Only One Thing Is Needed
October 5, 2025

(Luke 10:38-42) As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!" “Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (1 Timothy 1:17) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen

Alright, everyone, now be honest. With which of the two sisters do you sympathize more? Mary, who was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to him, and was scolded by her sister for it? Or Martha, who was working frantically trying to be a good host to Jesus, and was getting no help from Mary? Probably most of us sympathize more with Martha than with Mary. After all, Jesus and his 12 disciples had just arrived. Common courtesy demanded their feet be washed. Probably drinks of water would need to be offered. A meal suitable for 13 or more men had to be prepared. Lodging for all needed to be arranged. There was a lot to do! There would be a lot to do today if the same thing happened. And even with our modern conveniences and larger homes, we would have our hands full trying to accommodate a dozen men who suddenly showed up on our doorstep. And remember, Jesus didn’t have a phone to call ahead that he was coming!

The Bible tells us that Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. Martha recognizes everything that needs to be done, and is frantically dashing here and there trying to do it. Meanwhile, her able-bodied sister is sitting there doing nothing to help Is it any wonder that Martha is upset? Is it any wonder that she came to [Jesus] and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Many if not most of us would have found ourselves in Martha's shoes, and not in Mary's. We would have been frantically trying to play host or hostess, frantically trying to do all we needed to do to make Jesus comfortable, desperately trying to pull everything together that needed to be pulled together. Most of us would NOT have been sitting at Jesus' feet and listening.

In fact, try to imagine if Jesus and 12 men came unexpectedly to your home to visit this afternoon. How would you react? What would you do? Would you be scrambling around trying to pick up the dirty dishes, dust the furniture, and straighten the sofa pillows? Would you be offering them refreshing beverages? Would you be desperately pulling food out of the freezer to defrost in the microwave, and tossing together a soup or salad? Would you be excusing yourself to make some phone calls to order dinner, to cancel some appointments, and to invite some friends over? Or would you simply sit and listen to Jesus like Mary did? Generally speaking, we are much more like Martha than we are like Mary. We are much more inclined to fuss and become distracted by preparations like Martha than we are to simply sit and listen like Mary.

But listen and take to heart the words Jesus spoke to an indignant Martha. "Martha , Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Don't you think Martha expected Jesus to tell Mary to lend a hand? Don't you think Martha was convinced she was doing the "better" thing. Wouldn't we probably think the same thing in the same circumstances? But Martha was wrong, and so are we. Jesus said to her: “Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." In other words, Jesus told Martha, washing our feet isn't needed, making us comfortable isn't needed, making a fancy dinner isn't needed either, in fact, not even feeding us is necessary. Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better.

And what did Mary choose? Mary chose to hear God's Word. Mary chose to listen to her Savior. If we are absolutely honest, if we examine our heart-of-hearts, if we dismiss for a moment what Jesus clearly shows us today in our focus verses, what would we consider the only thing necessary? What do we build our lives around? What do we worry and fret over? What do we find ourselves distracted with time after time? How would we finish the statement, only one thing is needed? The proper answer is not, a good job, or money in the bank, or a safe retirement fund, or success in life. The proper answer is not, my own home, a nicely manicured lawn, or a nice car. The proper answer isn’t even joyful relationships, or a loving family, or my health, or even my life. Only one thing is needed, Jesus said Mary has chosen what is better. And again, what did Mary choose? Mary chose to hear God's Word. Mary chose to listen to her Savior. Only one thing is needed, Jesus said contact with the Word of God.

