

Duty vs. Devotion¹

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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October 4, 2016

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Purpose: Martha lost her focus as she served the Lord. Mary put first things first. Our lives can get out of focus when we focus on duty instead of devotion. This out of balance life can lead to self-pity, anger, fault finding, and blaming God.

A local business was looking for office help.

They put a sign in the window, stating the following: "HELP WANTED. Must be able to type, must be good with a computer"



A local business was looking for office help. They put a sign in the window, stating the following: "Help wanted. Must be able to type, must be good with a computer and must be bilingual. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer."

A short time afterwards, a dog trotted up to the window, saw the sign and went inside. He looked at the receptionist and wagged his tail, then walked over to the sign, looked at it and whined. Getting the idea, the receptionist got the office manager. The office manager looked at the dog and was surprised, to say the least. However, the dog looked determined, so he led him into the office.



Notes

¹ Sermon Outline by John Hamby

² Stephen Covey, A Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill. "First Things First: To Live, to Love, To Learn, to Leave a Legacy." (Simon & Schuster, 1994).

³ Charles Hummel. Priorities: Tyranny of the Urgent. Christian Basic Bible Studies. (InterVarsity Press, 1994)

Inside, the dog jumped up on the chair and stared at the manager. The manager said, "I can't hire you. The sign says you have to be able to type." The dog jumped down, went

to the typewriter and proceeded to type out a perfect letter. He took out the page and trotted over to the manager and gave it to him, then jumped back on the chair.

The manager was stunned, but then told the dog, "The sign says you have to be good with a computer." The dog jumped down again and went to the computer. The dog proceeded to enter and execute a perfect program that worked flawlessly the first time. By this time the manager was totally dumbfounded!

He looked at the dog and said, "I realize that you are a very intelligent dog and have some interesting abilities. However, I still can't give you the job." The dog jumped down and went to a copy of the sign and put his paw on the sentences that told about being an Equal Opportunity Employer.

The manager said, "Yes, but the sign also says that you have to be bilingual."

The dog looked at the manager calmly and said, "Meow."

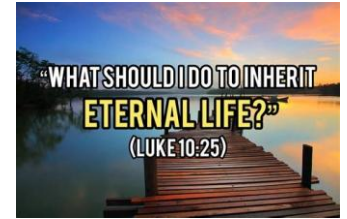


So, what brought you here today? Was it a sign in the window? Was it a friend that invited you to come?

Did you come here this morning out of a sense of duty – obligation – or responsibility to the Lord for all he has done for you? Could it be you are serving the Lord out of habit instead of genuine love for God?

In the scripture passage we examined last week, we see the Jewish leaders attempting to trap Jesus by asking what one must do to

“inherit eternal life.” The two central truths that came out of that discussion was that we are to *“Love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.”* We saw in the story of the Good Samaritan how one person came to the rescue for another that was beaten and left on the side of the road. Our Good Samaritan illustrates how we are to love our neighbors.

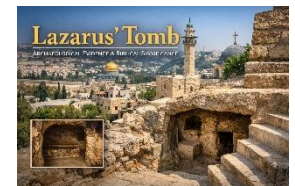


The passage of scripture that I read this morning tells of two sisters, Mary and Martha who loved Jesus, each in their own way. This story of Mary and Martha illustrates the tension between

Duty and Devotion.

The story takes place in the village of Bethany. Bethany is a small community located about a mile or two south of Jerusalem. If you were to walk from one place to the next, (during Jesus’

day) it would not have taken very long. I have been to Bethany and seen the place where Mary and Martha’s brother, Lazarus was buried. I have been to a Greek Orthodox Church built beside his tomb. Today that village is under Palestinian control and an Islamic Minaret is built right beside the church and almost on top of the tomb of Lazarus. Today a fence blocks the road running from Bethany to Jerusalem and now it takes over 30 minutes by road to travel between each area.



From what we can glean from scripture, the town of Bethany was home to Martha, her sister Mary, and her brother Lazarus. They opened their home to Jesus and his disciples as they were passing through town on many occasions. Their home became a place to rest and eat, away from the pressing crowds. This was a place where Jesus knew he was accepted and loved.



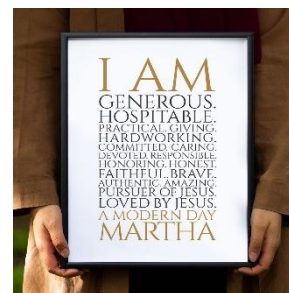
We see in our passage of scripture that when Jesus entered the village, he was welcomed into Martha's home. Once Jesus entered the home, he made himself comfortable and Mary came and sat at Jesus' feet and hung on His every word. Mary wasn't concerned about anything else, but being near Jesus and hearing what he had to say.

