

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 38: "MARTHA AND MARY" **LUKE 10:38-42**

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 38 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Martha and Mary."

Sermon Introduction

Peter Drucker, one the most influential thinkers on management in the last century, once said this:

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

He was talking about the confusion between effectiveness and efficiency, and the difference between doing the *right* things and doing *things* right.

For many, we spend most of our attention on doing what we're already doing more efficiently—"doing *things* right"—but we don't stop to ask the question of effectiveness: "Am I doing the *right* thing?"

Our lives are cluttered with so many activities and responsibilities, and we spend years refining our crafts to become more efficient. But what if our focus has been misplaced? What if we become the most efficient at all the things that aren't the most important things of life?

At the end of our lives, will we want to say, "I gave my life to *many* things," or will you want to be able say, "I gave my life to the *one* thing that matters most"?

That's what we're going to be unpacking today.

The One Thing

***We must not be distracted with many things
but be devoted to one thing.***

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 10:38-42.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Immediately before our passage for today, in response to a Jewish religious lawyer who was trying to test Jesus and justify himself, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, where a man was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road.

Two Jewish religious men—a priest and a Levite—saw the man, but they both ignored him and passed by on the other side. But Jesus holds up a Samaritan as the *perfect* neighbor—that *none* of us could ever be—

who *perfectly* loved his neighbor by showing him compassion that was proactive, sacrificial, selfless, and limitless. And as Jesus tells the religious lawyer to go and do likewise, the lawyer is left with God's holy standard of loving his neighbor that he knows that he cannot live up to.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 10:38-42.

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 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." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Distracted with many things (vv. 38-40)
- II. Devoted to one thing (vv. 41-42)

I. Distracted with many things (vv. 38-40)

Verse 38 says this:

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

Since the end of Luke chapter 9, Jesus has "set his face to go to *Jerusalem*" (9:51), where he knows he will be arrested and put to death for the sins of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior.

And at the beginning of Luke chapter 10, Jesus appointed and sent out 72 of his disciples to go into every town to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons—and they were to stay in the house of any that received them and their message of salvation, and they were to eat and drink whatever was provided for them there.

So here, that's what we see happening. Jesus and his disciples are "on their way" to *Jerusalem*, and they enter another village and a woman named Martha *receives* Jesus and his gospel (cf. Luke 9:6), and so she welcomes him into her house.

We know that Martha not only *receives* Jesus as a guest but also *believes* in him as "Lord" because that's what she calls him later in this passage (Luke 10:40). And later on, in John 11, Martha gives one of the greatest confessions about who Jesus is, saying, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:27).

And evidently, it's not just *Martha*, but her sister *Mary*, also receives Jesus and his message of salvation.

Verse 39 says this:

³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

To “sit at one’s feet” is a classic description of a *disciple* of a Jewish rabbi or teacher (2 Kings 4:38; 6:1; Luke 8:35; Acts 22:3).¹

But what is unusual about this scene is that women were *not* permitted to sit at the feet of a rabbi, but discipleship in the Jewish context of the time was reserved for men alone.²

The Greek word for “sat” here (*parakathestheisa*) is more literally “she sat herself beside,” which emphasizes the *deliberate choice* that Mary made to sit at the Lord’s feet and listen to his teaching.³

And if you think about it, it *had* to be a deliberate choice because Mary was going against the cultural norm. At the time and in that culture, the place for women was *not* before the feet of rabbis, but behind the scenes in the kitchen preparing the meal for the guests.

The beginning of verse 40 then says this:

40 But Martha was distracted with much serving....

“But” indicates a contrast. *Instead* of sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to his teaching like *Mary*, *Martha* was *distracted* with much serving.

Now even though the *sentence* is stated simply, the *scenario* for Martha just wasn’t that simple.

Remember, Martha was the *host*. She was the one who *welcomed* Jesus and his disciples into her home. And so, it was the cultural expectation that she would ensure that the guests were served.

