

210. The Gospel of John 21:17-18

Lessons in True Love-Part 4
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(2-19-23)

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So, we are coming to the end of a long and hopefully fruitful journey thru the Gospel of John.

As we have said numerous times—we have come to the final chapter in John's gospel—an 'epilogue' which John inserted so that his readers would know what happened to Peter after his denial of Jesus and how he was restored by the Lord to his apostleship.

But not only that, this chapter teaches us some very important lessons about true love (the love of God)—which can and should be applied to—first of all to our relationship with Jesus—but also to our marriages.

I. True Love is not Words—it's Commitment—verses 1-14

II. True Love is not Feelings—it's Service—verses 15-17

As we said last week, true love isn't *feelings* (not fundamentally—Jesus commanded us to love our enemies which doesn't require any feelings) it's service—which can be a legitimate and genuine expression of love for Jesus, your spouse, and for others.

Just be careful that you don't offer Jesus (or your spouse for that matter) service instead of or in the place of true love either.

As we closed last week's message, we said that—for many Christians, because their love for Jesus has cooled—they have substituted *service* for loving passionate *fellowship* with Him (Revelation 2:4).

What you need to do is fall in love with Jesus so that your service becomes an expression of your love for Him.

How can you fall in love with Jesus? —by starting to spend time with Him as demonstrated in the passage I want to spend our time looking at this morning.

Luke 10:38–42 (NKJV)

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

The '**one thing that is needed**' is, first and foremost—fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for '**fellowship**' is *koinonia* and it means to '*share in*'; '*to be one with someone in a deep, personal relationship.*'

That is the kind of relationship Jesus desires to have with all of us—something deep and personal—not shallow, superficial, and casual.

The only way this kind of relationship can be cultivated with Jesus is by spending ‘quality’ time with Him (we also call it ‘*communion*’—as in *communing* with someone)—simple service for Jesus cannot be substituted for *koinonia*—it just won’t cut it!

As we read the passage in Luke 10:38-42 about Martha and her sister Mary—the Holy Spirit highlights for us the basic personalities of each woman, and how it impacted the way they related to Jesus.

In fact, if we had to do a personality profile of these two women from the information given here it would probably look something like this:

The Profile

A. Martha

Martha comes across as a classic ‘type A’ personality.

One expert defined it this way:

“The so-called Type A personality is characterized by competitiveness and impatience. The most “toxic” personality traits of Type A people are frequent reactions of hostility and anger. These traits are correlated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease.”

Martha seems to be a high-strung, task oriented, perfectionist! She comes across as a person who can never sit still, who always has to be doing something. Her house has to always be immaculate, she can’t relax until the cupboards are cleaned, the dishes are washed and put away, and the beds are made.

Martha was probably the kind of person who busied herself more with *projects* than with people. It wasn’t that she was unfriendly or unpleasant to be around—it was just that she always seemed to have so much to do she didn’t have much time left to spend coffee klatsching with the neighbors.

There was always one more errand to run or one more choir that needed to be done—busy, busy, busy, that was Martha of Bethany.

She was what we call today a workaholic—with a possible splash of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) mixed in to boot.

B. Mary

Mary on the other hand was a much more laid back and easygoing kind of person. She was not task-oriented—she was a people person!

While Martha busied herself with household chores—Mary was probably out in the yard talking with the neighbors or strolling around visiting with the people in her village.

It was no problem for Mary to leave the dishes undone and the beds unmade to spend the afternoon sipping tea and visiting with a friend.

Martha, on the other hand, couldn't let anyone in the house unless it was spotless first which meant that Martha probably didn't entertain much—there was always another shelf that needed to be cleaned or a closet that needed to be organized or some other chore that needed her attention.

If I read Mary right, she was probably a *meanderer*—for Mary the journey was as important as the destination.

I can just picture her stopping along the way to look at and smell the Spring flowers—or to watch a robin build its nest.

She was probably never in a hurry which meant she was probably the one who was always late in getting somewhere—Martha on the other hand was never late in getting anywhere!

To Martha, the journey was nothing more than the time you had to waste in getting to where you were going—in other words, Martha hated the '*journey*'—she was all business and as such—it was the destination that was important to her.

The thought of stopping to look at flowers seemed to her—an unnecessary waste of time—something Martha never seemed to have enough of.

I mean, stopping to look at flowers when you had somewhere to be was the kind of irresponsible thing people like her sister Mary did—which forced everyone to have to wait for her and irritated Martha to no end!

