

The One Thing Necessary

Jack Hughes

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We are at the end of Luke 10, and if the Rapture doesn't occur, we're actually going to finish [it], which is a huge milestone in the Gospel of Luke. So, if you have your Bibles, you can turn [to] the end of Luke 10, [where] we're going to be looking at verses 38–42.

I actually plan a preaching schedule that's about six [or] eight months in advance, break[ing] up the text into what I think I'm going to preach on. A lot of times I'm wrong [and] I preach on less than I think [I can]. In this section [in Luke], I was looking, and I was thinking, "This is OK," but after I studied it, [I realized] there are some great things here. This is really, really good. I know you will be challenged and encouraged by this text this morning because it [has] this great thing in there that I cannot wait to tell you. So, I'm going to [tell you].

First, I want to tell you about one of my tool problems. In my lifetime, I have worn out an entire fleet of cordless drills. [Do] you know what wears out on them? It's not the drill. (I mean, one drill I did drop from a two-story building onto a concrete slab, [so] it didn't die for this reason.) Almost all the other ones quit working because the batteries just quit working. What happens is [that] when you're using cordless drills, at first, when they're brand new, they stay charged for hours. It's like they never wear out. Then, after a while, they're good for three hours, and then an hour, and then a half hour, and then a minute, and pretty soon, you're charging more than

you're drilling and driving. So, you think, "I'm going to get a couple [of] new batteries," and you discover that the batteries cost as much as a whole brand-new drill, so then you buy a new drill.

This is similar to Christians who, in the beginning of their walk with the Lord, man, they're just charged up all the time. They're excited. They love church; they love the Bible. I love it when they come up to me, and they say, "Did you know that Jesus was God?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did."

They [say], "Man, this is so cool!" Everything is new [to them]—church, the Bible, fellowship. They're excited. They have passion, and yeah, they know they're sinners, but they know they're forgiven. They know God has them in His hands, their lives are being transformed, and they're so thrilled, and have so much zeal and passion that they tell all their friends and all their family. It's great.

But, after a time, something can happen. I think it happens a little differently for [everyone], but the cause of why it happens, I think, is the same. Over time, a lot of people lose their zeal, passion, and joy for the Lord. They look at new Christians like, "Oh, you're still in *that* phase. It wears off after a while." [It may be] because [of] their knowledge of their own sin, [or] maybe [their] familiarity with things once new breeds contempt and complacency. Maybe, as they [were] in the zeal of their young Christianity, [they] went out and shared the gospel with a bunch of people [and were] persecuted, and [that] squelched back their zeal. Now, as they learn the Bible more and more, they [may think], "I [have] to do that and I [have] to do that, too. I've got to do that, too?" It doesn't matter who you are—junior high, [there are] commands to you; high school, [there are] commands to you; young married, [there are] commands to you; single, [there are] commands to you; old people, [there are] commands to you. Command, command, command. You could look at the Bible as a whole bunch of do's and don'ts [just aimed at you], and that's in addition to all the other commands that are for every believer.

A lot of people get to the place where they're just about ready to throw up their hands, and say, "I can't do it! I can't obey. There [are] too many rules, too many regulations. I know they're all good, I know this is the right thing to do, but I've tried [reading] books, I've tried talking to people, I've asked people to pray for me, I've tried as hard as I can to get organized, to get disciplined, and my life isn't working. I don't know what's wrong." It's not like these people want to go apostate. It's not like they're thinking, "I hate God now. I'm leaving." [Instead], there's this frustration. They're kind of like Bunyan's character, Christian, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*—they have this big burden on their backs that they just can't seem to get off. That joy, sorrow, peace, and the thrill that they had at the beginning [are] not there.

When they read Romans 7, and they read that little phrase that Paul writes, when he says, "And the things I don't want to do, I do; and I do the very things I hate" [see Romans 7:15], they [say], "Man, I know that! That is so comforting! I love that verse." But then, in the back of their minds, they're also thinking, "But, Paul still had joy. He still had passion; he still had zeal, and a love for the Lord. It's not happening [for me]. I don't feel good. I am burdened." Then, maybe, they begin to think, "Maybe I've just got this all wrong. Maybe all that really cool, exciting, fun, thrill[ing], pleasurable experience I had at the beginning of my Christian walk is something that wears off, and now I'm wishing I was a baby Christian again, and that's to be left behind [see 1 Corinthians 13:11]." [Then] they think, "No, no. That couldn't be. Surely, as you grow in the Lord, your love for the Lord, your zeal for the Lord, your passion for the Lord should *increase*, not decrease." [You may even be] out there thinking, "That's me. I don't know. I just don't know."

