

**JESUS SET HIS FACE TO GO TO JERUSALEM:
DISCIPLESHIP LESSONS FROM THE CALVARY ROAD
MARY HAS CHOSEN THE GOOD PORTION
CAMPBELL BAPTIST CHURCH (03/29/2020)**

In his book, *Crazy Busy*, Kevin DeYoung describes what most of our lives looked like only just a week and a half ago. Can you believe it? He says this:

AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER ... I HAVE BEEN BUSY. IN HIGH SCHOOL I RAN TRACK AND CROSS-COUNTRY, PLAYED INTRAMURAL BASKETBALL, DID NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY, TRIED THE SPANISH CLUB, TOOK MULTIPLE AP COURSES, PLAYED IN OUR INSANELY TIME-CONSUMING MARCHING BAND, SANG IN A MUSICAL, AND DID CHURCH TWICE ON SUNDAY, SUNDAY SCHOOL, YOUTH GROUP, AND A FRIDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY. NO ONE MADE ME LIKE THIS. MY PARENTS DIDN'T FORCE ME (THOUGH CHURCH WAS NOT UP FOR DISCUSSION). I WANTED TO DO ALL THESE THINGS.

IN COLLEGE I DID EVEN MORE. I RAN A SEASON OF TRACK, PLAYED INTRAMURAL SPORTS, WORKED PART-TIME FOR VARIOUS PROFESSORS, ORGANIZED ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S LARGES MODEL UN PROGRAMS (YES, IT'S TRUE), SIGNED UP TO BE A DJ AT THE CAMPUS RADIO STATION, LED OUR FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN STUDENTS GROUP, WENT TO VOLUNTARY CHAPEL THREE TIMES A WEEK, SANG IN A CHURCH CHOIR, SANG IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL CHOIR, PARTICIPATED IN MY CHURCH'S COLLEGE MINISTRY, HELPED WITH BOYS' BRIGADE ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS, WENT TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNING, THEN SUNDAY SCHOOL, THEN EVENING CHURCH, THEN CHAPEL BACK ON CAMPUS LATE INTO THE NIGHT.

SAME STORY IN SEMINARY. IN ADDITION TO NORMAL COURSE WORK AND WADING THROUGH MY DENOMINATION'S LABYRINTHINE ORDINATION PROCESS, I INTERNEED AT MY CHURCH, PREACHED REGULARLY, SANG IN UP TO THREE DIFFERENT CHOIRS AT THE SAME TIME, WENT TO AN ACCOUNTABILITY GROUP EVERY WEEK, DID THE USUAL WITH CHURCH TWICE ON SUNDAY, PLUS SUNDAY SCHOOL, PLUS A MIDWEEK CATECHISM CLASS I TAUGHT FOR LITTLE KIDS, PLUS LEADING THE SEMINARY'S MISSIONS COMMITTEE AND ATTENDING CHAPELS AND FREQUENT PRAYER MEETINGS. I COULD GO ON AND ON.

AND THIS IS BEFORE I WAS REALLY BUSY. THE ONLY PEOPLE BUSIER THAN SINGLE GRAD STUDENTS ARE PEOPLE WHO AREN'T SINGLE AND AREN'T GRAD STUDENTS. ALL THOSE YEARS IN SCHOOL, EXCEPT FOR ONE SEMESTER, I WASN'T MARRIED. I WASN'T IN FULL-TIME PASTORAL MIN-

ISTRY. I WASN'T BLOGGING OR WRITING BOOKS. I WASN'T LEADING ELDERS' MEETINGS. I WASN'T SPEAKING ANYWHERE. I WASN'T A SLAVE TO TECHNOLOGY. I DIDN'T HAVE A MORTGAGE TO FIGURE OUT OR A LAWN TO MOW OR A FURNACE TO FIX OR A DEAD RACCOON IN MY FIREPLACE (LONG STORY) OR WEEKLY SERMONS TO PREPARE. I DIDN'T HAVE TO TRAVEL. I DIDN'T HAVE FACEBOOK OR TWITTER. HARDLY ANYONE E-MAILED ME. AND I WASN'T PARENTING A CHILD, LET ALONE FIVE.