It's been said that the Mary's of this world will never *get* heart attacks—but they'll probably *give* a few. So here we have two women, two sisters with two entirely different personalities.

The Holy Spirit is contrasting these two women and how they related to Jesus to teach us, as Jesus Himself put it—the '*one thing that is needed*' in our Christian life (and a lesson in true love).

The Practice

Here we see how each sister's personality motivated and cultivated her practice in life.

First of all, we see Martha busying herself with serving the Lord—what's better than that!?

Mary on the other hand was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching and enjoying His fellowship—in fact, Mary of Bethany is mentioned three times in the New Testament and every time she's mentioned she is always found at Jesus' feet.

It's interesting to me that the Lord really didn't commend Martha for all her service and business for Him—but instead, He praised Mary for having chosen '*that good part*' which was *communion* with Him. Now at this point some might be prone to ask—"*Isn't Christian service good and important?*"—and the answer, of course, is—Yes!

Jesus admonished us to be faithful in our service for Him.

Paul the apostle said that we were to be "*fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*" (Romans 12:11)

The point of this passage isn't to put down service for Jesus—the point is to lift up fellowship with Jesus.

It's important to understand that each sister was expressing *her* love for Jesus—Martha through *service* and Mary through *fellowship*.

Now in all honesty—I relate more to Martha than I do to Mary (I also relate more to Peter than I do to Paul!).

And I’m not alone because I think that most Americans tend to be Martha’s—busy to the point of distraction and exhaustion!

We Christians comfort ourselves in our busyness by telling ourselves—“*Yes, I’m busy but it’s all-good because I’m busy serving the Lord. And sure I don’t have time for the Lord, that’s true—but He understands because I’m doing it for Him!*”

We think that activity (service) *for* Jesus—is just as good as spending time *with* Jesus.

But what many Christians don’t realize is that—what we do *with* Jesus is infinitely more important than what we do *for* Jesus.

The Product

What was the product of each sister’s practice—or in other words, what did it produce in each of their lives?

Mary

1. She had peace

Luke 10:39
And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet...

The fact that Mary was *sitting* at Jesus’ feet indicated a certain level of *calmness* and *peace* to her demeanor.

Sitting implies being at rest—as opposed to Martha who was walking back and forth from the kitchen to the dining room to the living room trying to get everything ready!

2. She was in tune with her Lord

Luke 10:39
And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.

Because she was sitting at Jesus’ feet, she was able to really listen to her Savior and this caused her to understand things that Martha and the other disciples missed.

It’s interesting to me that apparently Mary was the only one who really understood that Jesus was going to die—as was evidenced in the fact that she anointed Him for burial—almost a week before He was crucified! (John 12)

Martha with all her busyness apparently didn’t take the time to really *listen* to Jesus—as is the case with so many of us. (*‘Still small voice’*)

Martha

1. She was distracted

Luke 10:40

But Martha was distracted with much serving...

The dictionary defines “**distracted**” as: *‘having one’s thoughts or attention driven about mentally; unable to concentrate or give attention to something; over occupied.’*

The Greek verb literally means, “*To be drawn in different ways at the same time.*”

In other words, Martha’s attention was being drawn to (and controlled by) her surroundings (her house and her household chores)—from everywhere and from everything except from where her attention should have been focused—and that was on Jesus Himself!

Martha was so busy serving the Lord—that it wound up taking her away from the Lord!

Or in other words—she was so busy *serving* Him that she no longer had any time for Him.

It’s strange but we can get so busy with the ministry—that there’s no time left for Jesus (pastors especially)!

2. She was stressed out

Martha wanted to serve Jesus so much that she wound up taking on more than she could handle.

“But Martha was distracted with much serving...” (verse 40)

The result was that she started getting stressed out which caused her to not only lose her joy—but she further became frustrated and irritated—

Luke 10:40

But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?...”

Mary was sitting there at the feet of Jesus, relaxed, at peace and enjoying His fellowship—whereas Martha, on the other hand, was feeling stressed and frustrated about being left alone to do all the work she had to do for the Lord—work she wanted to do—work she volunteered to do—work that no one was forcing her to do!

3. She was angry

So, what does she do? She gets angry, not only at her sister—but also at the Lord!:

Luke 10:40

“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”

In other words, “*Don’t let her just sit there, Lord—tell her to get in the kitchen and help me.*”

In the Greek it comes across as a *rebuke*—she is so mad at Mary that she literally takes it out on Jesus—and actually rebukes Him for not being fair!