Well, I have good news for you: our text just happens to tell us what you need. What you need is the one necessary thing that's going to cause every area of your life to fall into place. It's not a system. It's not a big, complicated law system like the Law of Moses. It's not the twelve steps to whatever. It's just one thing—one thing and one thing only—that if you commit to [it], everything else will fall into place. Doesn't that sound sim-

ple? It is! It's very simple. As we look at our text this morning, we're going to find out what [that one thing] is.

Just to give you a little bit of background [to our text], at the end of Luke 10, the context is uncertain. Luke puts in the parable of the Good Samaritan and the situation that led to it at the end of [chapter] 10, and then it also talks about [Jesus] going toward Bethany [see 10:38–39], which is where Martha and Mary lived. We know that from John 11–12. So, that's all we know. We know from the end of [Luke] 9 [that Jesus] was headed for Jerusalem, but we don't know if Luke took some other episodes and kind of plopped them in there because he wanted to fill in the gap, or [if] they're actually in sequence, [or] if Jesus already went to Jerusalem and then went on a little excursion and came back, or [if] He decided to go to Jerusalem [later]. But, before He got to Jerusalem, He decided to take a little excursion through Bethany.

If you look at a map, you have Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, Jerusalem and the area of the Dead Sea toward the south, and just south-southwest of Jerusalem would be Bethany. It's a short distance away, so maybe [Jesus went] past Jerusalem and He's coming back. We don't know. What we do know is [that] He's heading into Bethany. And so, follow along in [Luke] 10:38–42 as I read:

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

From this text, we are going to extract two warnings, which, if heeded, are going to help you stay devoted to the one necessary thing, which will then cause all the other areas of your life—everything—to fall into proper perspective. It will keep your spiritual batteries charged in every circumstance in life.

The first thing I want to do is direct your attention to verse 38 and our first point, which is: Don't let the busyness of ministry distract you from the Lord. Look at verse 38: "Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary." Again, John 11–12 tell us that Mary and Martha were sisters and lived with their brother, Lazarus, in Bethany. We don't know why [they were living together]. Maybe it was because Martha was the older sister, or maybe because she was a widow. We don't know. But [we do know that] she was in charge of the household. She was kind of the matriarch both in our text and in the one in John 11–12. We see her as the one who is in charge here.

Look at the middle of [Luke 10:]39, where we read that Mary was "seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word." This is something you need to understand. Luke isn't saying here that Mary just happened to be plopped down in front of Jesus, listening to Him. That's not what Luke means. In that culture, rabbis would take on certain students. Those certain students, [called "disciples"], would literally sit at [the rabbi's] feet. So, for instance, Paul, who was a student, [or] disciple, of Gamaliel, might be described as, "Oh, yes, Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel." Everybody knew that this was just a synonym for being a disciple. So, when it says [in our text] that Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, it's really saying that Mary was taking on the role of a disciple of Jesus.

Now, you [may] say, "So what?" Well, that was a big deal [at that time] because rabbis didn't take women on as disciples. But Jesus did. If you remember, in Luke 8:1–3, it says:

The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

So, here, we have women, as Jesus' disciples, ministering to Him [and] ministering with Him. This was radical. The rabbis would have never [done] this, but Jesus, the rabbi, the Great Teacher, [did].

Look at [Luke 10:]40: "But Martha was distracted with all her preparations." Now, notice the little phrase there "but." It's a conjunction [that] emphasizes a contrast here. Martha is busy with her preparations, and cooking, and getting everything ready, but Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. Martha, the text says, was distracted with all her labors. The word "distracted," as the New American Standard [version] has it, means literally "[dragged] away, or pulled away from something." Here, Martha is being pulled away, [dragged] away. Because of the preparations she has to make, she's being pulled away from Jesus. You can understand why. I mean, after all, Jesus was the celebrity of all Israel. You can imagine, there you are in your quiet little town of Bethany, you're sweeping off the front porch, and somebody comes up, [and says], "Jesus is coming. He's coming with His disciples, and He wants to eat at *your* house! Ah!" What do you do? You [would jump into action, and say], "OK, OK, go get some help!"

