**Thesis:** When you think about everything you have to get done today, does it give you any stress? Is life just feeling like it’s too much to manage as you juggle family, work, school, and friends? Remember that we have a God of order. And order provides stability. And stability paves the way for peace. God doesn’t want us welling up with anxiety. He wants us to feel the comfort that comes from knowing Him and being with Him.

**Introduction:** Welcome to The Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_\_\_, your host from Pray.com. We’re back with another great retelling of Jesus’ ministry. This week, we’ll enter the home of Martha as we learn how God wants to take our stress.

**Context:** Not long after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus and the disciples are on the move again. As they travel through the town of Bethany, they’re invited into the home of some close friends of Jesus: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Bethany was just a few miles outside of Jerusalem, and the quick stop was a likely welcomed reprieve from the continual onslaught of crowds wanting to be near Jesus to hear Him teach and watch Him perform miracles. Imagine you’re preparing your home for Jesus. You’d likely start preparing a list of all the things that need to get done: Wash the dishes, sweep the floor, prepare a meal, and ensure everything is in tip top shape to welcome in not only a friend, but the Messiah. Does this sound stressful? It certainly did for Martha. But as Jesus finally rests His tired feet in their humble home, Martha will have a lot to learn about what it means to be present with the Lord.

**Message:** Every individual life is a unique collection of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perceptions of the world around us. Each one of us is distinct from the other. Though we live alongside each other, we take on the world in our own way. But what if our way isn’t working? What if life has become one endless stream of stress, worries, and anxieties? Today’s story takes us to the home of a small family of siblings: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They have known Jesus since they were children and each grew up under the same conditions. Yet we find that as they’ve grown, their lives couldn’t be more different from one another.

At the beginning of our passage, Martha does a good thing. She hears that Jesus is nearby and invites Him and His disciples to visit. She demonstrates a heart of hospitality as she prepares her home. It’s with a good heart that Martha wants to be near Jesus. We all should find the same attitude as Martha to gladly welcome Jesus into our lives. It’s a wonderful thing to spend time with God, and we should be seizing any opportunity we can to do so. We can welcome Jesus into our home in a number of ways. Taking a moment to read the Bible to let God’s word saturate our hearts and minds, praying with others as we align our will with God’s will, singing worship music in the car on the way to work to prepare us for the day ahead. All of these are opportunities to be with God. Despite our ever growing culture of busyness and hussle, we should never find ourselves too busy to spend time with God and welcome Him into our lives. The closer we allow Him to get, the better our lives become.

But like Martha, we can become distracted in our relationship with the Lord. With all of her own plans in what must be done before Jesus arrives, she forgets the whole purpose of the visit…to be with Jesus! As she runs around the house to cook, clean, and host, others are joyfully sitting with Jesus as He shares parables and stories of His life. While Martha clings to her tasks, everyone else is clinging to Christ as they grow in their faith. Taking the time to grow in our faith may seem like another time consuming to-do in an already packed schedule. We plan to wake up early for devos, only to find our kids have woken up before the sunrise. We tell ourselves we’ll find time to pray before bed, until we forget that we have an assignment due by midnight. And what we know we should be putting first can so easily get kicked to the bottom of our list.

But what may help us combat this pattern is retooling the way we look at our time. Rather than telling ourselves we’ll put Jesus and our faith first, it might be more helpful to think of it in terms of putting Jesus and our faith central. Instead of viewing it as an item on your agenda, view your time with God as the epicenter from which the rest of our life extends from. Let your life flow from your faith! Prioritizing our time with Jesus helps us to sense His guidance as He leads us where He wants us to go and shows us the things He wants us to take on in life. Don’t fall into the stress of Martha, putting all the things you want to do for Jesus above being with Him. There is a time to work and get things done, but it should never be apart from an active relationship with God. Being present with God is far more important than being productive for God. We can’t serve God in a pleasing way if we’re apart from Him. One must flow from the other.

Jesus tells us in *Matthew 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Being with God must be the constant in our life that sustains us and frees us from any potential stress. Seek first the kingdom of God, and He will care for any needs we may have. Don’t worry about tomorrow, for it will be full of new mercies.

But if you do find yourself feeling more like Martha in our story, don’t fret. There’s a solution right here in our passage. If we’ve wound up in a stressful place, all we have to do is stop, connect with God, and allow Him to correct us.

Our stress is directly related to how we respond to life. While there will definitely be stressful factors around us that are outside of our control, what we are in control of is how we handle them. We get to choose how they affect our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Some of us may respond to stress by shutting down. We find things like sleep to be a welcomed break from our overthinking minds. Others of us may respond to stress by becoming hyperactive. Like a mother anxiously awaiting a baby, we begin nesting. We find any and all chores and activities we can that will help us feel like we’ve at least accomplished something. But both of these responses are simply distractions from what we really need in the middle of our stress. What we truly need is an encounter with Jesus. When you’re feeling overwhelmed, allow yourself to stop for a moment and connect with God. Be with Him and feel His presence. Feel the warm embrace of His Spirit who comforts you. Hear the words of the One who called the storms to be still as He speaks the same command of peace over the raging seas of your heart. And once you find that moment of calm…that moment of quiet…open your ears to hear the words He wants to speak to you. Open your heart to receive correction, knowing that it’s not given in anger but in love. Trust that He wants what’s best for you and is willing to take the time to help you see what that is. As you hear His guidance, humble yourself to glad obedience. He’s calling you away from anxiety and worry and invites you into the peace and tranquility of His presence.

God wants to take the place of stress in your life. He wants to help you navigate the complexities of life. We read in *James 4:7a “Submit yourselves, then, to God….10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”* God wants to lift you up, but it first requires that you fall down at His feet. Resist your pride. Overcome the temptation to *do* before you enjoy the sweet satisfaction of *being*. Being with God, who doesn’t need anything from you, but deeply desires a relationship with you. Stress melts away in the presence of our Savior, who casts out all of our fear with His perfect love.