He was treating Mary (the lazy one) better than He is treating her (the industrious, responsible one)!

Martha had come to the place where her service was no longer motivated by a simple and sincere love for Jesus—but now, because she had overextended herself, she was feeling pressured by all of her responsibilities to get things done.

This filled her with anxiety which boils over in anger as she begins to complain to Jesus, essentially saying, *“Why am I always the one who has to do everything around here!”*

You never want to get to a place where you find yourself complaining about what you’re doing for the Lord.

And if ever you arrive at that place where you find yourself so stressed out in your service to the Lord that you start complaining about it—either go somewhere and pray and get your heart right—or quit serving!

The Lord doesn’t want any of us complaining about what we’re *doing* for Him. And He points this out to her—

Luke 10:41

And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.

The Greek indicates that Martha was inwardly very anxious and outwardly very distressed—in other words, she was a ‘basket case’—a spiritual train wreck!

At this point you might be thinking to yourself, *“I don’t think Mary was being right letting her sister do all the work while she just sat there. I think that the Lord should have rebuked Mary for her laziness.”*

That’s how most people see Mary when they read this account—but let me show you something you might not have seen before.

Luke 10:38–40 (NKJV)

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”

The Greek here is: **“Lord, do You not care that my sister keeps on leaving me to serve alone...”**

Mary *was* helping Martha in preparing the meal—but when she finished a task (like setting the table)—she quickly returned to sit at Jesus’ feet.

So, Mary *did* serve—but her service for the Lord was secondary to her true passion which was to sit at Jesus’ feet, listen to His words and fellowship with Him!

Martha, the homemaker, is cooking up a storm—she’s busy getting everything ready, wanting everything to be just perfect for Jesus—she is showing her love for Him by working herself to the bone.

Mary was helping Martha, but the service wasn’t her first love—Jesus was.

She helped set the table—but if she forgot the ‘*doilies*’ under the glasses—it was no big deal for Mary.

Her main concern was to get back as quickly as possible to the one place she loved the most—sitting at Jesus’ feet!

In other words, it wasn't that Mary was lazy and did *no* work—it was that she saw her service for Jesus as secondary to her fellowship and communion with Him—which in her mind was primary.

The one word that best characterized Mary was not the word '*lazy*'—it was the word balanced!

And I personally believe that was one of the big reasons why she was such a people person—I don't think you can sit at Jesus' feet, listen to His word ("*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*")—and not have a heart for people as He did. (Explain)

And this was the lesson Jesus was trying to get across to Martha—and the Holy Spirit to the rest of us who are like her—our service for the Lord will never be effective or even accepted if it doesn't flow from our fellowship with Him.

The Priority

Luke 10:42 (NKJV)

But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

The NIV translates Luke 10:42—"*Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*"

We need to understand that Jesus isn't holding up one to the *exclusion* of the other—it's not that service is *bad*—it's that communion is better!

It's not a matter choosing between the good and the bad—it's a matter of choosing between the good and the best!

When the Lord said that '**one thing is needed**'—He wasn't saying we only need to do this one thing.

He was saying that of all the things we busy ourselves with—this is the one thing we can't neglect! And notice what Jesus said about Mary—He said, "**Mary has chosen...**"

You and I must *choose* to sit with Jesus in fellowship—it won't just happen by accident.

There will always be one more job to do around the house, one more customer to call, one more bill to pay, one more place to go.

But as we look around at how many Christians are stressed out, frustrated and have no joy—it's directly proportionate to how much (or little) time they are spending with the Lord.

J. Vernon McGee—

"My frustrated, confused friend, are you at that corner of life where you do not know which way to turn? Then, for goodness' sake, sit down. Sit at Jesus' feet. Look in His Word and see what He has to say... Just take time to sit at the feet of Jesus. Mary chose the best part."

One author wrote:

"While the Master does appreciate all that we undertake for Him, He knows that our first need is to sit at His feet and learn His will; then in our tasks we shall be calm and peaceful and kindly, and at last our service may attain the perfectness of that of Mary when in a later scene she poured upon the feet of Jesus the ointment, the perfume of which still fills the world."

“My life is just too busy to spend time with the Lord”—that’s a cop-out!

You will always find time for what you consider to be important.

And please don’t fall into the trap of thinking that serving the Lord is just as important as sitting with the Lord—it is not, and I think the Holy Spirit is communicating that to us thru Mary and Martha.

You can’t fall in love with someone if you don’t spend time with them—an obvious and yet basic rule in practicing true love!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).