She probably emptied out her piggy bank and got as much food together as she could, begged every neighbor, [and] started immediately engaging in the cultural expectations that people had of women at that time—that when you had a guest the woman was to get on it, make the meal, entertain the guest, [and] be hospitable. [Martha has] all these expectations [laid on her], and she's a leader. When you look at this text and [the text in] John, she's on task. So, she makes a plan, she's got a goal, she's in task mode. She [says], "OK, we're going to get the food together. How many were there?"

“Well, there was Jesus, and there were the Twelve,” and maybe their families, and maybe the seventy. We’re talking [about] a big deal. Even if it was *only* Jesus and His disciples, it would be a big deal, wouldn’t it? [If] you have thirteen people over, that’s scary, and it could have been a lot more [people] than that. We know that Mary was helping at the beginning because when the text goes on, Martha clearly says that her sister *left her* to sit at Jesus’ feet [see Luke 10:40]. So, we know that Mary was helping at the beginning, but as soon as Jesus got there, she plopped down in front of Jesus.

[Martha] is very wound up about this. She’s so wound up about her sister sitting at Jesus’ feet, playing the part of a disciple, that she is exasperated to the point of anger. Look at the middle of verse 40: “And she came up to Him and said. . . .” You just need to stop here. What this means is [that] she burst in and interrupted Jesus. Jesus is sitting there, and all His disciples are sitting down in front, and He’s talking, dialoguing with them, teaching them, and [in comes] Martha. [She] barges in and stops the teaching session. Now, that’s not good. That is not good because in that culture, women just were not supposed to do that. [They were] supposed to be not seen, not heard, cooking in the kitchen. [And besides,] you don’t interrupt *the* Teacher. She says, in verse 40: “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone?” This is right up there with Peter’s rebuke, “Lord, surely you shall not die!” [see Matthew 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33]. It’s probably worse. You’re thinking, “Why’s that?” Well, Martha is accusing Jesus of being uncaring. Peter didn’t do that. She’s accusing Jesus of *failing to do what is right*. She’s rebuking the Lord of Glory for not telling her sister to help.

Some ancient manuscripts read: “At that time, the disciples moved away from Martha for fear they might be scorched by the fire that would fall from heaven!” Not really, but you can imagine. You can imagine everybody sitting there, [thinking], “Whoa!” Martha has just lost it. She’s in the kitchen, she [has] too much to do, she [has] all these preparations, and she’s fuming, and fuming, and fuming, and finally she pops into the teaching session, and

says, “Lord, You don’t care! You’ve blown it! You should have been telling my sister to get up and help me in the kitchen.”

Everybody is [thinking], “Whoa!”

If that wasn’t bad enough, look at the very end of [Luke 10:]40. Martha then *commands* Jesus: “Then tell her to help me.” In Greek, there are a lot of different kinds of commands, and this is the strongest form. “Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, I command you to tell my sister to get up and come help me in the kitchen.” It’s so bad! It is *so bad*. You know, *selah* and pause, and consider. It’s just bad. Martha was so anxious and bothered about her preparation, her plans, seeking to minister to other people [that] she was sinning to do it. Martha was like many Christians today, who [are] neglecting the one thing necessary to do “ministry,” but in the flesh. She wasn’t trusting the Lord here. She had no peace, no joy, no happiness. It wasn’t a pleasure to her. She was burdened. She was angry. She was bitter. She was at her wit’s end, and she just barged in, stopped the teaching session, and started telling Jesus that He blew it and commanding Him to do things. That is bad. That is *really* bad.

Her spiritual batteries were dead, and she was running on the power of the flesh. She was like those people that Jeremiah described in Jeremiah 17:5–6:

Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind
And makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the LORD.
For he will be like a bush in the desert
And will not see when prosperity comes,
But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness,
A land of salt without inhabitant.

Sounds pretty gruesome, doesn’t it? That’s the condition of a lot of people’s souls who are in church, who are busy serving, like Martha. They’re over there, [muttering], “I’m doing my ministry, but no one is helping me. I’m doing my ministry, but the helpers I’ve got aren’t doing it right.” They’re living in the “land of salt,” but [they’re thinking], “I’m serving the

Lord. At least *I'm* doing it right. If people could just be like me, then we'd really get some stuff done in this church."

I don't know why people are laughing. [Laughs.] [It's] because you know how it is, [don't you]? I know how it is, too. I get up there in my office sometimes, I turn on my calendar, and it's just like, "Ah!" I just want to just crumble in[to] the fetal position. [But then] I [say], "OK, Lord," and off I go. Sometimes there are so many things to do—I have to get my sermon done, I have to get [my class notes for] Sunday night done, I have to deal with this thing, and the elders want me to do this thing, and I have to do that thing, and this thing. You get so busy doing the Lord's work that you don't take time with Jesus to just stop, and say, "Lord, I have so much to do." Like Luther said, "I'm going to spend the first three hours in prayer." That seems so wrong, doesn't it, to somebody who wants to trust in mankind and make flesh his strength? But it sounds right to somebody who knows that the only good ministry is ministry that flows from a heart of devotion [to] and [with] love [for] God.