I can picture the scene unfolding before my mind's imagination. Mary centered her attention on Jesus, while Martha was standing in the background thinking about the logistics of having so many guests in her home.

While Mary went to Jesus, Martha headed to the kitchen. After all, there were guest's physical needs that needed to be attended to.



They would want something cool to drink and something light to eat after traveling and Martha would prepare the drinks and appetizers. Martha was the "busy as a bee" person, hovering over her guests, fixing, preparing, serving, thinking of her guests needs – while Mary was the meditative, contemplative, listening and learning type.



Often, we want to scold Martha for ignoring Jesus' teaching over the work of serving. Sometimes we want to scold Mary for simply sitting instead of working. But maybe there is a better way to look at the Martha's and Mary's in our world today. I don't think it should be an either/or kind of situation. Maybe it should be a both/and kind of situation. The Lord wants us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work and achieve a balance in both.

Mary is content to sit at Jesus' feet soaking up the Word, and not "do" anything. But her sister, Martha was focused on her guests and sees the need for help in the kitchen. Martha got busy preparing food. She saw it as a privilege to serve Jesus a meal while Mary saw an opportunity to sit with her master. Is one perspective wrong while the other one is right? I would say, "No." Both are essential. Duty and Devotion go hand in hand – but there needs to be a balance. Martha got them out of balance that day.



All of us gathered in this room this morning are involved in different relationships. Our relationships vary – family, business, civic, church. If the focus and purpose in these relationships is lost, then marriages crumble – businesses close – civic club's lose members – churches develop apathy. In every relationship we need to focus upon the things that are important and do these essentials first. John Hamby, in a sermon on this passage of scripture, identified the tension between "duty and devotion" and Martha's loss of focus. Our Biblical story demonstrates how Martha lost her focus and that loss

of focus – a loss of purpose – caused a mild rebuke from Jesus.

I. Martha's Loss of Focus Caused Her to Resort to Self-Pity

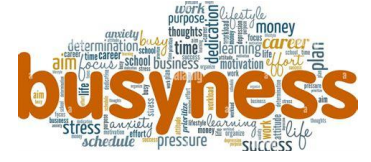
Self-Pity

We find in our story that Martha had lost her focus. It caused her to resort to self-pity.

All of us can identify with the stress an unplanned visitor can cause in your home. You begin to scurry around making sure the house is straight, you double check and make sure you have enough chairs for everyone to sit in. You begin to dig into the pantry and refrigerator to see if you have enough to invite them to stay and eat. Martha in our passage of scripture was just as busy. Verse 40 says she was *“much distracted by serving ...”* That seems to imply she was pulled away to attend the duties at hand, dragged away by her sense of responsibility as a hostess. Maybe she wanted to sit and listen, but there were things to do that demanded her time. Her “duties” were calling her and she could not turn off that inner voice calling her to duty and action. Her fretting robbed her of the joy of spending time in Jesus’ presence.

Yes, we should take our responsibilities seriously. Yes, there is a time to serve. But not to the point we overestimate our importance. The problem was not in the work Martha was doing – it was in the attitude she was doing it that mattered. Martha’s problem is one all of us have at times – we are out of balance in our life.

Maybe a few individuals that are doing nothing could say “Amen” to busyness. The truth is, there are too many sitters, and not enough doers. The difference between Martha and Mary is not that one served and the other did not, but rather one was serving out of “duty” while the other served out of “devotion.”

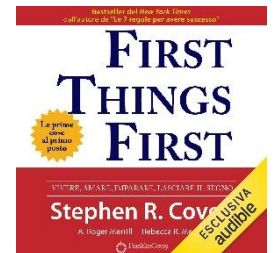


Our lives can become so busy with everyday things that we neglect the most important things.



I don’t know if you remember the television program, “The Jetsons.” It was a cartoon that showed the future as being free from many of the duties of life, because of future modern conveniences. There was this illusion that if we only had these contraptions and robots to do all our work, we would be free to do to what ever we wanted. It appears we are not far from the Jetson age!

