



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 10:38-42

To understand a little bit more about Martha, Mary, and how to prioritize busy-ness.

A History of Busy

Whenever you consider the idea of “being busy,” it seems fairly straightforward and non-controversial (albeit, *exhausting*). Being busy happens when you just have a lot of things to do, usually with little time to do it. However, a few “technological advancements” have aided our tendency to be busy. John Comer, in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, gives some history to this “busy” phenomenon and our obsession with time:

“First, the sundial, aka the original Casio. As far back as approximately 200 BC, people were complaining about what this new technology was doing to society. The Roman playwright Plautus turned anger into poetry: ‘The gods confound the man who first found out how to distinguish hours! Confound him, too.’ Fast-forward to the monks, our well-meaning spiritual ancestors who played a key role in the acceleration of Western society. In the sixth century Saint Benedict organized the monastery around seven times of prayer each day, a superlative idea. By the twelfth century the monks had invented the mechanical clock to rally the monastery to prayer.

But most historians point to 1370 as the turning point in the West’s relationship to time. That year the first public clock tower was erected in Cologne, Germany. Before that, time was natural. It was linked to the rotation of the earth on its axis and the four seasons. You went to bed with the moon and got up with the sun. Days were long and busy in summer, short and slow in winter. There was a rhythm to the day and even the

year. Life was 'dominated by agrarian rhythms, free of haste, careless of exactitude, unconcerned by productivity,' in the words of the French medievalist Jacques Le Goff. But the clock changed all that: it created artificial time—the slog of the nine-to-five *all year long*. We stopped listening to our bodies and started rising when our alarms droned their oppressive siren—not when our bodies were done resting. We became more efficient, yes, but also more machine, less human being.”

Comer points out some important moments in history that have perhaps aided us in our pursuit for busyness, but that isn't to say that being busy is a bad thing. In fact, it's better to be busy than lazy (Pr. 6:6-11; Eph. 4:28). We are, after all, created to be productive (Gen. 1:28). The problem with being busy arises when the tasks at hand take a priority over things they were not meant to overshadow. In this week's passage, we see this distinction between two sisters, *Mary and Martha*, as they invite Jesus into their home.

Mary and Martha

This story is a well-known story in most modern churches, usually employed to exhort women (and sometimes men) to slow down, stop being so busy, and rest at Jesus' feet. However, this take perhaps misses the point if careful consideration is not given to the text.

Verse 38 continues in Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem: “Now as they were on their way, Jesus entered a village.” The village is not named, but the primary characters in this part of the story are: “Martha,” who also had a sister named “Mary” (Lk. 10:39). Martha “welcomes” Jesus into her home, and He accepts this invitation which shows He is exemplifying what he originally taught the seventy-two disciples to do in Luke 10:3-7. Immediately, a contrast is drawn between the actions of Martha and Mary. Upon coming into the home, Mary “sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching” (Luke 10:39). The act of sitting at the feet of another individual who is teaching is a very well-known and established rabbinic practice of this time. This is exemplified by the demon-possessed man that Jesus healed (Lk. 8:35) as well as the apostle Paul during his time under the tutelage of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In fact, the only people in Luke's Gospel to sit at Jesus' feet other than the twelve disciples are women (7:38), Gentiles (8:35), and Samaritans (17:16). Though this practice is a Jewish one by nature, none of the Jews seem to be interested in sitting at Jesus' feet. To sit at the feet of a teacher meant to place yourself under the subjection of his teaching. For Mary, this is an act of submission.

Martha, on the other hand, “was distracted with much serving,” (Lk. 10:40) and this coupled with the fact that her sister (presumably younger than her) was not helping with the tasks at hand annoyed her. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone” (Lk. 10:40). The issue at hand is not the fact that Martha was serving (in this instance, specifically, serving in the form of hospitality). Serving is not a bad thing, but is actually an expectation of the Christian rhythm of life. Christ came, “not to be served, but to serve” (Mk. 10:45). The apostle Peter expects each spiritual gift given to Christians to be used “to serve one another, as stewards of God's grace” (1 Pet. 4:10). Christians are to serve as if they are serving Christ, not merely other people (Eph. 6:7). In fact, the greatest among Christians are those who embody the role of the servant (Matt. 23:11). Service is not the issue in this passage, but that it has become a *distraction* to something of more pressing importance.

Jesus' words to her are kind and yet to the point: “Martha, Martha; you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk. 10:42). The presence of terms like “anxious” and “troubled” indicate something about the condition of Martha's well-being, and it isn't good! The tasks at hand are wearing her down to a point of anxiety (who can

relate with that?). Beyond that, it's brought about what at least looks like some frustration towards Mary in that she's demanding Jesus to make Mary help her (Lk. 10:40). Notice the contrast between Martha's "many things" she's concerned with as opposed to Mary's "one thing" she is committed to. There is a singular focus for Mary; to listen to Christ's words. Jesus also uses the term "portion" to describe what Mary has chosen, which is reminiscent of Psalm 119:57: "The LORD is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words."

Simply put, Martha is practicing a virtuous discipline of service and hospitality but at the detriment of the purpose for which she is serving. The whole point of service in this instance is to bless Jesus, and yet here He is in her presence, and she is distracted. No ending or resolution is given to this story, and while that may frustrate us, it's of no real importance. The weight of this story is not on Martha's actions, but Jesus' words. The Lord calls Martha, and by extension us the reader, to consider the virtue of service, but never at the expense of hearing the Word of God. Interestingly, this story anticipates Acts 6:1-7, wherein the service of disseminating food has encumbered the weightier importance of the preaching of the Word, and thus there are servants chosen to do that task so that the preachers and teachers can continue to do their tasks.

What About Now?

The takeaway for this passage is fairly straightforward - serving is important, but it should never become a distraction to Christ. It's easy to get lost in the busyness of church, ministry, home groups, Bible studies, and a multitude of other good things, and lose sight of why we are serving to begin with. Christ should be the central focus of service, and never peripheral.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 10:38. Where were the disciples and Jesus coming from, and where were they going? What village did they enter?

2. Read Luke 10:38. Who welcomed Jesus into her home?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 10:39. Who was Martha's sister? What was she doing?

2. Read Luke 10:40. What was Martha distracting by? Is serving a good or a bad thing? Use Scripture to support your answers. (Hint: See above notes)

Day Three

1. Read Luke 10:40. What did Martha say to Jesus and what did she request of Him?

2. Read Luke 10:41. How did Jesus answer her? What two words did He use to describe her current state of being?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 10:42. What is the “one thing” Jesus is referencing?

2. Read Luke 10:42. What is the significance of the term “portion?” (Hint: See Psalm 119:57)

Week 41 Discussion: Burnout

One of the interesting and often missed details of Luke 10:38-42 is the appeal for help that Martha makes in verse 40: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” It almost sounds like burnout - that draining feeling of hopeless despair while doing something that usually energizes you. Whenever we reach the point of burnout, it’s easy to get frustrated with people we perceive are doing less than us. Talk as a group about any potential burnout you may be facing, and what you need might need to change to address it.

1. Icebreaker: Do you feel burned out right now in any area of your life? Have you ever been burned out before?
2. Would other people describe you as suffering from burnout?
3. What could you use more help with right now?
4. If you are feeling burned out, is there anything you should re-evaluate or stop doing?
5. Does it make you feel guilty to admit being burned out? Why or why not?
6. How can the church help you reassess your priorities?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus is invited into the house of Mary and Martha.
2. Martha chooses to busyness while Mary chooses to sit at Jesus’ feet; Jesus addresses Martha.