I don’t know if it was just Jesus and his Twelve at this point, or if it was Jesus, the Twelve, and the 72. But in any case, Jesus always traveled with an entourage, so this would have been a large party of guests that Martha would have been hosting.

So you can imagine the kind of stress that Martha is feeling. “Do we have enough cups and plates? Do we have enough food and drink? Is our table big enough to fit everyone? Is this a good enough meal for the Lord?”

But remember, Martha was a *disciple* too. Jesus was her “Lord.” And the *sense* of the word “distracted” is “to be *pulled away*” or “*dragged away*,” so the implication is that Martha *wanted* to be at the feet of Jesus and to listen to his teaching *too*, but she was being pulled away by her duties as the host.⁴

Now, to be clear, there is nothing wrong with *servicing*—or even *much* serving. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus sent out the 72 to *serve*, and Jesus told a parable of a perfect neighbor who went above and beyond to *serve* a man in distress. And in just the previous chapter, Jesus himself acted as a good host, where he fed the five thousand in a desolate place (Luke 9:10-17). Clearly, *much servicing* is commended by Jesus.

So the issue is *not* a matter of serving too much. No, the issue here is that Martha was “*distracted* with much serving.” She allowed her duties as host to pull her away from communion with the Lord. She allowed *good* things to pull her away from the *best* thing.

Now Martha was *not* idling around doing nothing. She was *not* endlessly scrolling through the news or watching endless YouTube videos and Netflix shows. No, she was *servicing*; and not only that, but she was serving *the Lord*.

But *even* in *servicing* the Lord, she was getting distracted from *communion* with the Lord.

<pause>

The rest of verse 40 says this:

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

² David L. Jeffrey, *Luke*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 152.

³ David L. Jeffrey, *Luke*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 152.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

40 ... 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."

Imagine the scene. Jesus is teaching his disciples, including Mary. And then Martha, filled with frustration, interrupts Jesus' teaching to say this to him.

Not only was this embarrassing to her sister, but this also put Jesus—her special guest—on the spot in front of everyone.

Martha was probably just speaking out of her own frustration, asking a rhetorical question—not really expecting a response—but at the same time, Jesus can't just stay silent here. He needs to say something.

But before we look at Jesus' response, let's look at what Martha's words exposed about her heart, "for out of the abundance of the heart [her] mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

Even though Martha calls Jesus "Lord" here, what she says to Jesus is entirely focused on *herself*: "Lord, do you not care that *my* sister has left *me* to serve *alone*? Tell her then to help *me*."

I'm sure that's *not* how Martha started off. She loved and welcomed Jesus. She wanted to serve Jesus. She wanted to prepare something special for Jesus. But somehow, her singular focus on *Jesus* slowly became twisted into a singular focus on *herself*.

Her eyes moved away *from* Jesus towards all the things she was doing *for* Jesus, and then it shifted towards her sister Mary, and she started to ask, "Why is Mary just sitting there while I'm running all around the house serving? And why is Jesus paying more attention to *her* than to *me*? Doesn't he see me doing all these things to serve him?"

It's a bit reminiscent of what the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son said to his father: "Look, these many years I have *served* you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you *never* gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" (Luke 15:29-30).

In a subtle, insidious way, perhaps Martha saw all her service as somehow making her *more worthy* of Jesus' attention or help. But when she didn't receive it, she started getting frustrated and even angry.

Notice that her question isn't a *fair* question. It's already packed with so many assumptions. It assumes that *she* has faithfully been doing what is best and most important, and *Mary* is the unfaithful one. It assumes that *she* is in the right and *Mary* is in the wrong.

But then, she goes one step further. She *accuses* Jesus of *not caring* about her: "Do you not care...?" It's a *rhetorical* question because she has already *assumed* the answer: Jesus *doesn't* care about me. There's no benefit of the doubt in her question, but it's a "guilty until proven innocent" mentality.

