

**Text:** Luke 10:38-42

**Title:** One Thing is Needed

**Truth:** A sharp focus on Jesus saves you from trouble and frustration.

**Date/Location:** June 9, 2024 at FBC

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## Introduction

The “certain” village and the “certain” woman, although real (Bethany and Martha), are generic enough that they can stand for any village and any person. It is not just Bethany that has people who have wrong priorities, and it is not just Martha who suffers that difficulty. People in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti and Milan and online today do too!

This passage gives us a prime opportunity to think and talk about the priorities that we have deep in our hearts that we do not readily acknowledge. We might make excuses for them to explain away why we need to be doing them instead of doing the “one thing [that] is needed.”

## I. Situation

- A. Jesus would travel back and forth to the area around Jerusalem until He made the final trip there for the Triumphal entry and then suffering. Remember from the beginning of our study in chapter 10 that the Lord spent some time on the other side of the Jordan. The village of Bethany was a convenient stop between Jordan and Jerusalem.
- B. Notice that Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. Another time, she *anointed* His feet with a costly perfume (John 12:1-7)! She knew His worth and worshipped Him. She sat and heard the word. How did she do that? *Sat at His feet* indicates that she was undistracted, focused. *Heard* indicates she took heed how she listened with a teachable spirit, earnest to learn, not with a hard heart that “already knows it all.”
- C. What did Jesus teach Mary? We do not know for sure, but it is probably what He has been saying all along up to this point:
  1. The priority of God’s word in a person’s life.

2. That God must have first place in your life.
3. That you must not put God to the test.
4. That He is the Messiah sent to save Jew and Gentile.
5. That He has power over unclean spirits and death.
6. The Kingdom of God.
7. The need to “catch” people.
8. That He has power to forgive sins.
9. The call to follow Jesus.
10. To call sinners to repentance.
11. That Jesus is going to suffer and die.
12. That what Jesus is teaching is new, not just the same old Law.
13. That He is the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath.
14. The beatitudes: blessings from heaven await those who are spiritually hungry and mourn and are persecuted.
15. Love your enemies, do good, give.
16. Checking yourself before jumping on others in criticism.
17. Obedience to God.

And that is a summary only through Luke 6!

- D. We know what Jesus was teaching Martha because Luke tells us. What Jesus teaches Martha He also teaches us.
- E. Notice that Martha was serving the Lord. The service became more about her than him, as it can easily do in our lives. But she was trying to do something good for God. In this passage we are not talking about Martha doing worldly, useless stuff and comparing that to sitting at the feet of Jesus. We are looking at busy service for the Lord and comparing *that* to sitting at Jesus’s feet. The issue of completely worldly things is not even on the table and should be easy for us to handle when it comes to the comparison of sitting at Jesus’s feet.

Do note also that being active in serving the Lord is not bad. This passage does not teach it is bad. But being a busy beaver “doing” becomes a problem when it overtakes “being” with the Lord.

- F. Martha’s task is, to her limited view, the most important thing at the moment. But it is *not* most important. We are deceived into thinking that what we are doing is the highest priority. It is easy and natural to think that our present task, our projects, or our priorities are the most important because it is *our* judgment that decides to do it. Our small perspective makes this difficult to see.
- G. Martha’s task is *distracting*. A good dictionary defines this as when a person’s attention is directed from one thing, and then another, and then another. Her attention was drawn in many directions. She was frenetic, crazily getting hospitality ready.

Martha was welcoming (good), serving (sort of good, but “much” serving was driving her mad), distracted, multi-tasking, resentful, experiencing tumult, fussing, focusing on the unnecessarily elaborate (MacArthur’s study notes), restless and agitated (Geldenhuys commentary on Luke).

- H. She questioned the Lord (accused Him?) about not caring. “Is it of any concern to you at all that I’m left to do this myself?” Is that true? Not at all, but the Lord has other things in mind, far more important things than her mundane concerns. As is *always* the case, when you accuse the Lord of wrongdoing, you can be sure that the problem is not in Him. It is in *you*.
- I. What the misplaced priority does to your mind and body is described by our Lord in two words: *worried* and *troubled*. The frenzied activity leads to a troubled mind. You might be in that state sometimes, even if you disagree!

J. Some more definitions:

1. *Serving* is diakonia – not a bad thing! But when it is out of control, chaos, keeping you from the Lord, then it is bad.
2. *Distracted* – pulled in many directions at once, pulled around. It gives me the idea of someone in a situation who wants to pull her hair out.

