

The Better Part

Text: Luke 10:38–42

Theme: Choosing intimacy with Christ over distraction by activity.

“Now as they went on their way, He entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so, she came to Him and asked, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, You are worried and distracted by many things. There is need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:38–42, NRSV)

I could hardly wait to bring you this sermon today. We all know someone like Martha. The doer. The worker. The one who takes responsibility. And we all know someone like Mary who will pause, stop, reflect, and then listen. Both are appreciated for what they do.

But this story isn’t about a quarrel. It’s about a revelation! A moment when Jesus gently invited someone to reconsider what matters most to them. Because here, the problem wasn’t service. It was distraction. Martha was getting her home ready for Jesus and wasn’t doing anything wrong. Her gift was to welcome Him. It showed deep respect. But Luke tells us: *“Martha was distracted by her many tasks.”* The Greek word for *“distracted”* means *“being pulled away.”* Pulled in different directions. Martha was well-intentioned. But what she was doing made it difficult for Jesus’ teaching. And how often do we find ourselves just like Martha. Busy *for* Jesus. But not *with* Jesus! Now, the story goes like this. Mary had chosen to sit and listen to Jesus. She *“sat at the His feet.”* The traditional place for a disciple. She had chosen to learn from Him. To soak up all that Jesus said. And to be near Him. So, when Jesus said: *“Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.”* The *“better part”* wasn’t showing favoritism. It was about having different priorities in a world of distractions. Mary, the model for having a heart focused on relationships. Not just responsibility, as did Martha! This story isn’t about rejecting work. What Martha was doing was needed! But Jesus called her by name—**twice!** And then offered a loving alternative: *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.”* He didn’t scold her. He was reminding her. There was only one thing she truly needed. To take time to sit at Jesus’ feet.

And could Jesus be saying the same to you today? Slow down! But, how do you choose *“the better part?”* Well, you start with being still. Take time every day to sit down with the Written Word, your Bible. Sit in silence or prayer. Let go of perfection. The house doesn’t have to be spotless. Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is what you do at a railroad crossing. Stop. Look and Listen! Be in the present! The here and now! Serve from satisfaction. Not confusion. Martha’s mistake wasn’t doing service. It was being busy doing other things while she was in the presence of the Lord. Martha actually was in the presence of Jesus. But was too busy to give Him her full attention. And that’s something a lot of us do without even realizing it. Let me give you some examples of being too busy doing other things while you’re in the Lord’s presence. You volunteer every Sunday in Season to prepare something for our Sunday after-church luncheons. But you never pause to pray or reflect on what you are doing for others because you’re so focused on getting ready for church that you miss the Spirit’s prompting.

See, you can be so busy *about* God’s work and still miss it. God **is with us**. How about when the Scripture is being read during the Worship Service. And you’re checking your phone! Or you’re mentally making a grocery list for shopping after church. You rush through your daily devotions because all you’re thinking about is your to-do list. That’s right! Being present with the Lord doesn’t necessarily mean you’re present with Him physically. It means spiritually. You’re so busy filling your life with “good” things, like family responsibilities. Your career. Things that require so much concentration there’s no time left for God. Many parents have taught their children *about* God. But they never take time to *listen* to God themselves. You may be listening to worship or praise music on your wireless earbuds. Or devotional podcasts you can stream or download and listen to on demand. But you never personally stop and pray or sit in silence before God. Understand, *information* about God is not the same thing as having a *relationship* with God. So, you need to ask yourself, *“What are the things I’m doing ‘for’ God that are keeping me from being ‘with’ God?”* Jesus said Mary’s portion *“will not be taken away.”* Mary’s choice was to sit quietly at Jesus’ feet and listen to His Word.