Her question is also a *manipulative* question because it's basically saying to Jesus, "If you *really* cared for me, you would tell my sister to help me." Martha has essentially given Jesus an *ultimatum*: either you prove that you care for me by telling my sister to help me, or else you've proven to me that you don't really care for me."

<pause>

Before we start judging Martha here, we should acknowledge that *we* do this all the time.

How many times have we started out with good intentions to love and serve God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? And how many times have we spiraled down a path where our focus has shifted away *from* God to the things we're doing *for* God, to *others* we compare ourselves to, to beginning to question whether *God* really cares for us?

Perhaps we've gone beyond *questioning* to *accusing* him of *not* caring for us. Perhaps in our heart of hearts, we've given God *ultimatums*:

- "If you really cared for me, then you would get me accepted into this university or this job."
- "If you really cared for me, then you would give me this relationship with this person."
- "If you really cared for me, then you would give us a child."
- "If you really cared for me, then you would heal my loved one of this sickness."

Martha doesn't go as far as *threatening* her service or her followership of Christ, but perhaps some of us *have* gone that far, thinking or saying in our hearts: "God, if you don't do this, then I'm not going to church anymore. I'm not going to follow you anymore. I'm not going to serve you anymore."

Wow, how is it that we can fall so far away from where we started?

Well, how did *Martha* get to this point? In a word, Martha got *distracted*. Somewhere down the line, her eyes lost focus on Jesus and her eyes began to shift to other things, which was the beginning of her going from *loving* Jesus to *accusing* Jesus.

<pause>

So first, distracted with many things; and second...

II. Devoted to one thing (vv. 41-42)

So in the midst of Martha's accusatory question to Jesus and in the midst of the thick tension in the room, all eyes are now on Jesus as they're anticipating how he'll respond to her.

Verse 41 then says this:

⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,

The repetition of a name was a Jewish way to express *intense emotion*, particularly related to *affection* and *intimacy*.⁵

- When the disciples were caught in a violent storm and they thought they were going to die, they cried out to Jesus, "Master, Master..." (Luke 8:24).
- When Jesus foretells Simon Peter's denial of him three times, he says, "Simon, Simon..." (Luke 22:31).

So in response to Martha's *accusation* of Jesus, he begins by expressing his deep *affection* and *love* for her, saying, "Martha, Martha."

He deals *gently* with her, even as he's about to *correct* her. Jesus speaks the truth in love to her by first *affirming* his affection for her and then *articulating* what's going on in her heart: "you are anxious and troubled about many things."

Notice that Jesus doesn't address *behavior*. He *could* have focused on the unruly and accusatory way that Martha was *speaking* to him and said, "Martha, don't talk to me that way." But that's *not* what he does.

Notice also that Jesus doesn't address the *situation*. He *could* have focused on Mary as the one who could change this situation and said, "Mary, this is a bit of a lose-lose situation right now. You know I care about you, but it would really help the whole situation if you just helped your sister a bit." But that's *not* what he does.

Instead, Jesus addresses Martha's *heart*. Her main problem was *not* her behavior, her situation, or her sister, but her main problem was that she has an anxious and troubled *heart*.

Jesus isn't simply about behavior or situation modification, but he's about *heart* change.

⁵ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); see also R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 230.

And so, he points out what's going on in her *heart*: "you are anxious and troubled about many things."

<pause>

I'm sure all of us can relate. We live in an anxious and troubled age.

We have *family* responsibilities, *school* or *work* responsibilities, and *church* responsibilities that *expose* our anxious and troubled *hearts*.

- We're anxious about our loved ones going through hard times, not knowing what we can do to help them.
- We're troubled about project deadlines and not meeting other people's expectations.
- We're anxious in church gatherings, feeling awkward in large groups, not really knowing how to interact with people who are new or different than us.
- We're troubled by fellow members that we see struggling, straying, or sinning, not responding well to our best efforts to love them.

Each day, as soon as our alarm goes off in the morning, we're hit with a wave of "many things" on our never-ending to-do list and "many things" on our growing list of situations where we have no idea what to do—and our *hearts* respond with more and more anxiety and trouble.

