

ARE WE CHOOSING THAT GOOD PART?

It's *exciting*—and at times a bit *nerve-wracking*—to wait on the *Lord's direction* regarding what to preach on. In many churches like ours, the Pastor will *preach through a book* of the Bible. The advantage of that—for the Pastor, anyway—is that he knows what the *text will be* for next week...and the week after...and the week after that. The "*disadvantage*"—if I can use that word—is that there are times when God *works on the Pastor's heart* regarding something that may be quite different from the book that the Pastor may be preaching from.

One illustration I read along those lines made the point that if you were sick and went to the doctor, you don't want him to *start at the upper left-hand corner* of his medicine cabinet and give you one medicine at a time until he *finds* the right one—you want him to give you the right one on *the first visit!*

The flip side of *topical preaching*, however, is that a Pastor can get on his "hobby horse"—meaning he can preach frequently on a *favorite topic*—and neglect to preach the whole counsel of God. I'm sure at some point I'll preach through a book, but as of now I've not felt led to do that on Sunday mornings.

When it comes to sermon prep, I have weekly goals. My *first goal* is to have the topic and text *NLT Tuesday* so I can get songs picked out and give them to Don on Tuesday night or Wednesday. My *second goal* is to have the sermon *outline done by Thursday* evening so I can reach my *third goal* which is to finish the bulk of the sermon *by Friday night*. This week, I had my topic on Tuesday, gave the songs to Don on Wednesday, and had my outline done on Thursday. *But* while praying on *Friday* morning, the Lord "threw me the proverbial curveball" and flooded my mind with a number of verses on *a different* subject.

And through those verses, the Lord was confronting me with this question: Do I *love God*—or do I just love *servicing* God? Another question along the same lines: do I serve God out of duty—or do I serve Him out of love? And so God very specifically led me to the familiar account of Martha being burdened with serving—while her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet! Title of message: *Are We Choosing That Good Part?*

Please take your Bibles and turn to Luke 10; follow along as I read verses 38-42.

Truth #1 we see in this account is... **1. We can become cumbered, "careful," and careless while serving God**

How do we know that? Because Martha was!

First, let's consider... A. The "cumbrance" of Martha

Look again at vs 40. Martha was "cumbered about much serving." What does "cumbered" mean?

--It means to be drawn away...to be distracted...to be over-occupied...to be too busy...to be burdened.

She was weighed down—and stressed out! **Why?** Because of "**much serving.**"

--**Who** was she serving? Jesus! **How** was she serving Jesus? By **providing a meal** for Him!

--Is it good to **be hospitable**? Yes, it is!

--Is it good to want to **do your best** when you serve the Lord? Yes, it is!

--Is it bad to **want other people** to share the workload? No; it's not!

Ladies, of course, are not the only ones that can be "cumbered about much serving." Men in the church can be overwhelmed with their responsibilities within the church. Pastors—regardless of the size of the church—can suffer what we often refer to as "burn-out." God through Paul was addressing **all believers** when he wrote **Galatians 6:9** "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." If we are warned not to be weary in well doing, it is something that can obviously happen!

Back to Martha and our passage here in Luke. Why didn't Jesus say, "Hey, Mary—stop sitting here listening to me and start helping your sister?" Because Jesus wanted to show Martha that **her priorities** had gotten out of whack—and that Mary had the right priority!

Look at Jesus' response to Martha's request for help in vs 41. "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha..." Usually not a good thing when someone says your name **two times** in a row! The **only thing worse** is when someone says it **three times** in a row! In spite of Jesus saying her name twice, I believe there is a **tenderness in His voice**. He is not being harsh; He is **gently** rebuking her and teaching her.

Aren't you thankful for the patience and tenderness of God? Think of how often God has to **teach us** the same lesson over and over again! Many of the things that God points out in **my life** that need "changing" are **not new things**—they are things that He has brought to my attention **before**. And yet—like some of you, I'm sure—I **fail to do that** which I know I ought to do so God has to **remind me again!** And thankfully He does it patiently—and yet very persistently!

Notice what Jesus says to her in the rest of the verse: "...thou art careful and troubled about many things:"

B. The "carefulness" of Martha

What does "careful" mean? Does it mean that Martha was **extra cautious** not to burn the food or drop a dish on the floor? No; "careful" here means **anxious or worried**; "troubled" means **bothered or upset**.

