

UNEDITED DRAFT

I am glad that all of you are here today. I know that during the summer months it can be more difficult to get to church. If you have kids, they're out of the school routine, and into the summer vacation routine so it's harder to get them up. You have lawns to maintain, and vacations to go on, and good weather to enjoy. But I am happy you made it a priority today to be here in God's house to listen to him, to feed you faith, to pray to him, to worship him, and to encourage your fellow followers of Christ.

I'm also really glad you're here because today we are talking about a principle that is so important that if you follow it, it will impact every area of your life. And if you fail to follow it, the waves will ripple through every part of your life.

You know there are certain things if you mess them up, the impact to your life is pretty localized. For example, you order a 50 cent ice cream cone at Burger King and on your way out the door, you bump it and the cone falls out of your hand. That's not good. It might upset you. But the ripples from that incident are minor. The repercussion on the rest of your life are minimal, right?

But other mistakes, missteps, and failures on your part have a much bigger impact on your life. If you mouth off to your boss, you get fired. You lose income. You have a hard time finding another job. Much of your life is impacted by that mistake. Or if you fail to invest in your marriage, and instead you just coast, you don't try, you don't make an effort, or worse you have an affair and your marriage falls apart, the repercussions from that effect every area of your life.

So again, today we're talking about a principle that if you follow it, it will positively effect every single area of your life. It will impact your self-esteem, your happiness, it will change every relationship for the better including and especially with your spouse and other family members. It will impact your financial situation. It will change your job performance. It could even have a positive impact on your health. It will help you prioritize and organize your life.

So what is this principle? I'm going to keep you in suspense, and ask you to try to figure it out yourself from the Scripture passage before us today in Luke 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

First let's just make sure we understand the situation and what took place here. Jesus is continuing to make his way toward Jerusalem. He comes to the village where Mary and Martha live. From other Scriptures we know this is Bethany, a village just outside of Jerusalem.

He stays with Mary and Martha, and although he isn't mentioned here, they have a brother named Lazarus. Yes, this is the Lazarus who later get sick and die, and then Jesus would raise him from the dead. These people were good friends of Jesus and they supported Jesus in his ministry. As you look through the Gospels, you see that Jesus had had fans, foes and friends. His fans were the people who thought he was great, loved to listen to his teaching, followed him around, and loved to be witnesses to and beneficiaries of his miracles. But they weren't really friends or close followers. They were just fans of Jesus. Many thousands of people would fall into this category.

Jesus also had foes. Those who hated him. They were jealous of his popularity. They saw him as a threat to the religious establishment. They didn't understand him. But they hated him. Foes.

Fans and foes have something in common. They choose you. You can't pick who is your fan and who is your foe. They choose you. But Jesus also had friends. And what's different about friends is that you pick them. Mary and Martha were in that much smaller category of people that were friends of Jesus. He had an ongoing relationship with them. They personally loved and supported him.

They fed Jesus. They gave him lodging. I would imagine they not only fed and housed Jesus, but the disciples and maybe many of his followers as well. We heard a couple weeks ago about the 72 who were sent out in Jesus' name. It's reasonable to expect that they were still with Jesus. Were Mary and Martha also coordinating food and shelter for that large group? When we see how Martha was frantic and worrying about many things, it's certainly a possibility.

Another thing we should take note of before we consider the main idea, is that Jesus was friends with and trained up women. This was countercultural in Jesus' day. The men were the ones who would sit at the feet of rabbis and be taught. Women did not have equal status when it came to education. Yet here we see that Jesus values the friendship of Mary and Martha AND takes them on as students being their rabbi. That Mary would formally sit at the feet of Jesus and be taught was just not something that was done in that culture. But Jesus did.

Another general observation is how different Mary and Martha were. Did you notice that? Mary seems to be more contemplative and quiet. Martha... well you have to wonder if her last name was Stewart. She was a doer, active, moving. She has her to-do list and chores in mind. Isn't that the nature of siblings? Do any you have siblings that are very different than you? Yet we see how the Lord deals with both in love.

Martha was greatly annoyed with her sister Mary. Martha had work to do, and Mary, instead of helping, was sitting around doing nothing (in Martha's opinion.) That happens in families, doesn't it? We sometimes get annoyed with each other. That happens in the family of the church as well. If you ever found yourself annoyed with another member of the church, well that's family, isn't it? That's not a reason to quit and find a new church. It's

what comes with being a family. So we work out our differences and find a way to love each other, just as we do in our actual families.

Please be patient with each other. Know that God has made each one of us unique. We have different opinions, different education, different life experiences, different gifts and abilities, different resources. We have different personalities: some are more extroverted and task oriented. Others are more introverted and contemplative. Because someone is different than you does not mean they are inferior to you. If you find yourself thinking, "Well that's not the way I would have done it." Can you have the spiritual maturity to understand that your way is not the only way, and there is usually more than one way to skin a cat? God made each of us different so that we could live interdependently with one another. God never intended us to live independently of one another. So when someone annoys you with their actions or view points, our default position must be to appreciate that they are different and they bring something to the issue that we cannot. Let's value our differences, not fight over them!