So what do we do? How can we address our anxious and troubled hearts?

<pause>

Verse 42 says this:

42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

When Jesus says, "one thing is necessary," that's not to say that the other "many things" are unnecessary. No, it's *necessary* to care for your family, be faithful at school and work, and build up the local church. To *not* do those things would be disobedient to God's Word. They *are* necessary in some sense.

But there is one thing that is *ultimately* necessary, and that one thing should be given *priority* over everything else in life. What is that one thing? *Communion with Jesus*. It's spending time in fellowship with him. It's enjoying an intimate relationship with him.

As important as family, work, and church are, they do not *equate* communion with Jesus. When we enter into glory in the new heavens and new earth, there's no guarantee that all our family members will be with us, there's no guarantee that all our earthly work will carry over into the renewed creation, and there's no guarantee that our particular local church will last till then.

But the one thing that we *can* be guaranteed will *never* be taken away from us is *communion with Jesus*.

What is our only hope in life and death? That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

As those who belong to Christ by faith in him, *communion with Jesus* is ours to enjoy both now and forever.

Throughout the OT, we see that the greatest possession is close *fellowship* with God as one's "portion" in life (Ps. 16:5; 27:4; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Josh. 18:7).⁶ For example, the psalmists say:

- "The LORD is my chosen *portion*" (Ps. 16:5).
- "God is the strength of my heart and my *portion* forever" (Ps. 73:26).
- "You are my refuge, my *portion* in the land of the living" (Ps. 142:5).

⁶ Study note on Luke 10:38-43, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

So by saying that communion with *him* is the “good portion” that Mary has chosen is essentially Jesus saying that communion with *him equates* communion with *God*.

And such communion will never be taken away.

<pause>

Now how does this help us address our anxious and troubled hearts?

If the one thing that is *necessary* is the one thing that can *never* be taken away, then what should we be anxious about?

Think to yourself: What do you fear losing or happening more than anything else? What do you strive to get more than anything else? Whatever that is, it is the “one thing” that you seek after. It is the “one thing” that you find necessary.

If you’re still not sure what that is, what do you think other people around you would say is the “one thing” in your life? If someone were to look at your everyday habits, your daily choices, how you spend your time, what causes you stress, or what leads you to rejoice, what would they say is the “one thing” necessary in your life?

Would it be your parents? Your spouse? Your children? Your work? Your grades? Your health? People’s approval? Worldly success? Food? Sex? Money? Comfort?

Whatever it might be, if it is anything but *communion with God*, then you will inevitably be consumed with anxiety and trouble as it begins to be taken away—and no matter who you are or what you do, it *will* one day be taken away from you as we all approach our inevitable deaths.

But if the “one thing” you seek and the “one thing” you know is *truly* and *ultimately* necessary is deeper *communion with God*, then *even* as everything else in your life is taken away, you will grow in confidence and peace because you *know* that you will dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of your life—now and forever (Ps. 27:4; 23:6). The “one thing” that is necessary will never be taken away from you.

<pause>

Again, keep in mind that Martha was serving the *Lord*. That was a very *good* thing. And there are *many* good things in life that deserve our attention.

But these *many* good things should *never* override the *one* greatest privilege and joy we have as Christians—to *commune* with the Lord.

On some level, perhaps Martha felt like Jesus *needed* her to serve him. But Jesus doesn’t *need* anything from her. If he could feed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, I’m sure he would have been just fine without the meal that Martha was frantically trying to prepare.

For many of us, we feel like we’re *needed*. If we don’t do something, then everything will fall apart. We forget that not the smallest sparrow or the grayest hair will fall to the ground unless your heavenly Father wills it (Matt. 10:29-30). God does not *need* us to accomplish his will, but he works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11).

Yes, Jesus *wants* us to serve; otherwise, he wouldn’t have called and sent the Twelve and the 72 out to serve and told the parable of the Good Samaritan. But he does not *need* us to serve. He does not want us to *overestimate* the importance of our service.

