make of the author’s claim that we can be sure that ‘academic pursuit is not ‘ the one thing that is necessary’ to a better relationship with the Lord”? (p.148). Might the text be read that way?

Question 6

What “preconceived ideas and self-justification” (p.148) might you bring to the text?