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~ **The Grieving Sisters of Bethany** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read John 11:1-46.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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John 11:1-46 NASB	John 11:1-46 NLT
<p>Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ So the sisters sent <i>word</i> to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ⁴ But when Jesus heard <i>this</i>, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days <i>longer</i> in the place where He was. ⁷ Then after this He <i>said</i> to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples <i>said</i> to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ This He said, and after that He <i>said</i> to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." ¹⁶ Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to <i>his</i> fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."</p> <p>¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning <i>their</i> brother. ²⁰ Martha therefore,</p>	<p>A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. ² 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. ³ So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."</p> <p>⁴ But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." ⁵ So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, ⁶ he stayed where he was for the next two days. ⁷ Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."</p> <p>⁸ But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"</p> <p>⁹ Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. ¹⁰ But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." ¹¹ Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up."</p> <p>¹² The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" ¹³ They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.</p> <p>¹⁴ So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."</p>

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when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. ²¹ Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” ²³ Jesus *said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha *said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she *got up quickly and was coming to Him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, “Where have you laid him?” They *said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?”

³⁸ So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, *came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus *said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, *said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus *said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” ⁴⁴ The man who

¹⁶ Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let’s go, too—and die with Jesus.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. ²⁰ When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. ²⁶ Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” ²⁸ Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” ²⁹ So Mary immediately went to him.

³⁰ Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. ³¹ When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there. ³² 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.”

³³ 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. ³⁴ “Where have you put him?” he asked them.

They told him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Then Jesus wept. ³⁶ The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” ³⁷ But some said,

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<p>had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”</p> <p>⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.</p>	<p>“This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”</p> <p>³⁸ Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. ³⁹ “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them.</p> <p>But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”</p> <p>⁴⁰ Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” ⁴¹ So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” ⁴³ Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”</p> <p>⁴⁵ Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. ⁴⁶ But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

The following insights are from Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John by Malina and Rohrbaugh.

1. There is a twofold shock and shame in this story. First, there is the shock of the unexpected death of Lazarus and the unexpected perplexity they feel that he did not come to heal Lazarus. Second is the fact that Jesus did not even attend the funeral. It was expected that friends would attend. People were expected to drop everything they were doing and attend to the needs of family and friends in a crisis. Jesus did not do this.
2. Women who were not attached to a father, an older brother, or a husband would find themselves in an insecure social standing. The leading male was their security.
3. Lazarus is called a “friend” which in the Middle East referred to people looked upon as social equals.
4. It was important to have as many mourners as possible at the time of death to indicate family honor.
5. Mourning included loud wailing and the beating of the breasts, usually by the women but sometimes by men at a death.

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6. Men and women would walk separately in a funeral procession. When they would return, the women would have a 30-day period of mourning and would usually sit on the floor during this time and would remain at home. The fact that Martha and Mary leave their home and go to the burial site, at Jesus' request, would be unusual and would signal that something special was to be said or done.
7. Both women express displeasure with Jesus because he did not come at their request to heal Lazarus and he did not even come in time for the funeral procession.

The following insights are from the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

1. Bethany was on the Mount of Olives, two miles to the east of Jerusalem.
2. While Jesus was in Galilee, he was under the political jurisdiction of and danger from Herod Antipas. While in Judea, he was under the political jurisdiction of Rome ruled by Governor Pilate. However, the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's ruling council, had much more authority in Judea and would also be a threat. Thus, the disciples speak of how the Jews there tried to stone him in verse 8.
3. Jesus was about one day's journey away from Bethany.
4. People often used the word "sleep" when referring to death.
5. The bereaved were expected to stay at the house with other mourners who had come. Martha slipped away from the house to go to the tomb to see Jesus, but Mary remained with the other mourners. When Mary leaves the house, everyone else leaves thinking she is going to the tomb to weep there, and they will go with her to weep at the tomb. Family members were expected to mourn for at least one week and do nothing else. Thus, since it is still the first week after Lazarus' death, everyone assumes Mary is going to the tomb to continue her grieving there.
6. Jewish practice was to allow bodies to decompose for one year. When the year was up, the bones of the deceased would be put into a container and then inserted into a slot in the burial cave.

3. Answer these reflective questions.

Luke 10:38-42 tells us about Jesus' previous visit to the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. At that time, there was conflict between Martha and Mary. Yet, we find that they are still greatly loved by Jesus in this story. What does this tell us about the love of Jesus Christ for people, even though they have problems?

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When Mary and Martha sent word that their brother Lazarus was sick, do you believe they were confident Jesus would come? How do you think they felt when Jesus did not arrive in time, and stayed away?

Have you ever felt like God has not answered your prayers, or is late? How does that make you feel? Does this story encourage your heart in any way?

Why do you think Jesus said, “this sickness is not for death but for the glory of God?” In what way did it show God’s glory?

What did the people believe about Jesus before Lazarus died? What did the people believe about Jesus after he raised Lazarus? What do you believe about Jesus?
