



EXCERPT



Finding Your Yes

Living a Life That's Open to God's Invitations

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Would you like to live into your yes? Christine Wagoner invites you to be attentive to the movements of the Spirit and engage with opportunities God gives you on your spiritual journey. Sharing about her own yes moments as well as those of others, Wagoner offers practical tools for living a life of openness to the invitations of God in our lives.

Consider Smaller, Better Yeses

Perhaps saying yes isn't a struggle for you. In fact, you love to say yes. Maybe you've said yes so often that now you feel as if you are in the circus. Saying yes to many things can lead to that frantic feeling of trying to keep all the balls in the air, paying close attention that nothing gets dropped. The world record for most balls juggled is eleven. My coordination limits me to two.

When we juggle too many yeses, a calendar with no margin can be the result. To say yes to one more thing is challenging. This becomes a problem when the next invitation to say yes could be the *better* yes—an opportunity that will give us more fulfillment, teach us more about God, and make a greater impact in our lives. Being open to the better yes is challenging when we don't have space to consider it.

Why are we so busy? What drives us to fill our schedules to the brim? Perhaps we will miss out on a better choice?

I am reminded of the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus was teaching in town, and Martha wanted to open her home to Jesus and his disciples. It was an honor to have Jesus come to their home. Martha leveraged her hospitality gifts for this visit with Jesus and his disciples. I can imagine her pulling together food from the fridge, getting beverages on the table, cleaning the house, and if she was anything like me, she might be kicking herself that she hadn't made it to the market earlier that week to get those favorite snacks. Martha wanted to make sure all was ready for these notable guests. She was very busy getting important tasks done.

And where was her sister, Mary? She wasn't in the kitchen helping Martha. Instead, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Mary wanted to be with Jesus, to learn from him, to be in his presence.

Martha was frustrated with her sister's choice and let Jesus know about it. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Jesus responded, "Martha, Martha, . . . you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:40-42 NIV).

This familiar text tends to make me feel guilty if I don't drop everything to have a spiritual moment with Jesus. And Martha manages to get a bad rap in this story. She was too busy with cooking and cleaning; therefore, she didn't say yes to spend time with Jesus. Mary is usually highlighted as the one that had her priorities straight and let the to-do list go to



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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"How do you discover the call of God? If that is the nagging question of your life, then Finding Your Yes is your guidebook. Through wonderfully evocative stories, biblical insights, and helpful suggestions, Christine Wagoner reveals the obstacles that keep us from saying yes to God's direction in our lives. You'll enjoy the journey as you receive clarity for the road ahead!"

—Dave Rodriguez, CEO of Destinyworks

say yes to Jesus. And for good reason, as Jesus does highlight this choice as better, but it wasn't that easy for Martha . . . or Mary.

Martha's busyness wasn't entirely bad. Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was "better." This implies that what Martha did was not wrong, and it was actually good. The Middle Eastern culture placed a high value on hospitality, and still does. Generosity and inclusion of all guests, even strangers, is not only a Middle Eastern priority but also a value Jesus taught.

Earlier in Luke 10, Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples to spread the news of the coming kingdom of God and heal in his name. Jesus instructed them to find people of peace and, "Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay" (Luke 10:7 NLT). Hospitality was needed to help the news of Christ spread beyond Jerusalem.

Then, in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus discusses the importance of loving your neighbor as yourself. He illustrates this point with the parable of the good Samaritan, who became the unlikely example of abundant provision and care for a stranger.

Perhaps Luke is highlighting the kingdom value of hospitality and Martha's desire to embody it. She served Jesus and the disciples. She desired to be near Jesus and invited him to her home. She wanted to provide an opportunity for others to experience Jesus, too, and went to work in the kitchen to ensure they had what they needed to enjoy the day. Serving likely was something Martha did well, and it is a kingdom value. These are good things to say yes to.

As Martha prepared to host Jesus and his friends, she may have said yes to so many good tasks that she didn't have the bandwidth to consider another yes that day. There was a better yes—to spend time with Jesus and the disciples. Perhaps Martha couldn't consider this option because she held tightly to the expectations of others and her desire to serve everyone well.

It may also have been easier for Martha to choose to stay busy in the kitchen. If she slowed down from serving and sat with Jesus, what might have emerged from her heart? Would Jesus have rebuked her for being upset with Mary? What might Jesus ask of her? Yes, being busy in the kitchen seemed like the way to go.

Meanwhile Mary stepped outside the box. In fact, Mary created a brand-new box. It was unheard of for women to do what Mary did. She went against cultural norms, took a risk, and learned from Jesus, alongside the men. While Judaism did not forbid women from learning the Torah, they certainly weren't meant to learn with men. Women were a rejected group in this time period, and it was rare to find a rabbi who would sink to the level of teaching women.

