

Hey friends, welcome to season 11 of the Sweet Selah Moments Podcast. We are so pleased you found us. Sharon and I pray that these episodes encourage you to learn alongside us how to be still and get to know the God who loves you fiercely. In this season, we are studying the stories of Jesus, particularly as he interacted with women. In today's episode, 154, called When God is Silent, we are talking about Mary and Martha and how they dealt with the death of Lazarus. Sharon, where in the Bible do we find their story?

We find it in John 11. So our last week, we were seeing Jesus as an infant eight days old, and he's now in public ministry. So clearly, we're not going chronologically.

We're jumping around a little bit.

We're jumping around a really big bit. But that's okay. What you and I did was just go through them together and find our favorites. And, oh my goodness, Mary and Martha are a favorite of mine. Both of them. And one of the things I love about these two sisters is how much he loved both and how different they were. And we're going to kind of explore that today. But we're going to find them in a difficult situation in John 11, because they're buds with Jesus. They've had Jesus over to their house. They're actually very close to him. They're one of his closest friends, this brother and two sisters. And yet, all of a sudden, Lazarus gets sick, and Mary and Martha don't hear from Jesus, and it hurts. And so then we're going to explore a little bit more about what it feels like when we feel like God is silent when we need him. So I'm really eager to dive into this. So why don't you start? We're going to read John 11, one through five, and then skip to 17 and read through 40. So you read about the first half, and I'll pick it up from there.

Sounds good. So John 11, one through five. A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, Lord, your dear friend is very sick. But when Jesus heard about it, he said, Lazarus' sickness will not end in death. Know it happened for the glory of God, so that the Son of Man will receive glory from this. So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. And jumping down to verse 17, when Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Mary and Martha in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus told her, your brother will rise again. Yes, Martha said, he will rise when everyone else rises on the last day. Jesus told her, I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha? Yes, Lord, she told him, I have always believed that you are the

Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God. Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, the teacher is here and wants to see you. So Mary immediately went to him.

Jesus had stayed outside the village at the place where Martha met him. When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus' grave to weep, so they followed her there. When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. Where have you put him? He asked them. They told him, Lord, come and see. Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, see how much he loved him. But some said, this man healed a blind man. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying? Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. Roll the stone aside, Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible. Jesus responded, didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe? So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here so they will believe you sent me. Then Jesus shouted, Lazarus, come out. And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in grave clothes, his face wrapped in a head cloth. Jesus told them, unwrap him, let him go. What a crazy, amazing story.

I love this story.

I love this story too. There's so much I want to unpack.

I know.

So we're going to divide this into three stories, Martha's story, then Mary's story, then we get to Jesus' story, which I cannot wait to get to because of that anger thing. But we're not there yet. We're going to start with Martha. So what do you learn about Martha, about her personality or temperament, how she handles things? What did you learn about Martha from this?

I think it's interesting that she approached him, that she came out of the house right away when she saw he was there. She seems a little bit more practical when dealing with situations like, Lord, if you had been here, he wouldn't have died. These are the facts, kind of, just came out and let him know what was going on, that Lazarus was dead. So I think that's really interesting. I kind of see a little bit of myself in Martha. You know, like, well, these are the facts, God, but I'm just going to accept it. I also think it's really neat that she's willing to go to him.

I do too.

To tell him her disappointment.

Yes.

And also, I'm curious what she thought he was going to do now, because she said, well, if you're the son of God, you can do anything. If you ask God, he'll do it for you. And then she said, but he's going to be raised at the end. So I wonder what she was expecting, because it didn't seem like she's expecting him to be raised now.

No.

Right. But she knew he was the messiah.

That hadn't changed. And I think that's one of the things I admire about Martha. OK, so we told you our brother was sick. You completely ignored us. You didn't even send a get well soon card, right, or whatever note he should have sent back right away. I mean, he was he was silent. So she could have been just mad, right? And just so grieved, she didn't even want to talk to him. Instead, she's still declaring the truth about him. Yeah, it didn't change. What an example for me when things don't go my way. God is still God. He has not changed just because I don't get my way. Martha lived that out.

