1. In this Sabbath School Lesson, we will be continuing our series looking at the virtuous woman brought to view in Proverbs 31. In this lesson, we will focus on the experience of Mary and Martha.

2. What question is asked in Proverbs 31:10?

3. **Note**: Let us now study the account of Mary and Martha. Read Luke 10:38-42.

4. What would Martha's work represent for women today? See quotations below.

   “It is the right of every daughter of Eve to have a thorough knowledge of household duties, to receive training in every department of domestic labor. Every young lady should be so educated that if called to fill the position of wife and mother, she may preside as a queen in her own domain. She should be fully competent to guide and instruct her children and to direct her servants, or, if need be, to minister with her own hands to the wants of her household. It is her right to understand the mechanism of the human body and the principles of hygiene, the matters of diet and dress, labor and recreation, and countless others that intimately concern the well-being of her household. It is her right to obtain such a knowledge of the best methods of treating disease that she can care for her children in sickness, instead of leaving her precious treasures in the hands of stranger nurses and physicians.” {AH 87.3}

   “The idea that ignorance of useful employment is an essential characteristic of the true gentleman or lady is contrary to the design of God in the creation of man. Idleness is a sin, and ignorance of common duties is the result of folly, which afterlife will give ample occasion to bitterly regret.” {AH 88.1}

   “Young women think that it is menial to cook and do other kinds of housework; and, for this reason, many girls who marry and have the care of families have little idea of the duties devolving upon a wife and mother.” {AH 88.2}

5. How high does God regard the work of the mother? See quotations below.

   “Because they are not connected with some directly religious work, many feel that their lives are useless, that they are doing nothing for the advancement of God’s kingdom. If they could do some great thing how gladly they would undertake it! But because they can serve only in little things, they think themselves justified in doing nothing. In this they err. A man may be in the active service of God while engaged in the ordinary, everyday duties—while felling trees, clearing the ground, or following the plow. The mother who trains her children for Christ is as truly working for God as is the minister in the pulpit.” {PK 219.1}

   “Would that every mother could realize how great are her duties and her responsibilities, and how great will be the reward of faithfulness. The mother’s daily influence upon her children is preparing them for everlasting life or eternal death. She exercises in her home a power more decisive than the minister in the desk, or even the king upon his throne. The day of God will reveal how much the world owes to godly mothers for men who have been unflinching advocates of truth and reform,—men who have been bold to do and dare, who have stood unshaken amid trials and temptations; men who chose the high and holy interests of truth and the glory of God, before worldly honor or life itself.” {ST November 3, 1881, par. 8}

6. What other line of work does Martha's labor represent?

   “Women may take their places in the work at this crisis, and the Lord will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Spirit of God, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power which will exceed that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.” {6T 117.4}

   “A direct necessity is being met by the work of women who have given themselves to the Lord and are reaching out to help a needy, sin-stricken people. Personal evangeliastic work is to be done. The women who take up this work carry the gospel to the homes of the people in the highways and the byways. They read and explain the word to families, praying with them, caring for the sick, relieving their temporal necessities. They present before families and individuals the purifying, transforming influence of the truth. They show that the way to find peace and joy is to follow Jesus.” {6T 118.1}
7. Does this give license for women to fill the role of men in the home and in the church? Numbers 12:1-6; Ephesians 5:23-25; 1 Peter 3:5; Titus 2:4-5, Colossians 3:18

8. The Bible says that Martha, although doing a work for Jesus, was cumbered about many things. What would this represent for men and women today? See quotations below.

   “Many [speaking about the thorny ground hearers] who might be fruitful in God’s service become bent on acquiring wealth. Their whole energy is absorbed in business enterprises, and they feel obliged to neglect things of a spiritual nature. Thus they separate themselves from God. We are enjoined in the Scriptures to be “not slothful in business.” Romans 12:11. We are to labor that we may impart to him who needs. Christians must work, they must engage in business, and they can do this without committing sin. But many become so absorbed in business that they have no time for prayer, no time for the study of the Bible, no time to seek and serve God. At times the longings of the soul go out for holiness and heaven; but there is no time to turn aside from the din of the world to listen to the majesty and authoritative utterances of the Spirit of God. The things of eternity are made subordinate, the things of the world supreme. It is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit; for the life of the soul is given to nourish the thorns of worldliness.” {COL 51.3}

   “And many [speaking about the thorny ground hearers] who are working with a very different purpose, fall into a like error. They are working for others’ good; their duties are pressing, their responsibilities are many, and they allow their labor to crowd out devotion. Communion with God through prayer and a study of His word is neglected. They forget that Christ has said, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5. They walk apart from Christ, their life is not pervaded by His grace, and the characteristics of self are revealed. Their service is marred by desire for supremacy, and the harsh, unlovely traits of the unsubdued heart. Here is one of the chief secrets of failure in Christian work. This is why its results are often so meager.” {COL 52.1}

9. Note: Martha is often viewed in a bad light for being rebuked by Jesus. She was a willing servant yet, she still needed to learn vital lessons about salvation.