Maybe you volunteered to do some ministry task, you're working hard, you're ministering to others, but there's no joy, no peace, no passion, no pleasure in giving God glory. You find yourself distracted, irritated, complaining, grumbling, and trudging through the swamp of despair, and wading in the muck of your own fleshly pursuits because you just don't know. It's just not right. You begin to resent others because they aren't doing what you think they should do. They should get up and help you in the kitchen, or whatever. This fleshly ministering heart spews up a whole bunch of black fumes of discontent because you're neglecting the one necessary thing—the one thing that would make all of these things a joy even if you were the only one doing [them]. [If you were doing the one necessary thing, you could say], "Well, I can't do it all, but I can do some. I'm going to do what I can for the Lord because I love Jesus."

Maybe [that fleshly place is] where you are right now, or maybe you're in a worse place. Maybe if I were to come up to you, and say, "So, tell me

what ministries you're in," you [would say, angrily], "You know, I used to be involved in such and such."

"No, no, where are you serving *now*?"

"You know what? When I was in such and such, it was really great."

"Yeah, but, you know, where are you serving. . ."

"Man, hasn't it been hot lately?"

"No, no, let's talk about what. . ."

"I'm not serving."

"Why aren't you involved in the church?"

"Well, I wanted the Lord to tell my sisters or brothers in Christ to help me, and they didn't, so I quit, and I'm not going back."

That's what happens. Some people can look back, and say, "I haven't served for months," [or] years, "because other people let me down."

"Did Jesus ever let you down?"

"Well, no."

"Why were you so anxious? Why were you so fretting? Why were you so bothered by so many things?"

See, the byproduct of neglecting the one necessary thing is sin. If you develop a habit of neglecting the one necessary thing, sins are going to start popping up in your life—bad attitudes, bad actions—and they're going to be like weeds in the summer. You're going to hack on those things, [but] you're not going to be able to get control of them. You're going to say, "Let me get discipline!" and you're going to fail. "I'm going to get committed!" and you're going to fail. "I'm going to say, 'no'! Just say 'no'!" and it's not going to work.

Then, what's going to happen is [that], after time, your life is going to be so messed up [that] it's going to be like this thick, dark, jungle of tangled sins, and you're not going to be able to push through. You're just going to be snarled there, and you're going to be looking around, [wondering], "What am I doing here? How did I get here? I can't get out! What do I do?" That leads us [to our second point, which is]: Don't neglect the one thing necessary.

Look at [Luke 10:]41. Remember, Martha has just barged in, accused Jesus of not caring, of being neglectful, and then has commanded Jesus to do her will. Verse 41 [says]: “But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things.’” Whenever Jesus uses your name twice, it’s not good. Jesus is so incredibly patient here. [Can’t you] see Him just [snapping] and [Martha turning into] salt, like Lot’s wife or something, right in the middle of her [yammering]? “Lord, don’t You. . .” [poof]. (Then they could take her to Morton’s house.)

The Lord says, “Martha, Martha.” He [does] this to two other people. He [does] it in Luke 22 to Simon [Peter] when He’s talking to Peter and Peter’s not doing [very] well—he’s talking about who’s the greatest, and [Jesus] says, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat” [Luke 22:31]. He [also does] it to Paul when he was Saul, persecuting the Church. On that Damascus road, when He stopped [Saul] and struck him blind, and said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” [see Acts 9:4].

So, when Jesus says, “Martha, Martha,” you know He’s [thinking], “Whoa! OK!” He says, “You are worried and bothered about so many things” [Luke 10:41]. Look at verse 42: “But only one thing is necessary.” Just stop there. That is such an interesting little phrase, isn’t it? Think of all the commands of the Bible—all the do’s, all the don’ts, all the things you get preached at and taught, and you know you should and shouldn’t do, all those things that burden you—and Jesus is saying, “Take them all away. Push them all away.” Here, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God, Jesus says [that] there’s only one thing, and one thing only, that’s necessary for every Christian. One thing. That makes it pretty simple, doesn’t it? That is so great! It’s like, “Oh, I could do *one thing*.” Serving Jesus is good, serving others is good, being hospitable is good, “but,” Jesus says, [which is a] contrast word, “only one thing is necessary.” It is a radical statement. I don’t know about you, but it makes me want to ask, “What about all the other things?” All those other things are important. Jesus isn’t saying, “Pitch all the commands of the Bible,” but what He is saying is [that] when

it comes to everything that we could and should do for the Lord, one thing is *absolutely* necessary. That's what He's saying.