She did.

In an incredible way. I thought it was really, really cool.

And I think she was the first person that Jesus ever officially revealed himself as Messiah to, isn't she?

Yeah, he does a lot of things for women. Lots of things.

That beautiful little...

Yes, and she believed it. I mean, absolutely rock solid faith. It's just so cool. And a faith not based on what God would do for her, which is where I just love that so much. If we base our faith on God obeying us and answering all our prayers at the snap of our fingers, we've created a little God. If we believe in the real God who runs the universe, we don't create him. He created us, right? So, yeah. Well, that's Martha. She's the practical one, and I totally agree with you. I mean, she's the one that was a little ticked off with Mary when Mary's just listening to Jesus talk, and there are 12 dirty-fedded men to feed, right?

Right.

Come help her. Yes, come on.

You got to get stuff done.

So she's a get things done girl. She really is. Yeah. So, OK, well, let's look at Mary now. Mary's more emotional. Martha says, if, you know, you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. And I agree with you. I think it was very matter of fact.

Yeah.

Mary's fallen at his feet, weeping her eyes out, you know, and she's just all emotional about it. Why weren't you here? You know, and also it's interesting that Mary didn't go out until Jesus called for her. Like she, because of her emotional state, she's like, fine. I mean, she might have been a little mad, right? She felt betrayed, I'm sure.

I was thinking that, that maybe she was slower to come out because she felt it, she felt more betrayed or more wounded by the fact that he didn't come or he didn't send her.

Right, right.

Where she was so tender hearted and so quick to sit at his feet to learn from him, you know what I mean?

Yeah, and it didn't fit who she thought he was, right? You know, I mean, they sent the note that the one you love is really sick, you know? And so, in her mind, there's a tremendous amount of confusion. This does not fix the picture I had of you.

Right.

Kind of thing, right? But she does come and she does run to him. And I actually do a talk on Mary and Martha. And one of the things that stands out to me about Mary is even mad, even distraught, even emotional, she brings the pain to him. She didn't say, I don't feel up to speaking to him right now. He can come to me, right? No, she went to him and she just bluffed out all the emotion. Right? She didn't hide it from him.

Well, it said she went immediately. They put in the word immediately. It's not like she had to put herself together first, or like, oh, do I want to go see him? Well, he should come to me. She went immediately when he called her. Even if she didn't rush to meet him right away with her grief and her pain, she still responded when he called her.

She sure did. And then she did bring it to him. She didn't hide it from him. And that teaches me, Lord, help me when I feel emotional and I feel unhappy with you, to run to you immediately and say, I feel emotional and unhappy with you.

What do I do with this?

Yes, because we can do that. I love how he interacted with both of them.

Yes, in different ways, too. Depending upon their personalities and their different strengths and weaknesses, he's so good to meet us where we are at individually.

Yes, as creator of us. He designed us for Crying Out Loud, and he's so big that he's actually interested in you and me when there are billions of us around. Isn't that amazing?

It is amazing. And I love that he doesn't just use the same thing. Like maybe Mary wasn't in a state of mind to receive the news that, hey, I'm the messiah, everyone's going to be raised again. Like maybe she wasn't ready in that moment to hear that. That's not what she needed to hear. She needed to see maybe a motion from Jesus instead to feel validated or seen. So again, he's so good about interacting with us, just how we need him to be.

Exactly. And now we've just transitioned so seamlessly into Jesus' story.

There's so much about him, we want to get to it.

Yeah, but no, that's so cool because, yeah, with Martha, he was actually more practical. You know, no, I wasn't there. But I am the resurrection and the life, by the way. And also Messiah, do you believe it? They had a more practical discussion, even though they both mutually loved Lazarus.

Oh, sure. I'm sure they weren't like very cold-hearted about it. There's probably a lot of emotion involved.

But not like with Mary. With Mary, Jesus sees her crying uncontrollably. He's looking at the people that are mourning. He knows he's going to raise Lazarus from the dead, and he still cries. Why do you think Jesus wept and was angry?