Jesus is saying to her that she is anxious...and bothered...and frazzled about **many** things. Jesus goes on to say in vs 42, "But **one thing is needful...**" A number of commentators suggest that Martha was going above and beyond in the way of a meal. Of "one thing is needful," **Ryrie wrote**: "One simple dish for the meal is all that is necessary, rather than the elaborate preparations Martha had made."

We're not told Martha's motives. Was she putting on a big spread because she wanted people—especially Jesus—to "ooh" and "awh" over how good of a cook and hostess she was? It is certainly a possibility, but we don't know that for sure. What we **do know** is this—her "joy in serving Jesus" was nowhere to be found!

She was distracted by everything **she had to do**—and probably worried about how things would turn out!

I believe we also see... C. The carelessness of Martha

Why do I say that? Because of what she **says to Jesus!**

First, she... **i. Accused Jesus of not caring**

Vs 40 "But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord **dost thou not care** that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" Think of the scene—and the stir—this may have caused!

It is as if she is saying, 'Jesus; **don't you see** what is going on here? Don't **you care about me** and all the work I am doing? Don't you **recognize that it is unfair for me** to be doing this all alone?'

Not only did she accuse Jesus of not caring, she also... **ii. Assumed she needed to tell Jesus what to do!**

We see that in the end of vs 40. "...bid her therefore that she help me." In her mind, Jesus was not just **doing wrong**—He wasn't **doing anything at all!** So she felt the need to **tell Jesus what to do**. If that's not a careless, thoughtless attitude, I don't know what is!

But what about us when we are stressed out? Can we start to think that God doesn't care? Can we start thinking that God doesn't know what's going on that we need to tell Him what He should do next? What an arrogant, faithless kind of mindset—and yet that was the mindset of Martha. And if we aren't careful, the same mindset can creep into our thinking!

Truth #1? **1. We can become cumbered, "careful," and careless while serving God**

I see a 2nd truth in this passage, and it is this: **2. We need to consider the correction Christ gave to Martha**

We are reminded in **II Tim 3:16** that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, **for correction**, for instruction in righteousness:" Jesus is certainly correcting **Martha** in this passage, but we also need to consider "if the shoe fits...!" I'm sure there are more, but let's consider two.

A. Attitudes are just as important as actions

Was Jesus teaching that you have to **make a choice between serving Jesus**—or sitting at His feet? Was He implying that you could **only do one** or the other—but couldn't do both? I don't believe that's the point.

Jesus was correcting Martha because her **attitude was wrong**. A guy named **Bob Deffinbaugh** put it like this: “I do not think our text suggests that both Mary and Martha should have been sitting at Jesus’ feet, and that no meal should have been prepared. Martha was not wrong in serving, but her **attitude in serving** was clearly wrong. Martha had a serving **ministry**, but not a servant’s **heart**.” (Bible.org; “When Martha was Mad at the Master”).

Although we aren’t told what **Mary’s** attitude was, I tend to think that if the **sole purpose** for Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet was to **get out of helping** her sister, Jesus would have corrected that attitude, too!

Back to Martha. How do we know Martha’s **attitude was wrong**? We see it in how she **accused Jesus of not caring**—and then proceeding to tell Him **what to do!** And even though we have no record here of **Martha saying** anything to Mary, my guess is that her attitude **toward her sister** was even worse!

Can that happen to us? It sure can! Sadly—on more occasions than I care to admit—my wife has “experienced” my lack of patience with her because I’m feeling stressed out while getting ready for Sunday’s sermon! **My service**—getting ready for a sermon—is obviously good; but **my attitude** while doing it is not good if I get upset with my wife!

A second correction that Jesus is making—and the one that struck me the most—is that...

B. Busyness should not crowd out the best

Notice again what Jesus says to Martha in vs 41-42: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: **But one thing is needful...**”

As mentioned before, some commentators suggest that Martha was going overboard in the meal she was preparing. I’m **not convinced** that that is what Jesus intended when He said, “one thing is needful.” I believe it refers to the thing that Mary chose—sitting at the feet of Jesus—not how many courses there were to the meal!