In fact, many of you today have some of those modern conveniences but feel totally overworked. There are unreal expectations about what should be accomplished in one day. Steven Covey commented on busyness in his book, *“First Things First.”* He said, “People expect us to be busy, overworked. It’s become a status symbol in our society – if we are busy, we’re important; if we are not busy, we’re embarrassed to admit it. Busyness is where we get our security, its validating, popular, and pleasing, it’s also a good excuse for not dealing with the first things in our lives.”²



We become so busy with work that we ignore the need for worship in our lives. We become so busy with finances that we ignore the needs of our family. We become so busy with television and Facebook that we ignore talking with others face to face. We become so busy with gaining material possessions that we ignore God.

This loss of focus on Martha's part, caused her to resort to "self-pity."

II. Martha's Loss of Focus Caused Her to Become Angry at Others

Secondly, Martha's loss of focus caused her to become angry at others.

Our world is full of distractions. The more pressure we are under, the more we are tempted to focus on the **urgent** rather than the **essential**.

I really believe Martha wanted to honor Jesus. She may have begun with the right attitude. But as she began to plan out her work, and became overwhelmed by the task, she began to get angry. She had so much to do, and so little time to do it in. She could not possibly finish the tasks



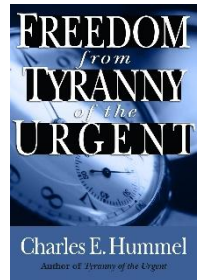
before it was time to eat.

Haven't you felt that in the home? What about work? What about school? So much to do and so little time to do it

in! As the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* says, "I'm Late; I'm Late, for a very important date. No time to say hello, goodbye, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!"

When those times come, we get angry, upset, and frustrated for getting ourselves in this fix in the first place. We get angry with others because they don't see things from our perspective. The harder Martha worked, the behinder she got! Martha became worked up to the point she was ready to explode on Mary. After all, she was doing her part and Mary was a slacker. "Doesn't she see me in the kitchen working hard to get everything ready? I am working and she is not." When that internal pressure builds, it is as if your blood begins to boil!

Charles Hummel in his book, "*Freedom from the Tyranny of the Urgent*," says, "Tension and frustration mount when we are performing the wrong tasks or trying to cram too many of the right activities into a given period. A critical spirit develops and we may begin to judge and condemn others for what they do or don't do. Anytime you feel a wave of criticism gaining momentum in your spirit remember it's completely out of line as far as God is concerned."³



A loss of focus in Martha caused her to be angry with others.

III. Martha's Anger led to Fault Finding in Others



Martha's anger led her to find fault in others. The second part of verse 40 shows how Martha exploded and came running to Jesus to point out how Mary was neglecting her duty. "*Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me.*"

Notice she doesn't call her by name. Maybe Martha had peeped at Mary and tried to signal her to come and help. Maybe she cleared her throat, dropped a few pans, or slammed the door a time or two. Maybe she even tried one of those "looks" and nothing moved Mary to action. We all know about those nonverbal "looks" our parents and teachers gave us.

Martha could not get Mary to come and help and she was angry and frustrated. We get even more irritated when others simply ignore us? Mary was fully caught up in listening to Jesus instead of helping in the kitchen.

Because of this, Martha found fault with Mary. Her loss of focus caused Martha to find fault with others.

IV. Martha's Loss of Focus Caused Her to then Question God's Care for Her

Martha's loss of focus caused her to question God's care for her. Her anger turned from Mary to the Lord. In a tone of accusation, she said, "*Lord, do You not care about me?*" The disciples asked Jesus the same question on the storm-tossed sea one night, "*Do you not care?*" Martha said to Jesus, "*Tell her to help me!*"

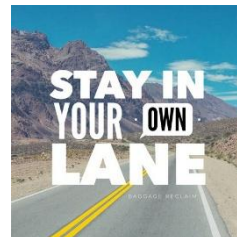
From Martha's perspective, Mary was selfish. But the fact was it was Martha that was selfish. She was now blaming Jesus for her overworked situation. It is as if she was saying, "**If Jesus really cared ...** he would send Mary into the kitchen." She was actually rebuking both Mary and Jesus in one sentence!

Have you ever turned to the Lord and said, "**If you really cared ...**" When we get in those kinds of situations in our

life, then we need to stop and examine our lives! Martha thought she knew what Jesus should be doing and was willing to tell him so! Do we ever do that in our lives?



Do we ever accuse God of not caring for us because we have already decided what God should be doing about our situation? Part of Martha's problem was she was worried too much about what others were doing instead of focusing on what she should be doing.



Someone once told me that I needed to "Stay in my lane" when I had an opinion about what they should be doing. It hurt my feelings a little. But the more I have thought about it, I think it's so true. "Stay in your own lane."