I know. Isn't that beautiful? I love that because it's almost like he knew the pain all of this would cause in the waiting. He knew that by waiting those couple of days and coming that Lazarus would die. Of course, he knew he's God. And I think that maybe seeing everyone in pain, he just felt the just the weight of death and sin and brokenness in the world. That's why he came. That's what his mission was here on earth. He was sent as a baby to save us from death and from sin. So maybe as he's watching somebody really close that he did love, die and just seeing the ultimate pain and the process of death, it just kind of overwhelmed his human heart, the human side of him.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love that God feels. I know. God is a person.

Yes.

You know, he's not an entity that's cold and distant. No, he felt. And I wonder if he wasn't angry because the enemy, Satan, from the beginning, distorted life to the degree that there even was death because there wasn't death before. Adam and Eve sinned, and they got a little help along the way from Satan disguised as a snake. Right?

Yeah.

So I think the anger was at this broken world and what the enemy had done. And I wonder if that righteous anger, that this is not how I created life to be, actually girded him up for the cross because this is right before the crucifixion. This is why he came because he sees the grief and the awfulness of death. He knows we cannot possibly get to heaven. We can't possibly be all we were created to be unless he defeats the enemy.

Wow. That's really powerful. I forget where in the timeline this was, but this was really close to his crucifixion.

In fact, that is really why the palm branches were floating around. If you read John a little later on, the people had heard of Lazarus' resurrection, and it just caused a ground swell.

Oh, I'm sure.

Yeah. So they're out there waving the palm branches thinking, this is it. This is our day. So Lazarus' not healing, risen from the deadness, really precipitated Palm Sunday, and then all that followed. Yeah. So it was an irrevocable move on Jesus' part once that happened.

I think things were really starting to be set into motion and kind of roll at that point. I also think it's neat that Jesus allowed himself to grieve, and kind of modeled grief for us too. He knew in a matter of moments, Lazarus was going to be alive and everyone would be happy, but he still took the time to be with them in their grief, to experience grief himself, and then express it. That's pretty powerful.

It is. It is. And it says, yes, it's okay to wail.

Right.

I think Americans, Nicole, are terrible at wailing.

It's not a gift.

We're all little Martha's trying to be polite.

Yes, and logical and think our way around it.

I think our funerals where we're shaking hands with everybody are so weird. The person that has lost their person has to comfort everybody that comes through the line who's trying to comfort them. It's exhausting. I mean, it's nice because they get to see everybody. I mean, it's not all terrible, but-

There's a strange way to-

It's so strange because-

To grieve. Yeah.

I mean, I think, I'm not gonna, don't quote me on this, but I think they got seven days in Bible times to just cry.

Well, didn't they hire people, or people would like be professional mourners and come to places to mourn with people?

Yeah. Yeah. That's how much they thought crying mattered.

Yes. It was that important. But I love that God shows, that Jesus showed that that's important. It's okay to grieve. It's okay to show our emotions, that we're allowed to have emotions as well, because I think especially as Americans, or rather, maybe you even know that better with your British mom.

With my British mom. Exactly. It must always look good.

Yes. No emotions. They're messy.

And I was just going to say, they're so messy. Yes. You're blowing your nose, your eyes are red, the mascara's running down your cheeks. You're not attractive when you're crying.

It's messy and it's painful, and we don't like to be so vulnerable and exposed in that. You know what?

It is very vulnerable, because we present a persona, especially in this age of cameras, where we want to look a certain way. And I am as guilty as anyone. When I go out of the house, I have my mascara on, and I wear a wig. I make sure my wig is on too. And

grief, you just want to be raw, just raw. And there's a place for being raw. I remember a friend calling me, her husband had died, of 45 years, so about the same amount of time, Ray, and I've been married. And I was in the car driving. I had about an hour in the car. And she started to cry. And the old me would have said to her, you know, try to comfort her and make her stop, you know. And the new me, who really thinks crying is really, really good, partially from this passage in scripture, I said, I'm going to be on the road for the next hour, and I'm staying on the phone with you. Just cry, honey.

