

One thing is necessary
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(READ Luke 10:38-42)

Who feels bad for Martha? Poor Martha. She does all the work; Mary just relaxes and sits with Jesus. And then, on top of that, Mary is the good example and Martha is the bad example; thanks a lot, Jesus! I suppose Mary is prettier and gets more attention from the boys, too.

Maybe we feel bad for Martha because we see ourselves in her; she represents us. We work, work, work, run, run, run and nobody seems to care or says “thank you.” It’s pretty easy for bitterness to set in. But it’s important for us to see and realize that Martha is the one who is corrected by Jesus. Her life isn’t the life aligned properly with what matters most. And that’s important to see. Even with the good that Martha is trying to do (and it seems that she is trying to do good... we’ll talk more about this in a minute) Martha’s life is the one that is not properly aligned with Jesus. So, if we relate to Martha that might mean our lives, too, aren’t aligned with what’s most important even when we are trying to do good things. Let that sink in. And it’s quite important figuring out how Martha was in the wrong; what was her error? And when we find Martha’s mistake, then we might just find our own. Remember a couple of weeks ago how I mentioned I have a prayer that loving correction would become a normal part of our culture. And when it’s a part of our culture we won’t be afraid or embarrassed when we need correction and we won’t be shocked or disappointed when others need correction. So, let’s try and practice that this morning - receiving Jesus’ kind correction.

This story provides us a great example of how even doing something good can turn into something bad or unhelpful. Notice how Martha was practicing the Christian virtue of hospitality. Vs. 38 says, “And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.” How lovely. And I think it’s significant that Martha is singled out as the initiator of this gift. It doesn’t say “Martha and Mary” welcomed Jesus or “Martha, Mary, and Lazarus” (that’s their brother). No, *Martha* welcomed Jesus. She was stepping up, obeying God’s commands. That helps us understand, too, why she got distracted with the many needs; it’s her responsibility to take care of the guests she invited into her home. But Martha’s train ran off the rail; what happened?

The problem starts, it seems, with a shift of motives. Do you see that there in vs. 40? “But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’” Notice how Martha’s care shifted from Jesus to herself. *I’m* left doing all the work *myself*. Tell Mary to help *me*! Something became more important than Jesus; something became of greater concern than Jesus and his agenda and that was Martha. Martha had a plan, she had a vision, she had concerns and when Mary didn’t align herself with Martha’s plans she took bad step.

It's a sneaking thing, right? Martha wanted to do good. She wanted to be a blessing to her Lord and those traveling with him. But even good things can be wrongly prioritized. And when that happens, anxiety and worry will rise. And it makes sense, right? Anxiety is misappropriated fear. When I say misappropriated, what I mean is anxiety is being afraid of the wrong thing. Not all fear is wrong or bad; in fact, fearful responses are meant to be a mechanism to keep us safe. And of course, we want the fear of the Lord. That's the one fear that we can always count on leading us towards a wise and fruitful life. Prov. 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Wisdom is the that path towards life; so, fearing God is a path that leads to life. We want that. But anxiety and worry is fear fixed on the wrong thing. Put in the most simplest of terms: worry is fear that my plan isn't going to work out. And that's what Martha had; she had a plan, it wasn't working out the way she hoped and worry and anxiety began to rise.

Consider this with me, too: is it possible that Martha was using her work to hide from Jesus? You know, the text doesn't say that explicitly, but I have a hunch it's true. First of all, anxiety isn't neutral. What I mean by that is anxiety reveals allegiances; Martha's anxiety revealed she was more loyal to herself than the master; she had misplaced priorities and we have them, too. I hope that's not so surprising to you; this is truth that reveals our need for God. And there's something helpful about seeing and learning this. Here's how this is helpful: by analyzing and evaluating your anxiety you can discover how your life isn't quite aligned with God's way; you can see what your soul is truly prioritizing. That's a good thing. Listen to your emotions, my good friends. God designed them in you to help you see what's happening in your heart. They are a window into your soul. Jesus seems to be trying to help Martha with this very thing. He said to Martha, "You're anxious and troubled about many things," but you're ignoring the one thing that matters. Martha, you care about the wrong stuff; Martha, your focus is all wrong.

Another reason why I wonder if her busyness was an effort to hide from Jesus is because we do this, too. I know some of you do this; I do this. Sometimes, to avoid taking the journey I need to take to avoid repenting like I should; I hide from the demands of being a godly man *by* getting busy. I work harder and when I do I get distracted. And it even feels virtuous. "Look at the good I'm doing! Look how I'm being productive." But sometimes the real reason I'm keeping busy is so I don't have to do what I must to do. Whether Martha knows she's doing it or not, her distractions are keeping her from what we must do. And I'm wondering how many of us, whether we know or not, are doing the exact same thing.

How might we know? Well, maybe two ways really quickly here. First of all, does my service to others make me bitter. Martha was angry. When we are serving with the wrong motives, we'll get angry, too, when things don't work like we think they should. Secondly, have I grown comfortable, or have I just accepted, something that's not in step with following Jesus. I've just come to accept that my husband and I can never have a better relationship. I've run out of parenting ideas and I'm giving up. Pay attention to these signs as they can help us know

where our hearts are. Sometimes, we can work to ignore something that we shouldn't be ignoring and the path towards life starts with acknowledging the problem.

Jesus' words go right to the heart of the problem. Look at vs. 41, "But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.'" So, the problem wasn't that Mary wasn't helping; the problem wasn't Martha's care about hospitality. The problem was that she was anxious and troubled by many things - about the wrong things. Jesus has already warned us that the cares and worries of the world will keep us from true discipleship. In Luke 8:14 Jesus said, "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." If there is any verse we wealthy, busy, preoccupied, American Christians need it's this one. Take Luke 8:14 very seriously, my friends.