[Martha] was doing what was right in wanting to serve people. That was good. [Martha] had good intentions—to want to feed them, that was honorable. It was OK. But Jesus didn't *command* her to do that. That was optional. Jesus didn't say, "OK, Martha, I want you to feed everybody. I want you to get your sister, Mary, I want you both to get together, I want you to create a huge feast for us, and I want it to be done by 6 [o'clock]." He didn't say that. Jesus fed thousands, didn't He? [If] Jesus wants dinner, He just says, "Dinner." Jesus isn't looking for help here. Do you really think that if Martha said, "He's coming? Oh, great!" and she ran out to meet Him, and [she] and Mary sat down at Jesus' feet everybody would have starved that night? Not on your life. Jesus would never let it happen.

Notice that the one thing necessary isn't being saved, it isn't doing good work, it isn't serving others; it is being willing to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Word. *That* is what it is. It means being a disciple, a learner, a student of Jesus. That's what it means—to long to sit at the feet of, and learn from, Jesus. It means making Jesus the number one priority of life. It means submitting your life to Jesus so that you desire and want to obey Him. It means trusting [in], relying upon, needing, seeking help from Jesus in everything you do, all day long, in every task, no matter what it is. But most important, it means spending time with the Lord—having a quiet time, having devotions, whatever you want to call them. It means having those times when you sit down with your Bible, and you say, "Lord, show me some great and wonderful things from Your Word today," and you read, meditate, ponder, and maybe write down Scriptures to memorize, [and] maybe go over some memory verses. You go through [a passage], you talk to Jesus in prayer, He talks to you through His Word, and you spend time with Jesus. That is the one necessary thing.

A few years back, Rick Warren's *A Purpose Driven Life* fad swept through Christianity. Like all fads, it's fading, but, it had—and is having—a good impact on a lot of people. There are a lot of churches today [that] are

doing the “Forty Days of Purpose,” and a lot of those churches are finding their whole church is being radically transformed. They’re thinking, “Man, this Forty Days of Purpose program is incredible!” But do you know why it’s transforming those churches? [It is] because included in the Forty Days of Purpose is a commitment that each person would spend time engaging in the one thing necessary: sitting down, reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture, [and] praying. Huh, a miracle. You see, many churches don’t practice expository preaching—they don’t take people through the Bible. Many churches don’t encourage and train people in inductive Bible study—how to write an inductive Bible study [or] how to teach an inductive Bible study. Many churches do not promote small group discipleship, or one-on-one discipleship focused around the Word of God and the application of the Word of God.

Most churches have neglected these things for years, and some have never even ever practiced them. In neglecting these things, they’re neglecting the one thing necessary. [As a result], the church becomes full of sin. People start falling apart—they lose their motivation; they lose their zeal. Pretty soon you have a bunch of dead people coming to a dead church, going through the dead, cold, orthodox motions that they’ve always done in their church. Then, along comes the Forty Days of Purpose, and the pastor, trying to get something to revitalize his congregation, says, “We’re going to do this as a congregation. Let’s all commit. It’s forty days—that’s only six weeks. We can do this! We can do this!” And so, he says, “OK, this is what we’re going to do. [Let’s] all get a pamphlet, all read our Bibles, memorize Scripture, pray, engage in the one thing necessary.” People started doing this, and their lives were changed. Huh, incredible.

[Is this] something new? No. This is just the ABCs of Christianity. This is what we try to teach people on day one. “[Do] you know Jesus? OK, get in the Word. This is how you pray. This is how you read the Bible. This is how you study. Get in these things that are going to equip you to spend a lifetime of engaging in the one thing necessary.” You can do the Forty Days of Purpose, but at the end of the forty days, then what happens? What

happens when the forty days end and the preacher still isn't preaching the Word; the sermons still are short, and shallow, and void of doctrine, and accuracy, and application; no one is teaching anybody how to do inductive Bible study; no one is teaching anybody how to teach the Word; the people just are going and they stop? Then the pastor [says], "We need another program, we need another thing." No. You just need to engage in the one necessary thing, which fixes all other things.

