

³⁸Jesus continued from there *toward Jerusalem* and came to another village. Martha, a resident of that village, welcomed Jesus into her home. ³⁹Her sister, Mary, went and sat at Jesus' feet, listening to him teach. ⁴⁰Meanwhile, Martha was anxious about all the hospitality arrangements.

Martha Lord, why don't you care that my sister is leaving me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to get over here and help me.

Jesus ⁴¹Oh Martha, Martha, you are so anxious and concerned about a million details, ⁴²but really, only one thing matters. Mary has chosen that one thing, and I won't take it away from her.

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DD Mary had something Jesus needed. He'd been on the road, headed for Jerusalem. He'd been traveling through hostile country, going toward a hotbed of enemies who would probably kill him. He needed a friend to listen and understand to drive away the clouds of doubt and despair. The disciples were no use. They argued with him about Jerusalem. They even argued with each other. Mary could listen through the solitude.

You know how it is. You get bad news and immediately you think of that friend you need. You dial across the nation to him or her, needing to hear that voice, reaching out for the reach back. That divorce is more bearable when you can talk through it with a friend. The disease diagnosis is more tolerable when you don't have to walk the road alone. Jesus wasn't getting that listening ear anywhere else. But Mary was listening. It was precious. Maybe it was even holy.

MJ *(Wearing sign, comes in, interrupting, fussing and fuming about, chattering)*
Mary! Mary, can you come help me in here?

Mary, I'm about to take the roast out. I sure could use a hand.

Jesus, you and Mary had better go wash up, I've got the table set.

Hey, you two, I've about got this food ready, don't you even care? You just sit there like I'm not even here. Do you have any idea how hot it is in that kitchen? This is Palestine, you know!

(more ad lib of this line of thought as inspiration and the moment permit)

DD Stop already. Will you *please* just stop, Martha. All you can see are the details of a dinner when we're talking about life and death. All you see are the million details but you've missed the only thing that really matters.

MJ *(taking "Martha" sign off)* Martha has not stopped. Safety experts teach our children to always STOP – LOOK – and LISTEN before crossing a street, for good reason. It saves lives. It is a survival thing. Survival experts tell us that the first thing people tend to do when they realize that they are lost in the woods is to walk even faster, to rush headlong through the brush into the first direction that seems plausible, to squander precious energy and supplies. There is a need to get someplace quickly. But they find that, at the end of the day, they have walked in a huge circle and achieved nothing and are still lost, though now tired, cold, hungry, thirsty. What they *should* do is stop, sit down, take stock, think, make a plan, even rest, and devise signals for rescuers.

DD Martha hadn't stopped from the time Jesus entered her house. She wanted to be a good host. She wanted to make him comfortable. She wanted him to be pleased with her. She thought a good meal with all the trimmings would be just

the thing. So she rushed and fussed about, busied with recipes and details of cooking, hardly giving a moment's thought to what Jesus *needed*. She assumed she knew.

MJ Martha wanted Jesus to be comfortable and welcome but she made him feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. It was about *her*, not him. If she'd only known to stop and pay attention maybe she would have seen what Mary saw. Here's a survival note for us: when a crisis comes – when possible – stop. Stopping gives an opportunity to look and also to listen. Stopping gives a chance to **act** instead of running off with the first re-**act**-ion that springs to mind. Stopping slows down the pace which keeps panic at bay and gives room for paying attention. Paying attention may save our life, or redeem a social situation.

DD She could have stopped and done the second thing on the list. She could have LOOKED.

MJ She *could* have seen the worry lines on Jesus face, and the grief in his eyes, the haunted loneliness in his posture. She *could* have seen the heart connection between Mary and Jesus and recognized the importance of their conversation. She *could* have noticed how they were leaning into each other, searching each other's eyes, drawing from and giving to each other, and respected that they were sharing something important.

Maybe for Jesus it was like uncovering treasure buried in a field. He'd endured so much and now, at last, someone who paid attention and responded to *him*. Maybe he thought of the sermon he'd preached about how life is ever so much more than the clothes we wear or the meals we eat. Maybe Jesus was irritated with Martha because she didn't see *him*. She only saw supper. The hunger he felt was deeper than physical. Mary saw it and responded.

- DD** Looking saves lives. Looking means we don't rush out in front of the oncoming car. Looking means we don't miss communication clues going on all around us. Looking gives us the data we need to make an accurate perception of what's going on. Looking helps us not get lost in the maze of our lives.
- MJ** Jesus talked about entering the kingdom of God with the mind of a child. A child sees things fresh. There is a survival school in Virginia which teaches people how to navigate without compass or map. Instead they encourage the use of such things as "Owl's eyes" and "Deer's ears". It is a different approach to the one that relies on toughness, training, and technology. It is, in fact, the way native peoples the world over have survived in all kinds of environments without destroying them in the process. It is the way of stopping, looking, and listening.
- DD** The teacher in that school is a big, macho looking guy with 12 years military experience who greets his students wearing an 18 inch Panamanian machete on his belt. Looking at him, one terrified student said to the other, "He's going to whip you like a red-headed stepchild."
- MJ** Instead of threatening, yelling, or badgering his students, he led them on a gentle walk through a trail-less forest.ⁱ He'd stop every 20 or 30 yards to point out something of interest. They wondered when the survival course was going to start. Instead of foraging for food and water and building shelters and trying to build fires, they just walked and discussed what they'd found. After they'd gone deep into the woods the teacher asked the students to close their eyes and point the way home. They couldn't. They'd been following but not paying attention. So the teacher directed their attention to the last place they'd stopped to talk. They could still see it from where they stood.

- DD** Instead of being the intimidating drill sergeant their teacher turned out to be “soft-spoken, polite, cheerfully earnest, and gentle to a fault. He never hurried, and was always carefully assessing himself and his environment.
- MJ** “Remember, we talked about that bittersweet vine there?” he asked. They’d taken a sample from a vine that’s good for making cordage. So they hiked back to *that* spot. Then he pointed to another spot, where he’d shown ways of seeing and walking that were used by Native American trackers and other Aboriginal peoples. They returned to *that* spot. From there, they could see the place where they thought they’d found the hoof print of a deer, but it turned out to be the entrance to a vole tunnel. They had squatted there to discuss the difference between voles, moles, and mice.
- DD** Thus, hopping from one conversation to the next, they were able to retrace their steps exactly and to remember in great detail not only where they’d been but what they’d said and done at each spot. In what seemed to be a featureless and homogenous forest, they’d learned to look for tangible cues, like road signs, which they could easily follow home. In short, they stopped, looked and listened all along the path.
- MJ** Martha, stop all that chattering and look. Don’t get lost in the details of your dinner.
- DD** Martha, look at Jesus and Mary. Notice how focused and intent they are. See them true. Don’t let your anxieties blind you to what is eternally important right before you.

MJ Martha, listen to the timbre of their voices. They are in the deeps of life. Don't get lost in your own little world of your own making that cannot see beyond the moment to big picture.

DD Stop. Look. Listen. Before you cross the street, use your eyes and ears, then use your feet.

MJ Look at Jesus on the mountain teaching,

DD in the dining room eating,

MJ at the temple shouting,

DD in the garden praying,

MJ on the cross forgiving.

DD You will have life and have it abundantly

MJ if you can stop and know the way,

DD look and see the path,

MJ listen and hear the truth.

DD You will have life and have it abundantly. Thanks be to God.

ⁱ *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why*, by Laurence Gonzales. (W.W. Norton. New York) 2003. Pp 176 ff.