This was a bold move for Mary, and I wonder how she had the courage to do this. I'm curious about how the disciples



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"This book is easy to say yes to. What an encouraging reminder that God has good works planned for us to do! Christine Wagoner offers a hopeful yet realistic word about listening and responding openly to the opportunities God puts in our path. They may be big or small. They may lead to success or disappointment. We may have doubts or courage. But through stories, Scripture, and hard-won wisdom, Wagoner shows how God can use it all."

—Andrew T. Le Peau, author of *Write Better*

reacted; Mary rocked the ship and didn't seem to care. Was she able to slow down enough to weigh out her options that day? Maybe Mary had the time that day to sense the power of Jesus drawing her toward him as well as his desire to spend time with all people. Jesus didn't filter people out due to their race, gender, or social status. Maybe that was why Mary thought it was a safe to say no to the expected things and say yes to this unexpected opportunity.

I desire to be like Mary and can relate to Martha. Sometimes I stay busy in the kitchen saying yes to many good things because that's what I know, and people expect it of me. I can please a lot of people and get much accomplished. This can make me feel significant and loved all at the same time. These are not bad emotions, but when I derive more significance and love from people than from God, I know I'm headed down a path that will not satisfy. Not to mention that when I'm busy with all the good yeses, I don't have time to pay attention to my own soul or talk to God about any of the difficult emotions that may be beneath the surface of my heart. It's no wonder I can have a hard time finding space for a better yes.

I wonder what would have happened if Martha had given in to a better yes. Perhaps it would have been an opportunity for Martha to realize how hungry her soul was for Jesus' words. Maybe she would have felt freedom to let go of expectations and rest in the presence of Christ. In the big scheme of things, the hours Martha utilized were not large blocks of time but were meaningful. Not all better yeses are large time commitments. It could look like having time to say yes to walking with a neighbor you've been praying for. Maybe slowing down your pace means being available to sit in a doctor's office with a friend as she receives the test results she's been worried about. Perhaps margin in your calendar will allow you to pray for and be more present with colleagues in your office. If we've said yes to too many things, we often can't say yes to these small opportunities with a big impact.

What smaller, better yeses would you enjoy considering if you had time?

If you resonate with saying too many yeses for one reason or another, I commend this practice to you before you give your next yes: sleep on it. Or at least wait a minute or two before you agree. Ask the Lord in a time of prayer what his thoughts are on the matter. Will you have margin to be present with others and with God if you say yes? And reflect on your motivation for saying yes. Are you looking to him for fulfillment in this yes, or external factors?

Martha's yes to serving Jesus and the disciples was a good yes, but Jesus wanted her to consider a better yes that day. If she could have let go of some of those good other tasks, Jesus knew that Martha's heart would have benefited from time spent with him. She would have known how loved she was by the Lord and that she, too, had a place in the living room with Jesus.

—Adapted from chapter three, "Discovering Internal Resistance"



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Christine E. Wagoner is an associate regional director with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, where she directed their national women's leadership development program. She received her master of arts in counseling ministries from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Be Open to All Possibilities

What was your inspiration for this book?

Christine Wagoner: The parable of the talents in Luke 19 inspired me. I spent a good amount of time marinating in this text as I taught from it a few years ago. As I spent time in the text, God made me curious about my motivations for using the gifts he's given me and why I tend to bury them. I thought of the most meaningful yeses I've had in my life, and many of them started out as noes. When I was open to yes, God would grow my character and leadership, even as I discerned, and then especially as I stepped into the invitation. And the kingdom expanded too. I'm passionate about leadership development and spiritual formation integrating in our lives.

What are some unique angles readers will discover within the pages of your book?

Christine: Storytelling is a primary method for illustrating and communicating main points in this book. I use stories of people in today's world, stories of people in Scripture, and stories from my life. The hope is that someone will see something of themselves in at least one of these stories, as there are a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, vocations, and gender. And they will be inspired through the small, ordinary examples and the big, extraordinary illustrations too.

I also have a leadership element to the book that may be different from other books written by women. This book is intentionally written for both men and women. I write from the philosophy that Christian leadership is the integration of both spiritual formation and missional activity.

What are some of the lessons readers will learn in reading your book?

Christine Wagoner: I hope this book will get people into Scripture and that the study guide in the back of the book will facilitate good small group discussions about at least the five key ideas below:

1. Live a life open to possibilities, even ones that seem unlikely.
2. Use the gifts God has given you for his glory and his kingdom.
3. When we say yes to God's invitations, we grow not only the kingdom, but we grow in our intimacy with Christ, our character, and our leadership too.
4. When we identify external and internal challenges to opportunities, we have options for overcoming them, experiencing healing, and even redemption.
5. Trust God even in the midst of the pain and challenges that come with a yes.



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