3. *Worried* – apprehensive, anxious, concerned. And this when Phil. 4:6 says that we are not to be anxious about anything. That does not mean “anxious about nothing except the thing we want to be anxious about”! The Lord directs us to avoid anxiety about clothing, food, hydration, our stature or life span, or the things of tomorrow (Matthew 6:25, 27-28, 31, 34). That which comes first is the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We long for that kingdom to make its appearance, and meanwhile we cultivate righteousness in our lives and in the lives of others that we may be fit citizens of that kingdom.
  4. *Troubled* seems to be a direct translation from Greek to English. This is the feeling of a super-busy housewife with guests on short-notice and not enough help.
- K. In this situation, the Lord Jesus was not in a hurry to eat. Dinner could have been an hour or two late and He would not have complained! Mary was absorbed in listening and time flies when you are with the Lord.

### III. Application

- A. **Wrong “application.”** Please, please do not think that this message is about being focused or listening carefully, or not being distracted and reducing your multi-tasking time or improving time management, or “choosing different priorities” in isolation from Biblical concerns. Those are interesting “human” problems and solutions that people author books about, and teach time management classes, and so forth. But they are not the real issue here. The real issue is that those characteristics of our behavior must center around Jesus. Focus is great, but focusing on the wrong thing is terrible. Listening carefully to the wrong doctrine can be deadly, and itself distracting you from the main issue of life, namely knowing God and His Son through the gospel.
- B. The issue is not sitting for relaxation, that is, that everyone needs a break or a vacation or “me” time. This is not a passage that teaches us to avoid serving Jesus or let others do all the difficult labor. It is sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn. It is *active*, not *passive*. We still are to follow His example of serving (John 13) to put feet to the

things we learn. If you need to remember this, whenever you hear people saying they need “me” time, think that you need your “Jesus” time.

- C. **Right application.** What is the issue? The issue is that the Lord Jesus and His teaching should have your focus, your listening attention. He should fill up your affections and desires so that you avoid unnecessary distractions and multi-tasking while with Him. Though we cannot literally “sit at his feet” like Mary did then, today we do the same basic thing when we pray, read the Word, spend time in meaningful conversation with one another, hearing preaching, sing hymns of praise, hearing others worshipping God, and the like.
- D. I am a person just like you are, so I suffer the same kinds of desires and distractions and ideas and the tug of the material and so on.
- E. Churches get off the Great Commission and instead dig wells and build hospitals and plant trees and get involved in social programs and social controversies. Are those really the “one thing that is needed”? Instead, they need to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what He wants them to do to share the message of saving grace to the world.
- F. Young people focus on games and communication technology and are resentful when asked to do work to obey their parents instead of honoring them in obedience to Christ’s word. How do those things compare to the “one thing that is needed”?
- G. Women can get distracted by various doctrines and adorning themselves in terms of outward appearance. Perhaps they want more nice furniture and things around the home and new colors. But are those things the “one thing that is needed”?
- H. Men love their expensive toys, and relaxation, and their pet projects, etc. Must own that boat, RV (many vacations are absolutely necessary, right?), second house, and other extra toys. Improvement projects consume tremendous amounts of time. Things must be exactly right—not functional and clean, but up to date and extra features and... But are any of those “the one thing

that is needed”? Or do they take away time from the one thing that is needed?

- I. What is it about priorities? What do they represent? Where the money is, the heart will be also. I guess if time is money, then where your time is, there your heart is also. Would you rather spend extra time working on the project at home (or fill in the blank), or... being at church? Be honest with yourself.

I use “being at church” as a proxy for “sitting at the Lord’s feet” because frankly, there are some of us who just do not spend serious time in the Word of God on our own, so the impact of church meetings are the closest we come to spending time with the Lord. For others of us who do spend time in the word of God, I give many thanks. That will cause us to *desire* to be with God’s people even more!

- J. One other application: anxiety can be pushed down from parents to children through over-control or just the troubled atmosphere in the home. If parents are worried all the time about the world ending due to some catastrophe, that has a real impact on their children. I have observed this and have read about it.

## Conclusion

One other thing: remember that Martha was trying to serve the Lord Jesus. And there is nothing wrong with that when considered in isolation from everything else. But when the activities and programs of your church life become frenetic and you begin to complain, the making of disciples has become secondary. The problem is one of proportion and priority. Our focus should be to become like Jesus by being with Him. Church is not about programs and activities. It is about people becoming like Jesus Christ. Some churches need to reduce their activities and programs and take some time to focus. I am not certain we need to do that, because many of us are not crazy busy with church stuff most of the time. But we need to be clear on our priority: being like Jesus by being with Him more.

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