Now let's think about what our God is teaching us in this portion of Scripture you're your behavior and lifestyle more like Mary or Martha? Mary took the time to sit at Jesus' feet. To listen. To learn. Humble. Teachable. Available to the Lord. Martha, in contrast, was scattered and distracted. She had a million things to do and nowhere near enough time to get them all done. She was being pulled in several different directions. You can imagine her stress levels were high as she wanted to prepare a nice meal for Jesus and all the other guests. 12? 70? She had good intentions. She wanted the best for Jesus. She wanted to serve Jesus the best she could. She wanted to please Jesus.

Maybe you can associate with Martha and what she was feeling at that moment. Do you always have a lot of irons in the fire? Are you pulled in many different directions. As you do one thing, do you find yourself feeling anxious about other important things that aren't getting done because you're doing that other thing? Do you constantly feel like you don't have enough resources for all of your responsibilities? Not enough time in a day? Not enough money for expenses? Not enough attention for everything needs it? Not enough focus to be efficient?

I don't think this is about personality styles: Introvert vs. extrovert. Task oriented vs. goal oriented. I think this is about lifestyle and priorities. If you are worried and distracted and pulled in countless directions, the Lord Jesus is calling on you to make a change in your life today. This is the change that I talked about in the beginning. If we get this principle right, the impact will be felt in absolutely every area of our lives! What is it?

First thing first. If you get nothing out of our time together today, take those words home with you today and think about it. First thing (not *things*) first. Listen again to what Jesus said to Martha.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

So what was the problem with Martha? It wasn't that she was serving Jesus. It wasn't that she was working. Work is a gift from God and not only is pleased when we work, but he requires it, for he said, "If man shall not work, neither shall he eat." So if working wasn't her problem, what was?

She failed to put the first thing first. More important than anything she was doing was someone she should have been spending time with. She needed time at Jesus's feet listening to him. This will sound strange, but **she was so busy serving Jesus that she was starting to lose her connection to Jesus**. For there to be a healthy connection to Christ, good communication is vital. We need to listen to Jesus in his Word. We need to pray to him in response. Where there is constant listening speaking with the Savior, faith is growing. Out of that communication and connection, flows service and doing. God isn't just concerned with *what* you do but with *why* you do it and *how* you do it.

So what happens if you don't get this right? What if you don't keep the first thing first? You don't spend time in the Word of God and you don't respond in prayer? If you keep working and serving, working and serving, even if the things you are doing are good things, but you fail to keep your connection to Christ strong through regular communication in Word and Sacrament, and a response of prayer, then your faith will weaken. Your motives will get wrong. You'll start to find yourself frazzled and bitter and angry at the people you are serving. You won't enjoy serving and working anymore. Or, what could also happen is that you stop working so hard and you grow more and more lazy.

LAW: Have you kept the first thing (the word) first? Or have you become worried and distracted by many things? It's showing in your life and in your relationships, isn't it? You've seen the ripples going out into every area of your life, haven't you? The good news is, it's not too late to change. So here are the next steps:

1) Now is the time to repent. Acknowledge to God the destructiveness of your work, work, mentality. Your faith in Jesus has suffered. No excuses. No reasons why you are so busy. Honest confession and repentance.

2) Turn to Jesus and know that he forgives you. Study the life of Jesus, and you never see him frazzled, or distracted, or frustrated by the many things he did. He was extremely busy, but never too busy to find time with his Father in meditation and prayer. Never too busy that he skipped going to church (synagogue) on the weekend. Never too busy that he started to forget the massive amount Scriptures that he had memorized. All of this Jesus did for you. You have failed. Jesus succeeded. And says that in Christ, you are a success. And what about your failures? They were taken from you by Jesus. He took full blame and he died and a rough wooden cross because of it. The Father's anger was taken out on him, and the Father's favor is what's left for you.

Bottom line: Yes, you've messed up. But your heavenly Father has fully and freely forgiven you. So what's next?

3) Starting today / this week. Not next week, but today, you make daily time at the feet of Jesus your first and highest priority. No more excuses. Take time each day to listen to him, and to respond to him in prayer. "But I'm too busy!" No! If you're that busy, then you especially can't afford to sacrifice this time with Jesus. Martin Luther, the great reformer, had an unimaginably busy schedule. Yet a colleague noticed that Luther never

failed to spend 2 – 3 *hours* in Bible study and prayer every day. So he asked him, “How do you find time?” Martin Luther said that he had so much work to do for God that he could never get it done unless he prayed three hours a day.”

What you will find when keep the first thing first, sitting at Jesus’ feet, following him closely, that you will have new peace and joy. You will live free from guilt. You will be confident in your relationship with almighty God. And as you consider God’s Word and will, you will have his guidance in the work that you do. You will find that your service and work will flow from a thankful, loving heart. You will find that your work will be joyful and satisfying. It will be intentional and effective. It will be balanced and useful. And most important, it will be work that is pleasing to your Father in heaven. You will also find God’s Word and will and love spilling into every area of your life: your relationships, your finances, your perspective and view on life’s troubles and difficulties, your career.

Can you imagine how dramatically your whole life would change with God speaking into every part of it?

Friends, start today. Time with Jesus is now priority number one. Listen and pray. Listen and pray. He speaks in his Word, you respond in prayer. Meditate on his Word all day long. I challenge you to do this. If I told you a pill could change every part of your life for the better, you’d take it. Yet a bunch of you here today won’t take me up on this challenge to make time with Jesus your highest priority. Do so at your own peril. The principle is God’s and it cannot be broken. First thing first. Time with Jesus, then all else. For God’s glory and our good, let’ do it. Amen.