ON MOST DAYS, MY RESPONSIBILITIES, REQUIREMENTS, AND AMBITIONS ADD UP TO MUCH MORE THAN I CAN HANDLE. IT HAS SINCE I WAS A TEENAGER, AND ONLY SEEMS TO BE GETTING WORSE.¹

And then corona virus hit and everything ground to a halt. It's almost as if God said to our entire world, "[Y]ou are anxious and troubled about many things but few things are necessary, or only one. Here let me stop everything else so that you can re-evaluate what you're doing and get your lives back in order." Tell me: have you felt God saying that to you? Christian Blogger Brett Ullman has. In fact, he called his readers to look at the "long game" and reverse engineer their next few months, saying,

I HAVE SEEN THIS WEEK 100'S OF PEOPLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA TALKING ABOUT WHAT SERIES TO BINGE-WATCH ON NETFLIX, CRAVE, HBO OR DISNEY+. WHILE I DO AGREE WE WILL ALL SPEND A LITTLE MORE TIME THIS SEASON WATCHING SHOWS, I WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO LOOK AT THE "LONG GAME" IN THIS. I DO THINK WE MAY HAVE AT LEAST A NUMBER OF MONTHS WHERE LIFE WILL BE DRAMATICALLY CHANGED SO LET'S PLAN ON USING THIS TIME WISELY.

REVERSE ENGINEERING IS A PROCESS TO LOOK AT WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IN THE FUTURE AND THEN LOOK AT WHAT DAILY THINGS YOU WILL NEED TO DO TO GET THERE. IT THEN GIVES YOU A ROADMAP TO WHERE YOU WANT TO END UP. SO, IF WE ARE GOING TO BE HOME AND HAVE EXTRA TIME ON OUR HANDS, I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE VERY STRATEGIC ON WHAT YOU DO WITH THAT TIME. WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN WE COME OUT OF THIS WHETHER IT BE IN A MONTH, 2 MONTHS OR MORE?²

That's a good question. And my answer is that I want to be where Mary was two thousand years ago. Let me explain. If you have a

1 Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013), 12-13.

2 Brett Ullman, "Reverse Engineering Our Next Few Months" blog post dated 23 March 2020 [https://www.brettullman.com/2020/03/23/reverse-engineering-our-next-few-months/?fbclid=IwAR29WjxwWPZ4rTgvGkBzfcZGFP0mltgCmHddaNjMo_P4kSk2lLsLzxHYJN0] accessed 24 March 2020.

Bible handy, please open it to Luke chapter 10 where I'm going to read, now, from verse 38 through to verse 42:

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Our text introduces us to two sisters: Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching, and Martha, who was distracted from listening to Jesus with much serving. When Martha chides Jesus for letting her sister get away with making her do all the work, Jesus answers her gently and compassionately, saying, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but [only] one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." In other words, Mary has rightfully chosen to focus her attention on the one thing that is necessary, namely sitting at my feet, listening to my teaching. So, in this story, then, we have both the priority that ought to govern how we use our time along with the number one distraction that tends to get in the way. What is the priority that ought to govern how we use our time?

The priority is this: sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his Word.