This encounter between Martha and Jesus reminds me of the time in John 21 where Peter was concerned about what was going to happen to another disciple. Peter asked Jesus a question, "*But what about this man?*" Jesus reminded Peter that was not really any of his concern. Peter simply needed to worry about himself and follow Jesus. In today's passage of scripture, we see Jesus refused to do as Martha requested. Yes, the service she was doing was valuable. Yes, it was necessary. But was it done with a heart of devotion?

What she wanted most was for Mary to serve the Lord in the same manner that she was serving. Martha wanted to dictate the right way of duty and devotion.



Aren't we just as guilty? We look around and judge how often someone comes to church, or their willingness to serve on a committee, or their attendance at Sunday

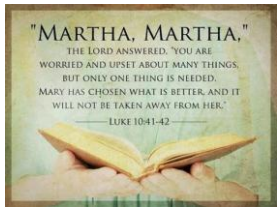
school, and judge their devotion. Each person must decide in their heart how they will best serve the Lord – both out of duty but with a devoted heart. Each person must take care of the “log in their own eye” before they can talk about the “speck in the other persons eye.”

Sadly, Martha's loss of focus caused Martha to question God's care for her.



V. Martha's Loss of Focus Could be Eliminated by Remembering “Why She Was Doing What She Was Doing?”

Martha's loss of focus could have been eliminated by going back to the original purpose. That is, answering the question, “Why was she doing what she was doing?”



Jesus looked into Martha's eyes and said, “*Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*”

Jesus responds with tenderness that only He can do. He did not rebuke Martha for making preparations for her guests. He did not reject her. Her problem was not the food she was preparing; it was the importance she gave to it. Today

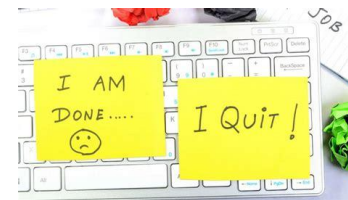
we need to be careful that we do not let the necessary things that must be done in life, get out of balance in our lives.

The core of the problem was Martha tried to impose her value system on Mary. It was not the task that was the problem, it was her focus and it was her attitude.



Today, many people are overworked and overstressed. These often overcrowd our lives and force out the essential things. The “Tyranny of the Urgent” forces us to choose the least important over the most important. When we forget why we are doing what we are doing, then our world operates upside down. We feel overworked and underappreciated.

Dr. Mark Hollingsworth once said, “**If we forget God while we are serving God, we will probably quit God!**”



Have you served in this church for years out of duty instead of devotion? Now you have become fatigued, tired, and simply want to quit? Have you forgotten why this job in the church needs to be done? And now, you may be on the verge of saying, “I quit.”

We need to go back and see if we are serving out of duty or devotion. When we keep our attitudes right, we will find that God will enable us to do what “needs” to be done with joy and satisfaction. Unless we take time to talk with Jesus personally and privately in prayer, we will soon end up like Martha, busy but not blessed.

The Christian life is one of balancing duty and devotion.

Sitting without serving is powerless.

Serving without sitting is directionless.

Serving after sitting produces power and balance.

A Confession of Faith and a Demonstration of Devotion

There is more to Martha's story than this one encounter with Jesus. After Martha's brother Lazarus died, Jesus finally showed up four days later. It seemed as if it was too late for Jesus to help Lazarus. Jesus looked at Martha and said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* Martha gives her life's confession to Jesus. *"Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*

Martha was the one that ran to Jesus and apparently overcame her tendency to focus on duty. Now she was trusting Jesus and exhibiting great faith.

We also have the "rest of the story" concerning Mary. In John 12 it says this:

"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.



Mary was criticized for her devotion to Jesus. She lavishly poured out an expensive perfume. She even took her long hair and wiped Jesus' feet with it. That, my friend, is real devotion and worship. She understood Jesus' death was near and, in many ways, prepared his body for death.

Even when she was criticized, she did not quit. She didn't harbor hard feelings or nurse a bruised ego. She learned to turn the other cheek and go on. Mary's devotion carried her to the tomb that morning Jesus was resurrected.



These two passages of scripture, demonstrating Martha's confession and Mary's worship, show us that they both achieved a balance between duty and devotion.

What about you? Are you stuck in a mode of dogged determination and duty? If so, maybe you have some building resentment, anger, and finger pointing going on in your life. I want to encourage you to turn that duty into devotion. Serve the Lord out of a thankful heart. Serve the Lord because you love Him. Serve the Lord because of the great Grace you have received. Give of your best unto the Master.

Our duty can transition to devotion when we put first things first!

LET US PRAY