Yeah.

And she did.

And that's such a gift, because we need to get grief out. It's like a poison inside. And I think even with Mary going to him, she got out that grief to the one that is the safest place for us to bring our grief to.

It was what she needed to do. She needed to cry her brains out.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah. And so my friend cried for about 15 minutes. And she knew I was there every once in a while. I'd say, I'm here. But I didn't try to make it better.

Yes, which we want to do, because grief is uncomfortable, and we want everyone to be happy.

We do. And somehow it feels like you've got to fix it.

Yes.

But you have to go through it. You can't walk around it or bury it because it will come back to bite you. You might as well just cry and be stunned at how many tears one human being can express.

And there's something about grief. I feel like it's this shovel inside of us that digs a deeper well for joy. We need to have grief and pain to make more space for joy. Doesn't joy feel better when you've experienced that deep, gut-wrenching pain?

I had never thought of that, but I do believe you're right. If we refuse to feel the sad feelings, I don't know that we ever feel the good feelings to the same degree. We have to numb ourselves a little bit. And when you're numb, you're numb.

It's true. Right. I think you kind of live somewhere like this little middle kind of meh space. But if we allow ourselves to feel the grief and pain, and bring it to God, so it

doesn't become bitterness, because grief, undealt with, can become bitterness, and that can suffocate us. But if we bring it to God, and we process it that way, I think that when he restores us, and he always does, he always heals, there's always some level of grief. Time does not heal everything, but God does, God can. I think that when the joy comes, it's so much sweeter, because you've seen the darker side of that feeling.

I'm thinking of the psalm, joy comes in the morning.

I love those verses.

And you cling to them when you're in a state where you cannot imagine joy again.

Absolutely. Those are really powerful verses.

So anyways, we're talking about when God is silent in this episode. And Jesus chose to be silent about Lazarus for four days. So we're gonna go into personal stories now, because I don't believe there's a human being on the planet that's lived more than a few years, where you've wanted God to do something, and he hasn't done it. Now, he's never silent in the sense that all creation says he's real. Every breath we take is because the God of life gave it to us. The Bible always is his word, but he can be silent about a topic that you would really like some help with for his own purposes. In this case, for Lazarus, he wanted to raise Lazarus from the dead. He wanted that whole process. It was part of God's plan. But when you're in the middle, you don't really want God's plan. You want your own.

Yes, and he didn't give them like, oh, it's okay, guys, I'm going to wait four days. He's going to die, but then I'll raise him before it happened. He didn't give him a heads up.

That's right. I can remember telling God at one point, I know you always have a plan, and I just have to tell you, I hate your plan. And I did not get struck by lightning.

I know.

But then I felt a little guilty that I said it, but then I thought, Sharon, you were thinking it.

He knows anyway.

He knows, and that's how I felt. I would not have done this, Lord. And when you go through really hard times, and we're going to turn to our own stories now, because we both had really hard times, like every other person on the planet, we've learned that, that things don't always go the way we want. So my story is just all the babies that died. My one daughter lost two babies in miscarriage, and Katherine lost six. So I have eight little grand babies in heaven that I prayed would live. And I can't explain to you why God took all of them home. And then after Katherine lost the six, then she had two

failed adoptions that she was told she would have for sure in a foster to adopt program. So then we had two more losses. So there's another long part where it felt like God was at least silent to doing what I wanted, which would be another grandchild for my beautiful girl who had a little boy and really felt that her family wasn't complete yet. So many years later, we have Emma, who, oh my goodness, you would not know that Emma had not birthed, Catherine had not birthed Emma. Emma is Catherine's twin.

Oh my goodness, she is.

It's hysterical. They both like pictures. They both chat up a storm. They are so alike, it's hysterical. And Emma was God's choice. And there were a lot of things that God said no to first. So he was silent to all my pleas. When I get to heaven, I'll fully understand. And then we got our Emma.

And she's such a special little girl. She's tenacious. She's got a lot of spunk in her.

She sure does. She sure does. So you're right, the pain never goes away from the hard, but joy does come in the morning.