According to verse 42, listening to Jesus' teaching is "the good portion, which will not be taken away from [us]." That language, "good portion," fits the context well "because the Greek word for portion ... often refers to a meal. [So] While Martha was preparing one meal, Mary was having another, [a] better one. She was feeding on the Living Word."³ This idea of feeding on the Living Word reminds me of Revelation chapter 10, verse 9 and what Eugene Peterson had to say about it. "Most of us," Peterson says, carry

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke Volume 1: Chapters 1-12 in the Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 561.

around a handful of essential commands that keep us on track:”

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR. HONOUR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER. REPENT AND BELIEVE. REMEMBER THE SABBATH. BE NOT ANXIOUS. GIVE THANKS AT ALL TIMES. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. FOLLOW ME. GO AND TELL. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS. ADD THIS TO YOUR REPERTOIRE: EAT THIS BOOK; NOT MERELY, “READ YOUR BIBLE,” BUT, “EAT THIS BOOK.” CHRISTIANS FEED ON SCRIPTURE. HOLY SCRIPTURE NURTURES THE HOLY COMMUNITY AS FOOD NURTURES THE HUMAN BODY. CHRISTIANS DON’T SIMPLY LEARN OR STUDY OR USE SCRIPTURE, WE ASSIMILATE IT, TAKE INTO OUR LIVES IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT GETS METABOLIZED INTO ACTS OF LOVE, CUPS OF COLD WATER, MISSIONS INTO ALL THE WORLD, HEALING AND EVANGELISM, AND JUSTICE IN JESUS’ NAME, HANDS RAISED IN ADORATION OF THE FATHER, FEET WASHED IN COMPANY WITH THE SON ... WORDS, SPOKEN AND LISTENED TO, WRITTEN AND READ, ARE INTENDED TO DO SOMETHING IN US: GIVE HEALTH AND WHOLENESS, VITALITY AND HOLINESS, WISDOM AND HOPE.⁴

That being the case, do you feed on the Living Word? Do you make it a priority to get out your Bible, read, and maybe take a few notes, as you meditate on what you’ve read? If not, now would be a great time to start. The same Christian blogger who encouraged us all to reverse engineer this season of social distancing time went on to explain how he was using the time to feed on God’s Word:

I’M USING AN APP CALLED READ SCRIPTURE (BY THE BIBLE PROJECT). THIS IS A DAILY BIBLE READING THAT INCLUDES VIDEOS THAT HELP TO EXPLAIN BOOKS OF THE BIBLE ... [IN ADDITION] AS A FAMILY, WE ARE TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WATCH DIFFERENT PREACHERS/TEACHERS ONLINE AND THEN TALKING ABOUT THEIR MESSAGE. THIS HAS BEEN A REWARDING EXPERIENCE TO BROADEN OUR EXPOSURE TO OTHER CHRISTIAN VOICES AND TO SPEND MORE TIME SHARING WITH AND HEARING FROM OUR TEENAGERS.⁵

In our day and age, there are a host of different ways in which we can feed on God’s Word. The issue is time and desire. And now, for many, the issue of time has been removed. So the question is desire. Will you choose the good portion the way Mary did or will

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 18-21.

⁵ Ullman.

you find new ways of busying yourself—decluttering, tackling all those projects around the house that you’ve been meaning to get to, filing your income taxes, attending online meeting after online meeting? What are you going to do? Or, better yet, where do you want to be when we come out of this thing, whether it be in a month, 2 months or more? I want to be more like Mary. I want to be closer to Jesus. And the way to do that is to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to his teaching. After all, it’s the only thing that’s necessary.

Now, having said that, it’s important for us to also consider the rival thing that most often distracts from what is necessary and that is Christian service.

Don’t get me wrong, Christian service is good. In fact, last week’s look at the Good Samaritan reminded us that it’s a big part of what it means to love our neighbour as ourselves. But Christian service is also dangerous. It’s dangerous insofar as it can distract you from the one thing that is necessary, as it did for Martha. In fact, Martha serves as an example of the terrible path that you can begin to head down once you turn away from what’s most important to focus on something even as good as Christian service. As Philip Ryken outlines this path for us, noting that Martha was guilty of at least three sins:

ONE WAS **DISTRACTION**. AS LUKE TELLS US, SHE WAS “Distracted with much serving.” MARTHA WAS GUILTY OF INATTENTION TO THE WORD OF CHRIST. THE PRIMARY MEANING OF THE GREEK VERB FOR DISTRACTION (*PERISPAO*) IS TO BE DRAGGED AWAY. THIS IMPLIES THAT MARTHA WAS DOING OR WANTING TO DO ONE THING, BUT ENDED UP GETTING PULLED AWAY FROM IT. THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DISTRACTED. FIRST WE ARE ATTRACTED TO SOMETHING, BUT THEN WE GET DISTRACTED, AND OUR ATTENTION TURNS AWAY.