Can our **priorities** get out of whack? Can **busyness** in our life—even in good things—crowd out the **best things**? Can we be **duty-driven** to do God’s work—but not be **devoted to God** Himself! Yes, yes, yes—to all three questions, right?

What does that **look like**? I’m not sure what it looks like in **your life**, but I’ll tell you what it looks like **in mine**. I can get up in the morning, **open up my Bible**, and read anywhere from 3-5 chapters—but not have **my heart in it**. I can **get out my prayer list**—pray for 30 minutes or more—and not have **my heart** in it. I can read a challenging Christian book...and go visit people...and work on a sermon—but still not have **my heart** in it! And the same can happen to you!

Jesus warned of our tendency to do “lip service” to God—while our **hearts are far away!**
Mt 15:7-8 “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, ⁸This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their **heart is far from me.**”

Truth #1? **1. We can become cumbered, “careful,” and careless while serving God**

Truth #2? **2. We need to consider the correction Christ gave to Martha**

Lastly, Truth #3: **3. We need to copy that which Jesus commends**

What does Jesus **commend**? What is the thing He wants us to **imitate** in Mary’s life? Look at vs 42: “But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part...” What is the thing that Mary chose?

Was it simply to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear **His** Word as stated in vs 39—or is there more to it than that? Stated another way, what is it that God **wants from me—and you**—if it is not our service?

Listen carefully: God wants **affection** toward Him more than **activities for Him**.

--He wants **our devotion** more than **our duty!**

--He wants **our heart** more than **our hands!**

To sum it all up, God doesn’t just want what we can **give Him**—He **wants us!**

We understand that truth in **other relationships**—why is it so hard to remember that God wants the same thing in our relationship with Him?

--Children enjoy clothes, pets, and toys, but more than anything else they want the **love of their parents**.
--Wives enjoy clothes, and shoes, and purses—and more clothes, and shoes, and purses—and a nice home, but most women desire the **love of their husbands** more than things.
--Husbands enjoy clean clothes...and dinner...and a clean house, but most men desire the **love of their wives** more than what their wives **do for them**.

Again I ask—why is it so hard to remember that God **desires the same from us**? God’s desire that we give Him our heart—our entire being—is an **impossible-to-miss thread** that is woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

A. God wants us to love Him with all our heart

Did Mary **love Jesus** with all her heart? Although we don’t necessarily see that in Mary’s life in **this passage**, I believe we see it in John 12 where she anointed Jesus with an ointment valued at a year’s worth of wages!

Are we **to love God** with all our heart? We certainly are!

Mt 22:37-38 “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt **love the Lord thy God** with **all thy heart**, and with **all thy soul**, and with **all thy mind**.³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.”

What will **loving God** look like? Can’t answer that for you, but here is what I believe it will look like **for me**.

--It will mean having a heart-to-heart time with Him before I do anything else—even read my Bible! I need to **open my heart to Him** so I will see His heart when I open His Word!

Not only does God want us to love Him with all our heart,

B. God wants us to seek Him with all our heart

Did Mary **seek Jesus** with all her heart? I believe she did—and I believe that’s why she was at His feet listening to Him. Are we **to seek God** with all our heart? We certainly are!

Psalm 119:10 “With **my whole heart** have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.”

Jer 29:13 “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with **all your heart**.”

What will **seeking God** look like? Can’t answer that for you, either, but here is what I believe it will look like for me.

--It will require a concentrated effort on my part to read the Bible with my heart—and not with my head! What do I mean by that?

--I need to read it with the intent of **hearing from Him**—not to find verses for the next sermon to preach! I need to read it with the mindset of “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

As we close, I want us to take our Bibles and turn to I Cor 8; please follow along as I read verses 1-3.

--Do you love God?

--Do others know that you love God? In other words, can others see your love for God?

That’s what God wants—and that’s what God deserves!

So what would God have us do in light of His word?

1. First, if you have not received Christ and trusted Him for the penalty of your sins, you cannot love God! How can you love someone when you reject their most precious gift for your most important need?

2. If you are a child of God, be honest about your love toward God! Do you love God with all your heart? Do you seek Him with all your heart?

If not, confess that sin to Him...and ask Him to stir your heart to love Him more. You know what loving God will look like in your life—or at least have a pretty good idea. But it starts with seeing a need to change.