10. In spite of Martha’s shortcomings, what were Jesus’ sentiments toward her? John 11:5

11. In contrast to Martha, what was Mary doing? Luke 10:39

12. What are we told about the experience of Mary and Martha? See quotation below.

   “All who work for God should have the Martha and the Mary attributes blended—a willingness to minister and a sincere love of the truth. Self and selfishness must be put out of sight. God calls for earnest women workers, workers who are prudent, warmhearted, tender, and true to principle. He calls for persevering women who will take their minds from self and their personal convenience, and will center them on Christ, speaking words of truth, praying with the persons to whom they can obtain access, laboring for the conversion of souls.” {ST 118.2}

13. What was the “one thing” that Martha needed which Mary possessed?

   “The “one thing” that Martha needed was a calm, devotional spirit, a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement. She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever. Jesus would teach His children to seize every opportunity of gaining that knowledge which will make them wise unto salvation. The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.” {DA 525.2}

14. Note: Read Proverbs 31:28. Besides the children, the husband is the one who praises the virtuous woman. This verse points to Mary’s experience since Jesus praised her for choosing the one thing that was needful. For one application, she had chosen Him as her husband. See Isaiah 54:5.

15. What was the language of Mary’s heart towards Jesus? See Psalm 27:4
   a) Dwell in the house of the Lord - Mary accepted Jesus as her Saviour; she became married to Him (spiritually), forsaking the things of the world to hear His Words.
   b) To behold the beauty of the Lord - See John 1:29
   c) Enquire in His Temple - See Matthew 5:6; John 5:39

16. To whom else did Jesus offer the “one thing” that is needful? Mark 10:17-22
17. How did the rich young ruler respond when he was told that he lacked “one thing” by Jesus? Mark 10:21, 22

18. **Note**: Similarly to Martha, what were Jesus’ sentiments toward the rich young ruler? Compare Mark 10:21 and John 11:5

19. **Note**: The account of the rich young ruler proves that Jesus is calling both men and women into His service today. Martha was lovingly rebuked by Christ for not choosing the one thing that was needful: spending time in His presence and surrendering fully to Him. However, Martha later gained this needful experience. She is spoken of other times in scripture (John 11:24-27) and is once again doing service for her Savior Jesus Christ (John 12:1, 2). The rich young ruler, however, thought that his good works could merit him salvation and thus, he never made an entire surrender to follow Jesus all the way. Whose experience will you imitate in your life: Martha’s experience (combined with Mary’s) or the rich young ruler?

20. **Note**: We are told that we are to have the May and Martha experience blended. Let us now briefly study the account of a woman named Ruth who manifested the experience of both Mary and Martha.

21. What was Ruth’s relation to Naomi, and where was she born? Ruth 1:3-6

22. What was Ruth’s response when Naomi told her to return to her people? Ruth 1:11, 15, 16, 17

23. Since we know that a woman represents a church, what would Ruth’s experience mean for us? Luke 9:23; Revelation 14:1, 4

24. **Note**: Ruth had chosen to forsake the world (negative worldly associations and her previous gods) to follow Naomi and continue learning of the One True God. She represents the 144,000 who follow the Lamb (Jesus) wherever He goeth. This scene represents Mary’s experience as she was found at Jesus’ feet learning about Him and the principles of salvation. Ruth’s experience is also hope for women and men today who were once enemies of God, serving sin, but who today will choose to surrender all to Jesus and begin a life of faith.

25. Once Ruth made her decision to follow Naomi, what did she willingly choose to do? Ruth 2:2; Proverbs 31:16, 27


27. **Note**: This represents Martha’s experience. Ruth had proverbially sat at Jesus’ feet (like Mary) and was now willing to go forth into the field to do a work of aggressive evangelism.

28. **Note**: Not only did Ruth go to work in the field, but it says that she would work for the person with whom she found grace. In our previous lesson when we covered Esther’s account, we saw that her finding grace in the king’s sight typifies coming boldly before God in prayer (Hebrews 4:14-16). Ruth’s experience shows us that another way we find grace in God’s sight is by willingly doing active missionary service for Him.

29. How is Ruth described in Ruth 3:11? Proverbs 31:10

30. Where did Boaz, Ruth’s husband to be, go when he was seeking the right to marry her? Ruth 4:1, 2

31. What does Proverbs 31:23 say?

32. **Note**: Through these accounts, God is telling us that He needs men who will be known among their associates because of their integrity and faithfulness to God like Boaz. God needs women who will protect her husband’s influence by her own pure and righteous conduct. (See also 1T 450) God is also looking for every member of His church body to make Jesus known to others in their associations.

> “Oh, what is our excuse, my sisters, that we do not devote all the time possible to searching the Scriptures, making the mind a storehouse of precious things, that we may present them to those who are not interested in the truth? Will our sisters arise to the emergency? Will they work for the Master?” {6T 118.3}

> “If there were twenty women where now there is one who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth.”—The Review and Herald, January 2, 1879. {ChS 28.5}
“Sisters, do not become weary of vigilant missionary labor. This is a work that you may all engage in successfully, if you will but connect with God. Before writing letters of inquiry, always lift up your heart to God in prayer, that you may be successful in gathering some wild branches which may be grafted into the true vine, and bear fruit to the glory of God. All who with humble hearts take part in this work will be continually educating themselves as workers in the vineyard of the Lord.”—The Review and Herald, June 10, 1880. (ChS 29.2)