MARTHA HAD LOST HER FOCUS, AND IT WAS HER SERVICE, OF ALL THINGS, THAT DISTRACTED HER ATTENTION AWAY FROM JESUS. WITH HER STRONG SENSE OF DUTY, MARTHA HAD A LONG LIST OF ALL THE THINGS SHE HAD TO DO. THEY WERE ALL THINGS SHE WANTED TO DO FOR JESUS, BUT SHE GOT SO CAUGHT UP IN DOING THEM THAT SHE LOST SIGHT OF JESUS HIMSELF ... MARTHA’S MINISTRY WAS KEEPING HER FROM JESUS.

HOW EASY IT IS FOR US TO GET DISTRACTED, EVEN WHEN WE ARE SERVING THE LORD. WE BEGIN SERVING BECAUSE WE ARE ATTRACTED

TO JESUS AND WANT TO SHOW HIM OUR LOVE. SO WE GET INVOLVED IN HELPING CHILDREN, OR REACHING OUT TO THE POOR, OR TEACHING THE BIBLE, OR SOME OTHER FORM OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE. OUR MOTIVATION IS TO HONOR GOD BY LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS. BUT SOON WE GET DISTRACTED BY THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE IN MINISTRY, OR EVEN BY THE WORK OF MINISTRY ITSELF ...

DISTRACTION SOON GIVES WAY TO **SELF-PITY**. THE MORE MARTHA THOUGHT ABOUT ALL THE THINGS THAT HAD TO BE DONE—AT LEAST ACCORDING TO HER OWN HIGH STANDARDS FOR HOSPITALITY—THE MORE OVERWHELMED SHE BEGAN TO FEEL. AS SHE CONTINUED SLAVING AWAY IN THE KITCHEN, SHE BEGAN TO FEEL SORRY FOR HERSELF. WE KNOW THE FEELING, BECAUSE LIKE MARTHA, WE START SULKING WHENEVER WE FEEL THAT WE ARE THE ONES DOING ALL OF THE WORK. WE THINK MORE AND MORE ABOUT HOW HARD WE ARE WORKING; LITTLE BY LITTLE, OUR FEELINGS OF SELF-PITY TAKE OVER. SOON WE HAVE STOPPED SERVING JESUS AT ALL. WE ARE SERVING OURSELVES, AND THINKING ONLY ABOUT WHAT OUR MINISTRY IS OR IS NOT DOING FOR US.

SELF-PITY INEVITABLY GIVES RISE TO **RESENTMENT**. MARTHA DID NOT STAY FEELING SORRY FOR HERSELF FOR LONG, HOWEVER. QUICKLY SHE REALIZED THAT THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE TO BLAME—SOMEONE WHO WASN'T LIFTING A FINGER. IT JUST WASN'T FAIR! MARTHA DID NOT HAVE TO BE DOING ALL THIS WORK BY HERSELF; IF ONLY THAT LAZY MAY WOULD GET BACK IN THE KITCHEN WHERE SHE BELONGED! FOR IF THERE WAS ONE THING THAT MARTHA HATED, IT WAS A SLACKER ... IN HER RESENTMENT, MARTHA SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY ASSUMED THAT HER SISTER OUGHT TO BE SERVING JESUS THE SAME WAY THAT SHE WAS. THIS ATTITUDE IS COMMON IN THE CHURCH, ESPECIALLY AMONG PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY ARE WORKING HARD IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. WE ASSUME THAT OTHERS SHOULD HAVE THE SAME PRIORITY THAT WE HAVE, AND WE LOOK DISAPPROVINGLY ON THEIR LACK OF COMMITMENT. WHY ISN'T ANYONE VOLUNTEERING TO HELP? WHY AREN'T MORE PEOPLE SUPPORTING THIS MINISTRY? WHY DON'T PEOPLE NOTICE WHAT I AM DOING? WHETHER WE ARE INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY, OR ADULT DISCIPLESHIP, OR MERCY MINISTRY, OR MISSIONARY WORK, OR SOME OTHER FORM OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE, WE RESENT IT WHEN PEOPLE DO NOT MAKE OUR MINISTRY THEIR PRIORITY.⁶