As people with packed calendars, let's get honest about the solution that Jesus lays out for us. We find it in vs. 42; let's read that again (READ). There are two significant points Jesus makes in his solution, in which he praises Mary. The first point that is critical is when Jesus uses the word *necessary*. "But one thing is *necessary*, Martha." Jesus could have said important - but one thing is important. But saying Mary's example is important misses the total transformation that we must take when we follow Jesus. We'd all say what Mary has done - prioritizing the humble posture of submitting to Jesus - is important. But here's the deal: we have a lot of important things in life. So, get this: Jesus is included in my big list of important things. That list includes my family and my job. My friends are pretty important, too, especially our weekend trips to the lake or up north. My vacation home is also pretty important, as well as my yearly golfing or hunting trips out west. Come to think of it: I have a lot of important things. Here's what I've learned about myself and about many of us: when Jesus is one important thing among many, he becomes one of the least important. It's just the way it works.

Jesus said, "Martha, one thing is *necessary*." There is one thing that is a non-negotiable. You have one thing that you cannot live without. It's not your retirement home; it's not your important civic responsibilities; it's not even your family time. You have just one thing that you cannot live without and still be my disciple - humbly and principally aligning yourself with the words and life of Jesus. You can't live without that, FBC. And I'll be honest about myself, friends: if you judge me by my actions (which, of course, is exactly what you should judge me by) it doesn't always look like I can't live without Jesus. It looks like I can't live without my sports, or my favorite food (man, I love my burgers), and yes, my family. Too often that's what looks necessary. Friends, how about you? What's necessary? Is Jesus necessary? And don't just analyze yourself by how you feel? Examine your actions. Examine what you do to make Jesus necessary. That's obvious, right? If I tell Korby she's my top priority, but forget our anniversary, ignore Valentine's Day, never compliment her... is she going to feel all warm and fuzzy that I say she's necessary? I don't think so.

The second significant point Jesus makes is saying *one thing* is necessary. Just one thing. Life in the kingdom, following Jesus, has a remarkable focus and clarity about it. You

pretty much just have one thing to do: die to yourself align all your life with Jesus in faith. How simple, right? Simple, but not easy. Do you know that distinction? Something can be remarkably simple, but incredibly difficult. This is one of them. Life is found when we repent of taking our own path and follow Jesus in obedient faith - simple. But it's the hardest thing you will ever do; in fact, God's word says it's impossible without the grace of God. Why is that? Because you have to die to yourself. You have to humble yourself before God. You have to admit your need in every aspect of your life. You have to surrender all of your priorities and pride to Jesus. That doesn't just happen. Our flesh hates all of that. But when we surrender to the Holy Spirit, when we resolve ourselves to trust God's word instead of our words, it happens, by his grace, over our lifetime walking with him.

This isn't the only time we learn about the one thing principle. I want to show you two passages that highlight this same focus, this same call to make our lives about one thing, and notice how both times the one thing principle is the antidote towards worry and anxiety. First, turn back to Matthew 6. Look at vs. 25 (READ). What's Jesus helping with? Worry and anxiety. Later in vs. 31 Jesus says again, "Therefore, do not be anxious." I oftentimes recommend Matthew 6 to my anxious friends because we see all kinds of reasons why we don't need to be anxious. But towards the end of this section he gives the alternative lifestyle we should embrace. Instead of living anxiously, he says, live this way and that answer is in vs. 33; let's read it now (READ). Realign your life in such a way that you have a singular focus and priority: God's kingdom. That's how you live; that should be the orientation of your life.

We see this in the OT, too. Go to Psalm 27. This is a psalm of David as we can all see ourselves from the very beginning of this psalm. Let me read vs. 1-3 (READ). What's David's biggest problem or concern in Psalm 27? Fear. Worry. And for good reason. Evildoers are pressing in on him. An army has boxed him in. He's got trouble all around. Maybe that's how some of you feel today and the anxiety is killing you. Look what he says next (READ vs. 4-5).

Do you see it again? I need one thing. There's just one thing I need to do; one thing I want as trouble surrounds me. That one thing is God. I will seek after God; I need to dwell in his house. I need to see him and his glory, his beauty, his power. I need to see his grace for me and his care of me. I need to be reminded of his strength because my trouble looks ominous and threatening.

All three of those passages, Psalm 27, Matthew 6, and ours in Luke 10 emphasize the necessity of one thing in the face of anxiety and trouble. Do you see why? The more you align yourself with the greatest, the most beautiful, the most consequential, the most powerful, the most comforting name there is, the smaller your troubles will appear. The less significant your earthly treasures will be. The more courage you will have to lean into the challenges of this life. That's why you must prioritize the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life. It is necessary for you and for me to fully submit ourselves to Christ in the manner that Mary did. She sat at his feet and said, "I am yours; I'm ready to learn from you." When we do, friends, we will be spared the anxiety and troubles that plagued Martha.

Do you know what to do next? Repent and believe in the gospel. Turn away from the many distractions. Turn away from making many things necessary when only one thing is required. Sit at the feet of Jesus, FBC. He died for you. His word is true. His Spirit is powerful. He has mercy and grace for you. Align yourself with the Lord Jesus, die to all your earthly desires, and watch God give you all that's required.

Key vs. Luke 10:42

Questions for the week

- In what ways do you relate to Martha and Mary?
- Can you name the “many thing” you get anxious and troubled by?
- What must you repent of you more faithfully align yourself with Jesus?