We need to remember that *our* service is just the byproduct of *his* service.

Jesus washes *our* feet before he calls us to wash one another’s feet (John 13:14). Jesus loves *us* before he calls us to love one another (John 13:34).

What's important is that *Jesus* serves us, and all *our* service is a response of praise and thanksgiving for having *been served* by our Lord.

We're *not as important* as we think; Jesus does not *need* us to do anything. But we are more *loved* than you could ever imagine; Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8 NIV).

What service could we do to ever earn or repay our Lord for what he has done for us? None. But on the cross, Christ said, "It is finished." *Jesus* is our substitute, and *he* lived the perfect life we could not live and *he* died the death that we deserve for our sins. There is nothing left to be done to secure our salvation. If he has done it and it is finished, and I belong to him by faith, then I can say with joyful confidence that I *am* forgiven, I *am* righteous in God's sight, I *am* his child, and I *will* see and enjoy him forever with all the saints in the world to come!

We must never confuse *our* service as something that Christ *needs* or something that Christ must *repay*. No, *we* are the ones in need, and *we* are the ones who are forever indebted to *him*. *He* has done it all, and *we* must constantly put ourselves in the position to remember and receive afresh his great service to us. And we do that by *communing* with him.

<pause>

As Christians, our focus is *Jesus* and we *want* to spend time *communing* with him, where we listen to him in the Word and we speak to him in prayer.

But, if we're Christians and there is *no* desire to spend time with the Lord, then something is *fundamentally* wrong.

If I ever said to my wife, "I love you, but I have no desire to spend time with you," can it really be said that I love my wife? In the same way, if I have no desire to spend time with Christ, can it really be said that I love him—that he is my all and all?

I'm not saying that we don't struggle but that's just the thing—is there a struggle? Is there a *desire*—a *want*—to spend time with the Lord at all?

If there is a desire but your life is filled with distractions, that can be addressed.

But if there is *little* desire to spend time with the Lord, then you have *little* assurance that you *really* have a relationship with Christ—that you belong to him and are truly saved from your sins—and that should *not* be taken lightly.

Don't just think that because you *once* had a passion for Christ—and you *once* wanted to spend much time with him—that you can rest assured. No, how many kings do we read about in the OT who were *once* so passionate for the Lord, but who ended up turning away from the Lord later in life? If you *currently* have no desire to spend time with the Lord, then no amount of *past* passion for him can ever make up for it.

Perhaps you're not at *zero* desire to commune with Christ, but your desire is *diminishing*. If that's you, then turn around! Do not become complacent in drifting away from your Lord and Savior.

It's not enough to know that it's *important* to spend time with the Lord, but you must be absolutely convinced that it is the one thing that is *necessary*. You will spiritually *die* without communion with Christ.

Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for *apart from me you can do nothing*. If anyone does *not* abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (John 15:5-6).

The eternal state of your soul is at stake. So I *plead* with you: don't get distracted with the many things, the many people, the many anxieties and troubles, but fix your eyes on the one who bled and died for you, the one who rose and ascended to prepare a place for you.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). But “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose” (Jim Elliot).

<pause>

Still, the fact is that we live in a frenetic, constantly *busy* world. There are so many things that are *competing* for our attention. The posture of just sitting and listening doesn’t sit well with our culture; we struggle to sit still at the feet of our Lord.

So how do we give ourselves to the “one thing” necessary in the midst of the other many things going on in our lives?

Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, argues for establishing what he calls a “keystone habit.” The idea is that if we concentrate on *one* specific “keystone habit,” it will have a ripple effect in other areas of our lives. So let’s say that you made it your “keystone habit” to commune with the Lord, listening to him in the Word and speaking to him in prayer every day. It’s your one non-negotiable every day. What other effects would that have on your life?