Without pursuing the one thing necessary, your spiritual life slowly grows cold. You could be the busiest person at St. Martha's Church, and it's not going to work. You're just going to end up going through the motions. When you get that one thing set in your life, then all of a sudden, you're going to find that zeal, that joy, that happiness, that contentment. You're going to have discernment. You're going to feel close [to] God; you're going to be walking with God. It's going to be great!

[Dr.] J. Vernon McGee, in his farmer-type way, said this:

Sit at Jesus' feet. Look in His Word and see what He has to say. It will help you with your housework. It will make you be a better dishwasher. It will help you sweep the floors cleaner. You will dig a better ditch, mow a better lawn, and study your lesson better. Your work at the office will be easier, and you will be able to drive your car better. Just take time to sit at the feet of Jesus.

That is so right on! He knew it. The difference between having trouble doing a lot of housework and not having trouble is your attitude, and your attitude gets fixed when you spend time with Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, says [of our text in Luke], "Certainly a meal was in order, but what we do *with* Christ is far more important than what we do *for* Christ" [emphasis added]. What Wiersbe is saying is [that] what we do alone in our private devotions with the Lord is much more important than what we do *for* the Lord. Wiersbe goes on to say:

Often in my pastoral ministry, I have asked people with serious problems, “Tell me about your devotional life.” The usual response has been an embarrassed look, a bowed head, and the quiet confession, “I stopped reading my Bible and praying a long time ago.” And they wondered why they had problems!

I was sitting in my office thinking about this. I was trying to think, “Now, who do I know, who have I counseled in the past, who had these big spiritual problems in their lives who were really faithful at being in the Word, studying, [and] praying?” I couldn’t think of anybody. There might have been [someone who was], but I’m telling you, it’s the rare exception because [for] those people who are plugged into Jesus, everything else falls into place. Yeah, they have trials like everybody else. Yeah, they battle sins like everybody else, but the difference is [that] they have the spiritual resources, the joy, the relationship that’s driving their whole life. Jesus is the battery charger for your soul. [If] you unplug from Him, you go dead spiritually. That’s just how it is. Everything else—serving, worshipping, work, play—all flows from your engaging in that one necessary thing.

Wiersbe says:

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. . . . The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will soon end up like Martha: busy but not blessed.

That is so true. You just need to look at your life, and say, “Is that me?” And then ask yourself: Do [I] have the joy? Do [I] have the zeal? Do [I] have the passion? You don’t need to answer: it’s “no” if your answer is [“yes” to the question “Is that me?”].

Spurgeon put it this way in his sermon entitled “Taking Hold Upon God”:

When there is a degeneracy of public manners, you may be sure that there has also occurred a serious decline of secret devotion. When the outward service of the church begins to flag and her holiness declines, you may be sure that her communion with God has been sadly suspended.

Devotion to God will be found to be the basis of holiness and the buttress of integrity. If you backslide in secret before God, you will soon err in public before men. You may judge yourselves, my dear hearers, as to your spiritual state by the condition of your hearts in the matter of prayer.

How are you at the mercy seat? for that is what you really are. Are the consolations of God small with you? That is a minor matter; look deeper—Is there not a restraining of prayer before the living God?

Do you find yourself weak in the presence of temptation? That is important; but search below the surface, and you will find that you have grown lax in supplication, and have failed to keep up continual communion with God.

Man, Spurgeon's advice is so right on. The great Scottish preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne, put all of this very succinctly into one line. He said this: "What a man is on his knees before God in secret, is what he is, and nothing more." That's it! What you are in secret devotions with God alone is what you are and nothing more because that one thing is what drives everything and makes it pleasing to God.

You know, our text [in Luke 10] never even records a single word that Mary says. She's just sitting as a disciple at Jesus' feet, and Jesus says, "I'm not telling her to stop." When you look at that, it tells you some things about Mary, doesn't it? She delighted in Jesus; she wanted to be close to Jesus; she wanted to be a disciple of Jesus; and while she was helping her sister in the kitchen earlier on, she left as soon as Jesus got there. Though there

were cultural pressures upon her to be helping in the kitchen, she said “no.” Though her sister was nagging and fretting, she said “no.” Though she was sitting with a bunch of men, and normally women didn’t sit as disciples in front of rabbis, she was doing that anyway. She didn’t care if everybody got fed or not. She was not going to neglect that one necessary thing. That is why she is such a great example.