It wasn’t brief, like eating a meal or doing a chore. It was spiritual nourishment that took time and had lasting value. Both *in* the moment. And *forever*. It was in contrast to Martha’s distraction and nervousness. Mary’s choice was in line with what God truly values. Relationship over responsibility! Jesus confirmed that God honors those who draw near to Him. And it’s deeply woven throughout Scripture. It’s a beautiful and encouraging promise. When we seek God sincerely, He responds with His presence, nearness, and blessing. It’s a spiritual closeness that cannot be lost, because time spent in God’s presence is never wasted! It’s the glue that holds you together in a busy world. It’s the quiet, unwavering presence of God when everything else around you seems to be moving too fast. Doctor appointments. Bank overdrawn notifications. Needing to be somewhere else.

When it's like that, return to stillness with prayer and Scripture. Remember, it's not what you do that matters. It's who you belong to that matters! Christ should always be the center of your life. His peace should be the calm beneath the chaos. And His promises should remind you; you are held fast by Him even when you feel overwhelmed. That steady feeling will help you breathe easier. Help refocus your life. Let you live with purpose. Not pressure! Don't be so busy doing **for** Jesus that you forget to be **with** Jesus.

Billy Graham pointed out the importance of personal devotion to Christ over religious activity. While there's no exact quote of him using the phrase "*so busy doing for Jesus that we forget to simply be with Jesus*," the idea is reflected in his teachings and writings. In his book "*Hope for the Troubled Heart*," he wrote: "*We are not to become so overwhelmed in the work of the Lord that we neglect the Lord of the work.*" And that echoes our lesson today. Martha was busy serving, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet. Billy Graham, like many Christian leaders, point to this story as a reminder that our relationship with Christ is our foundation. Christian service must naturally flow out of time spent with Him. And Billy Graham often warned against spiritual burnout. He encouraged believers to maintain regular prayer. Bible reading. Having quiet time with the Lord. Not just being busy doing a ministry activity.

Spiritual burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion. It can occur when you become overwhelmed. Or you overextend yourself in church work. Especially when you put doing *for* God, over being *with* God. When you lose the joy of serving and worship, it will make you feel disconnected from God. Even while you're doing something spiritual, you're exhausted! Mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. You feel you have a sense of duty. But you have become irritable. You resent the people you're serving. You feel like you're having to earn God's approval through your work. And then you neglect prayer and Scripture reading. Or you don't rest because you're "too busy doing God's work." Well, that's what causes spiritual burnout! Overcommitment. Trying to please people, rather than God. Serving from your own strength, rather than the Holy Spirit. And neglecting personal spiritual growth. Misunderstanding all this leads to forgetting that God loves you for who you are. Not just for what you do!

So, how do you recover from spiritual burnout? You return to having a closeness with God by being focused on being *with* Him, more than *doing* for Him. You practice *Sabbath* rest. The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word "*Shabbat*," meaning *to cease, or stop*. In Genesis 2:2–3, God rested on the seventh day after Creation. Not because He was tired. He *rested* to delight in His creation. Which emphasizes the sanctification of the Sabbath. The Sabbath day, our Sunday, is holy. It's to be used for His purposes. Holy and dedicated to God. A sacred time for rest, worship, and renewal. To *set apart for God's purposes* limits for your commitments. Learn to say no! And realize you're not alone! Talk to Your pastor. An advisor. Or a counselor for advice on your lifestyle. Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28–30 was "*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*"

That verse is strong medicine for spiritual burnout! It's a call to rest in Christ, rather than struggle with your own weaknesses. Learn to live with trust in God. Surrender by having your dependence on God, and not being so self-sufficient. Depending on yourself. Putting pressure on yourself to prove yourself. So, what is "*The Better Part?*" "*The better part*" is being with Jesus. Not just working for Him. But putting His presence in your life over your performance. His worship over your worry. And relationships over responsibility. Jesus isn't asking for your perfection. What He wants is your attention. "*The better part.*" It isn't about doing more for Jesus. It's about sitting with Him. Listening to Him. Loving Him. And being loved by Him. Let us pray.

Lord, in a world full of distractions, help us choose the better part. Teach us to slow down. To listen. And to rest at Your feet. May our service always flow from a heart that has first, been with You. Amen.