- If it was a non-negotiable to spend time with God in the morning, then you would probably go to bed earlier.
- In order to sleep earlier, you would go to bed by a certain reasonable hour and not stay up late with your face glued to your phone, but you’d airplane your phone and put it across the room before you go to bed.
- And since you’re waking up earlier to spend time with God, you wouldn’t un-airplane your phone till *afterwards*; and when those notifications *do* come in, you’d receive them with a quiet trust and confidence in your heavenly Father instead of being thrown into another cycle of anxiety and trouble at the thought of your long to-do list and new problems each day.
- And as you commune with the Lord day-in and day-out, you *will* become more like him, progressively over time exuding more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.⁷

In other words, rather than the “many things” *swallowing* up the “one thing” necessary, the “one thing” necessary begins to *shape* how you go about the other “many things” in your life.

<pause>

So how can we go about establishing this “keystone habit” of communing with the Lord each day?

Let me offer a few suggestions.

[Practical tips for communing with the Lord each day:

1. Choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day.]

First, choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day. When I started to do this as a university student, I resolved that I would not eat until I spent time with God in the Word and prayer. Nowadays, right after I get up in the morning, I make coffee, I sit in the same spot on my couch, and then I read the Bible and pray. I’ll eat every day and I’ll make coffee every day in the morning, so those are regular *cues* each day for me to spend time with God. It’s become so habitual now that I *cannot* eat or make coffee in the morning without thinking to commune with God.

[Practical tips for communing with the Lord each day:

1. Choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day.
2. Make it obvious (and make distractions invisible).]

Second, make it obvious (and make distractions invisible). If you’re going to spend time with God at night, put a Bible on your pillow after you get up, so you won’t be able to go to bed later at night without reading it and praying. Block off that time in your calendar each day, so you’ll see it whenever you look at

⁷ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

your calendar each day. Keep your Bible app on the Home Screen of your phone, and hide your email, messaging, and social media apps, so that you're more inclined to open your Bible app than those other apps.

[Practical tips for communing with the Lord each day:

1. Choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day.
2. Make it obvious (and make distractions invisible).
3. Build the habit by having a short "quiet time" with God every day.]

Third, build the habit by having a short "quiet time" with God every day.

It's better to start small and do it consistently every day than to do something big and do it inconsistently every once in a while. When it comes to physical health, you shouldn't just eat a huge meal every once in a while, but it's better to eat smaller meals every day. In the same way, when it comes to spiritual health, you shouldn't try to binge your communion with God every once in a while, but it's better to commune with him in shorter amount every day.

You can always build on a habit later, but you can't build on what isn't already a habit.

So don't start with setting aside an hour a day but start with a few minutes a day. And have a plan for what you're going to do in those few minutes.

Perhaps you could read one chapter or just a narrative passage a day from one of the Gospel accounts, and then go through four points that can help you pray through the passage you read.

1. Instruction: what is the passage commanding me to do?
2. Praise: what does the passage lead me to praise God for?
3. Confession: where have I fallen short of the passage's instruction?
4. Petition: ask for God's grace to help you live out the commands of the passage.⁸

This is relatively quick. For example, if I read this passage today, I might pray through it afterwards by saying something like this:

- "God, your Word commands me to never forsake the one thing that is necessary, which is communion with you **[that's Instruction]**.
- I praise you that you want to spend time with me and speak so affectionately and gently to me, even when I accuse you of not caring for me **[that's Praise]**.
- Lord, forgive me for constantly getting distracted with many things that only cause me more anxiety and trouble, and somehow accusing *you* of being in the wrong **[that's Confession]**.
- May you give me the grace I need to not only *see* when that is happening, but to truly see communion with you as the one thing that is necessary. Help me to fix my eyes on Jesus, the only one who has died and resurrected for the forgiveness of my sins, the only one who can truly satisfy me, and the only one who can never be taken away from me **[that's Petition]**. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

[Practical tips for communing with the Lord each day:

1. Choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day.
2. Make it obvious (and make distractions invisible).
3. Build the habit by having a short "quiet time" with God every day.
4. Get an accountability partner.]