If you’re out there, and you’re thinking, “This is so convicting! I need to fix this in my life. I’m hit and miss. I’m like the Sunday paper—[I only show up] once a week. What can I do to be a person who says, ‘My life is dominated by an ironclad commitment to engage in the one thing necessary—to spend time with God?’” I’m not talking about saying, “OK, I have to read my chapter of the Bible,” and then plowing through it, closing your Bible, and [going] off to do your thing. I’m not talking about that. That’s just legalism. That’s like sitting in front of Jesus when He’s teaching, and [saying], “Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh. OK, bye!” That doesn’t work. We’re not talking about a procedure here. We’re talking about maintaining a relationship [in which] you talk with Jesus, and He talks to you through His Word, you pray to Him, and He talks to you through His Word, and you’re meditating on that, and you’re asking Him to help you, you’re giving your requests, you’re praising Him, you’re having this relationship with Jesus. That’s what we’re talking about.

How do you have that? The first thing you have to do is make sure that you have a relationship with Jesus to begin with. If you don’t know the Lord, and you just know *about* the Lord, if you just call yourself a Christian, but you don’t really know what it means to be a Christian, you’ve never had your life changed, you don’t really know what it means to be born again, you’ve never really experienced any sort of life transformation, though now you may go to church, and you may tell other people you’re a Christian, you need to get saved. You need to be born again. You need to understand that you are a sinner, that God is holy, [and] that He must punish you. You need to understand that Jesus came to earth for the express purpose of living a perfect life so that He could die a substitutionary sacrifice—that is,

a substitute for those [who] place their faith in Him—that He died on the cross, bore the sins of the world, was buried, and rose again on the third day. You need to understand that He did that so that you, through faith in what He did, could receive the free gift of eternal life. That is, you turn from your sin to receive Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone to save you. God, then, will cause you to be born again. You will be changed. You will become a new creature in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17]. So, if you have never done that, the beginning to the end here is to get saved. You need to deal with that before the Lord. You need to repent, believe, and be saved.

If you are saved, and you [have] experienced that [transformation], but somehow you've gone from happy, zeal[ous], passionate serving to cold, dead misery, then confess your sins to God. Confess that you have neglected that one thing necessary. Now, again, you may even say, "Well, I read my Bible every day." Yeah, but do you read it like a machine because it's a task, like brushing your teeth? We're not talking about that. It means you get in there, and say, "Lord, I'm a sinner." You confess your sin, you study the Word, you look up stuff. Maybe you're all over the Word, searching out themes, searching out things—something you're interested in, something you're struggling with, something you always wanted to know about—you're *in* the Word. You're buying books, and getting the theology, and getting the commentary, and digging, [and] digging to find out what God has for you. When you find it, you're just so blessed, and you're thanking and praising God. *That's* [the] kind of stuff [we're talking about].

If you're out there, [thinking], "Man, that's not me. I read my half chapter. . ." that's not going to do it for you. That's better than nothing, but barely better than nothing. You need to confess if you've been neglecting that communion with God [and] you need to find out how [to do it properly]. If you don't know how, [then] find a Christian to go with you, and say, "Let's work on our devotions together. Could you teach me how to find whatever I need, and [how to] spend time with Jesus?"

Turn to Revelation 2. I want to show you this because this is such a great and tragic example of what I'm talking about, [and] what the text

[in Luke 10] is talking about. Here, [in Revelation 2], Jesus is speaking to the church at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus was a very well-taught church. They had the Apostle Paul, Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, Timothy, Titus, and Tychicus [teach them]. Paul threw every great teacher he could at [that church]. They had profound discipleship, teaching, and preaching. They were fat with knowledge. Look at [Revelation 2:]1[-3]:

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”

Like Martha, they were very busy doing good. Verse 4 [goes on to say]: “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” You could insert in there, “I have this against you, that you have neglected the one thing necessary.” [Verse 5 continues]: “Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.” [He’s saying]: “Go back! Quit relying on your knowledge, your doctrine, your programs, your church, your strategic location, the history of great teachers you’ve had, and I want you to come back to Me, have devotions with Me, and fall in love with Me. That’s what’s going to make your church work. [If] you neglect that, I’m going to pull the rug out. I’m going to snuff out your candle. The church of Ephesus is going to die.” And, history tells us it did.