And yet, Jesus made it clear what our priority was supposed to be. It's sitting at his feet, listening to his teaching. So how do we keep from going off the rails here? How do we keep Christian service

⁶ Ryken, 555-557.

in its proper place, because we're called as Christians to serve so we can't just jettison service as if it's unimportant? Let me suggest five thoughts offered by Charles Spurgeon to help keep Christian service in its proper place.

1. [T]HE LORD JESUS GOT ON VERY WELL BEFORE WE WERE BORN, AND IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT HE WILL GET ON EXCEEDINGLY WELL WHEN WE ARE DEAD.
2. [I]T IS PRETTY CERTAIN THAT IF WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST FOR OUR MASTER, OUR FRETTING WILL NOT IMPROVE THINGS.
3. [I]T IS NOT OUR WORK, BUT HIS WORK IN WHICH WE ARE ENGAGED.
4. [S]OMETIMES WHEN THINGS ARE GOING VERY BADLY, AS WE THINK, THEY ARE REALLY GOING BEST.
5. [W]E SERVE A VERY GENEROUS MASTER[.] THERE ARE SOME MASTERS WHOM YOU CANNOT PLEASE—WHEN YOU HAVE DONE YOUR BEST, THEY WILL STILL FIND SOME FAULT—FOR THEY HAVE A QUICK EYE FOR A FAULT. BUT OUR LORD JESUS SEEMS AS IF HE COULD NOT FIND FAULT WITH HIS PEOPLE, AND WHEN WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST, THOUGH IT IS A POOR, POOR THING, YET HE TAKES IT AND SO TRANSFORMS IT BY ONE TOUCH OF HIS OWN GRACIOUS AND PIERCED HANDS, THAT WE DO NOT KNOW IT AGAIN! IT IS MORE HIS THAN OURS AND IT IS ACCEPTED BY HIM. HE DOES NOT RECEIVE OUR WORKS BECAUSE OF THEIR INTRINSIC EXCELLENCES, BUT BECAUSE HE WORKED THEM IN US AND BECAUSE THE MOTIVE FOR WHICH WE HAVE PERFORMED THEM IS HONORABLE TO HIMSELF.⁷

Of course, our motive is only honourable if we haven't fallen prey to self-pity and resentment; so, review this list often to ensure that you keep from being anxious, troubled, and distracted in your Christian service. Let's be sure to keep the main thing the main thing and sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his teaching.

Twenty years ago, Joanna Weaver wrote a book entitled, *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*. Now that the world has slowed down to Mary's pace, the question is: Do you still have a Martha heart in a Mary world? Put another way, what are you doing with this forced Sabbath that the Lord has given you? Are you still distracted from the one thing that is necessary, trying to fill your time with as many work projects as you can or are you sitting at Jesus' feet listening

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "Cumbered with Much Serving," sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington in 1866 [<https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs3163.pdf>] accessed 25 March 2020.

to his teaching? An internet meme that has been circulating of late sums up the matter well. It says, “No movies. No concerts. No sporting events. No restaurants. No social gatherings. Limited workload. Now that I’ve cleared your schedule can we talk now? – God.” How will you respond?

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.

Will you join her?