Fourth, get an accountability partner. I can't tell you how helpful this has been to me, especially when I first became a Christian. When I was a second-year university student, my friend and I realized that we both didn't have much of a prayer life. So we decided that we would go to our church's morning prayer every day, so each morning—rain, snow, or shine—I would meet him in front of his dorm and we would walk together to a chapel where we had guided morning prayer every weekday at 6:30am. I can tell you that I never enjoyed getting up early to do that, but I would always get up because I knew that my friend would be waiting for me in front of his dorm.

⁸ Martin Luther's method of studying the Bible in Jordan Raynor, *Redeeming Your Time* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2021), 18, Kindle.

It doesn't have to be a commitment to go somewhere for morning prayer, but it could be a commitment to read through a Bible Reading Plan together, where you message each other something that stood out to you from what you read each day. You can go to our church website under "Bible Resources" if you'd want some suggestions for a Bible Reading Plan.

If you're married, it could be a commitment to pray together every night before you go to bed. If you have kids, it could be a commitment to sing a worship song, read from a children's Bible, and pray together in light of what you read with your whole family.

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4. Get an accountability partner.
5. Gather regularly with your local church.]

Fifth, gather regularly for with your local church. This one might sound odd because it's not every day, but one of the best ways to commune with God throughout the week is by prioritizing our corporate times to commune with God as a whole church at Sunday Celebration and Prayer Gathering, where we read, hear, sing, pray, and see the Word of God together. LIFE Groups are also where we get all of that in a smaller group each week.

And if you're a member of our church, this is what we covenanted together to do: "We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others."

As Christians, Lord's Day worship—whether with our church or another church—should be a non-negotiable for us. The first day of the week is the *Lord's Day* and it ought to be set aside to gather together with his people to *commune* with him. Even when we gather together as a church, we take *communion* (or the Lord's Supper) together. Communion with God was never meant to be simply a "me and God" thing, but the words of the covenant that we see repeated throughout Scripture are "I will be your God and you will be my *people*."

<pause>

With all that said, I want us to know that it's not about perfectly have a "quiet time" every day, but it's about being in a relationship with Christ. So if we fail at having a "quiet time" one day, thank God that he does not love us on the basis of our having daily "quiet times." Rather, we are loved on the basis of what Christ has done and that can never be taken away from us. That does not drive us away from Christ, but drives us deeper in our desire to communion with him—to enjoy our relationship with him more and more until we see him face-to face.

<pause>

Now, as we close, to be clear, the point of this narrative is *not* simply to just be more like Mary and less like Martha.

Rather, we should want to be a *combination* of Mary and Martha. We want to sit and listen to Lord, and *then* serve out of that sitting and listening to him. We want to be Martha serving out of Mary's heart.

That's actually how *Jesus* was. Nobody can deny that Jesus gave himself over to *much serving*. Everywhere Jesus went, in every town, he served and served and served.

That's even how Jesus described himself, saying, "the Son of Man came not to *be* served but to *serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45).

Still, even though Jesus gave himself over to *much serving*, he was *never distracted*. He *knew* that the one thing necessary was *communion* with God the Father, so he had a regular habit of retreating to desolate places to spend time with him.

Over and over again, the Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus “would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:16; cf. 4:42; 6:12; Matt. 14:13).

Jesus sat and listened to Lord, and then he served *out of* that sitting and listening to him.

So let’s not be focused on being more like *Mary* or more like *Martha*, but let’s be more like *Jesus*—and that begins with devoting ourselves to the “one thing” that’s necessary—communion with him.

The One Thing

***We must not be distracted with many things
but be devoted to one thing.***

Here’s the...

Life Application

It’s just the same...

Practical tips for communing with the Lord each day:

1. Choose a time and place that is connected to something you will do every day.
2. Make it obvious (and make distractions invisible).
3. Build the habit by having a short “quiet time” with God every day.
4. Get an accountability partner.
5. Gather regularly with your local church.

Conclusion

If you’re able, can we all stand as we respond to God’s Word together?