If you are very busy, and you look at your life, and you are neglecting the one thing necessary in your life, [this is what you need to do]. You need to be a Christian; you need to confess your sins, even if you are a Christian;

and [you need to] plan to spend time with Jesus. You've got to make a plan. Has your checkbook ever just accidentally balanced itself? Have you ever been sitting there in the living room, watching TV, and all of a sudden the groceries at the store put themselves in a sack, pay for themselves, charge [themselves] to your account, show up, cut themselves up, chop themselves up, cook themselves up, serve themselves up, and you just walk into the kitchen, and say, "Huh, dinner accidentally made itself!"? Has that ever happened? No. Why? [It is] because it takes planning. Everything we do takes planning. If you don't plan to do something, you're planning *not* to do something.

If somebody can come up to you, and [ask], "When do you spend time with the Lord?" and you say, "Uh. . .," you are planning *not* to spend time with the Lord. You are neglecting the one thing necessary. I know the condition of your spiritual life: it's bad. You're living in a stony waste, a land of salt without inhabitant [see Jeremiah 17:6]. Listen, if it comes to choosing, you forsake sleep, food, friends, nagging sisters, peer pressure, whatever you need to forsake in order to engage in that one thing necessary. Then, once you get that out of the way, do whatever that's honoring to the Lord, but don't neglect that one thing. You just resolve, "You know what? There's one thing I'm always going to do forever in my life: I am going to spend time with the Lord." You do that, [and] everything else is going to fall into place. You're going to think, "I have joy again," and it's not because you have the Forty Days of Purpose, it's because you're practicing basic Christianity. You're doing what God commands you to do. You're giving attention to your first love.

Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer, wrote a hymn [that] so perfectly fits our text that I was tempted to exegete it. I'm telling you, this is so good. I'm going to close with this. Actually, I found a piece of [the hymn] in one of the commentaries [I was using], but just a little fragment, and so I [searched] and finally I found the whole thing. It is so exactly what this text [in Luke 10] is trying to teach. As I read it, I want you to notice how Wesley is expressing that everything he does in his life is all because he loves the

Lord, spends time with the Lord, and has devotions with the Lord. His love for God, his closeness with God, is driving everything. So as I go [through the hymn], just listen. It will bless your soul.

LO! I come with joy to do
The Master's blessed will;
Him in outward works pursue,
And serve his pleasure still;
Faithful to my Lord's commands,
I still would choose the better part,
Serve with careful Martha's hands,
And loving Mary's heart.

Careful without care I am,
Nor feel my happy toil,
Kept in peace by Jesu's name,
Supported by his smile;
Joyful thus my faith to show,
I find his service my reward;
Every work I do below,
I do it to the Lord.

Thou, O Lord, in tender love
Dost all my burdens bear,
Lift my heart to things above,
And fix it ever there!
Calm on tumult's wheel I sit,
Midst busy multitudes alone,
Sweetly waiting at thy feet,
Till all thy will be done.

Thou, O Lord, my portion art,
Before I hence remove!
Now my treasure and my heart

Are all laid up above;
Far above all earthly things,
While yet my hands are here employed,
Sees my soul the King of kings,
And freely talks with God.

O that all the art might know
Of living thus to thee!
Find their heaven begun below,
And here thy glory see!
Walk in all the works prepared
By thee, to exercise their grace,
Till they gain their full reward,
And see thy glorious face!¹

That is *so* good! If you didn't get anything [else] out of [this] sermon, I hope you got the one necessary thing, that you just look at your life, and you ask yourself: "Am I neglecting the one necessary thing?" If you don't know how to have quiet times with the Lord, get involved in a discipleship group, a small group, contact a godly person, find out how to have a quiet time with the Lord, and plan to do that *forever* until you die. That is [the] thing you do and it will charge your life and keep it charged until you die or Jesus comes back—and both are good. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for what we learned in this text. We thank You for Martha's bad example, a convicting example because we've all been there. We thank You for Mary's good example, who, in the midst of pressure, anxiety, busyness, [and] expectations ignored it all and would not forsake to sit at Your feet. Father, if there is someone here who doesn't know you, may he or she repent of his or her sins, and place his or her faith in Jesus alone. May You infuse him or her with Your grace, indwell him or her with the Holy Spirit, and, Father, may he or she have joy

¹<http://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/hymn/jwg03/jwg0325.html>

inexpressible, and may he or she, as a beginning, right from the start, make it his or her life plan to engage in the one necessary thing. For the rest of us, especially those who haven't had faithful, consistent quiet times, may we commit to do that, and just realize [that] it's part of knowing You, it's part of what makes life work. May we not neglect that one thing, knowing all other things will flow from it, when we are faithful to commune with You. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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