Yes.

So that's my story. How about yours?

I was thinking about the story and that sometimes we ask God for the thing that we know He can do, right? And so we only want that. So we tell Him what we want instead of asking Him to help us in things.

True.

And then I can be disappointed if I don't get the answer I want when I want it. And then kind of like Mary just went inside and was grieving, I feel like I stop watching for God to work and just kind of wallow in my grief, because He didn't answer my prayer. He didn't do what I wanted. Mostly this past year of health issues, it's been a nightmare, you know, back and forth, and I'll feel better than I'll feel worse. We think we get an answer, and then it's not an answer. It's been so frustrating. And I was just telling my friend Jenny, because we walked together. So I just kind of feel like I've been sitting on the side of the road, like the path of life. I'm just kind of sitting here like, hang on, I got to get this sorted, and then I can get back on the path and do what God wants for my life, you know? So I feel like I'm kind of stuck in this rut. And I just felt like God was whispering to me, serve anyway, you know, live anyway, like get back up and get into things. Like, it's gonna be messy, and I don't like that. I want to say, this is what I can do, and then do it, and I can't right now. I am prone to whatever my body decides it can do day to day. And that is maddening. And I've asked God for healing. People have asked for healing. I've asked for answers. And it feels like a silent period where

there are no answers. There is no immediate healing. But when I look back on the details, I see so much that he is doing in my heart, in my life, and around me. It's not what I want. I want to be healed. But he's doing so much around me that I need to stop and look and see how he is working, not just how I want him to work.

I love that. That is so good. And sometimes he does his best work when we are the weakest, which is annoying. It is.

But it's so true. I was cracked pots and all.

Yes, yes, yes. And I love the thought that you're never really sidelined. If this is the path he has for you, right on that path, there are doctors and nurses that need to see your bright face. There are people that need you to be able to relate to them when they also get sidelined, you know, in terms of what they want to do. So yeah, his purpose stays. It's just not what we're looking for sometimes.

No. And you think, we think we know better, like, Oh, I can do so much more for you, God, for my family and for my friends. And I just felt better. It's like, now I just feel like I can't. But he just keeps whispering, like, keep going, like, serve anyway.

Serve anyway.

Yeah.

Yeah. I do that. I do that with Meniere's disease. I'm a public speaker and I sometimes have seizures in episodes. Cool.

Yeah. And you just have to trust. And that's there's so much in that that you can't rely on yourself for. Nope. Because you could do all this planning, prepping, praying, and get there, and your brain could say, not today. Surprise. You could have a seizure. Right.

Right.

So there's another level of truly relying on God. And then being able to just give him glory like, this was nothing I did on my own. I can't do this on my own. God, the glory is all yours.

Exactly. I think the enemy of our souls would love to sideline us. Oh, sure. Yeah. I remember in Mom's a Prayer, we were praying for Catherine to be able to conceive, and she didn't, and she didn't. And I almost felt like, well, maybe I should step down. I'm teaching women to pray, and it's, quote, not working. Right? That was so the enemy. We don't just pray to make God do what we want. Like Martha, who, it's not

what she wanted, but Martha still loved God, because God is God, whether we get our way or not. And someday we're going to really understand.

I know. I'm looking forward to that day.

Yes. Well, let me pray. Let me pray. Oh, heavenly father, if there is someone listening to this, who has felt the hurt that Martha and Mary felt, and is still in the waiting for answers, would you come near father? Would you love them right where they are? Would you remind them of the truth? That you see them and you care. I pray your blessing on them today and help all of us, Lord, to run to you with every trouble and never away. Where else would we go, Lord? You hold the truth of life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thanks for listening in today as we wrestled with trusting God when things don't go how we want. Are you in a season where God feels silence? We would be honored to pray for you. Please reach out to us at Nicole at sweetselah.org. If this podcast has encouraged you, we would be so honored if you would take a minute to leave a review or share it with a friend. If you would like more information about us, please go to our website at sweetselah.org and have a look around. And of course, please join us next time for Episode 155, Courageous Faith.