And why is contact with the Word of God so crucial? Why is God's Word referred to by Jesus as the one thing needed? God's Word is the one thing needed, because only God's Word shows us the depth of our iniquity, and the height of Jesus' love. Only God's Law cuts our sanctimonious hearts to ribbons, and only God's Gospel heals them back up again in Christ. Only God's Law can take our self-righteous selves to the brink of utter despair by showing us our sin, and only God's Gospel can lift our spirits to the heights of giddy joy by showing us Jesus our Savior. Only God's Word can foster our faith in Jesus our Savior, which in turn wins for us forgiveness from our sins, which in turn opens for us the gates of salvation. God's Word is God's chosen instrument to create faith, sustain faith, and strengthen faith. God's Word is the spark that sets our souls on fire for the Lord, and it's the fuel that keeps the fire burning. God's Word is the vehicle the Holy Spirit uses to open spiritual eyes, and change spiritual hearts. God's Word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. It is the narrow way, which leads through the narrow gate into the wide and wonderful land of heaven. It is the river of life which leads to the springs of salvation.

Let there be no doubt that God's Word is the one thing needed. Your house may have major issues. Your fancy cars may get wrecked. Your job may be terminated. Your savings may be depleted. Your retirement fund may shrivel away. Your family may dissolve. Your health may fail. Your dreams may die. Your life may end, but God's Word remains yours forever. As Jesus told Mary, The one thing needed will not be taken away. And as he said elsewhere, (Matthew 24:35) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

No matter what difficulty we might find ourselves in, God's Word speaks to it. No matter what tragedy we might face, God's Word holds comfort for us. No matter what crossroads we might find ourselves at, God's Word gives direction. No matter how our consciences might torment us, God's Word offers us peace. No matter what sin we might have committed, God's Word speaks forgiveness to us. No matter how great our iniquities, God's Word shows us a Savior who paid for them all in full. No matter how viciously Satan may accuse us, God's Word shows us God's holy verdict of "pardoned in Christ Jesus."

Dear Friends, do you see now why Jesus said "only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her?" God never takes his Word away from us. Rather, it is we who take ourselves away from his Word. We have no shortage of lousy excuses as to why we are neglecting the Word. We say things like: I would read my Bible more or do devotions, but there just aren't enough hours in the day, or I'm just too busy taking care of family things or work issues, or I don't know how or where to start, or there are so many things I just can't understand. Or we say: I would come to church more, but services are held too early or late in the morning, or Sunday's are our family day, or Sunday's the only day I have to do my own thing, or I have to work during services. No matter how hard we try to justify our neglect of God's Word, would any of our excuses really hold up before our Savior? I think not.

In fact, Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 6:31-33) So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (Now listen carefully to these next words) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. In other words, seek first [the things of God], and all these [other] things [we recognize we need] will be given to you as well. When we are putting God and his Word first in our lives, God promises to care for all of our other needs. All those things we spend so much time and energy worrying about to the detriment of spending time in God's Word. All those necessary things we chase after throughout life, will be given to us when we get our priorities straight. All those other things we need will be provided for us by our gracious God when we dedicate ourselves to the one thing needed.

To quote Jesus in our focus verses, "Brother ... sister" the Lord [says to us], "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed my Word" Read God's Word. Hear God's Word. Study God's Word. Spend frequent and regular time in God's Word. God's Word is the one thing needed. God's Word shows us our Savior and his saving sacrifice. God's Word shows us our Lord's love. God's Word shows us our God's incredible blessings, poured out in every aspect of our lives. God's Words show us a God who gives us incredible promises, and keeps them all. God's Word provides self esteem, and security, and peace, and joy, and a purpose, and a destination.

It is estimated that Bibles per capita in the world stand at less than half a Bible per person. Yet in the United States of America where a typical household is just a little over 2 people we average more than 5 Bibles per household, over 2 Bibles per person. However, only 37% of Americans claim to read their Bibles at least once a week. 16% claim to read the Bible once a month. 10% say they read it less than monthly. 41% say they rarely or never

read their Bibles. "Brother ... sister" the Lord [says to us], "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed, my Word"

To get back to Mary and Martha, don't you suppose that Martha was thinking "If only Mary would help me, then we could both listen to Jesus." But that is Satan's great lie to the Marthas of the world. Satan is always telling us, "After you do this, THEN you can spend time with Jesus." But there will always be something more! After Martha made the dinner, she would have to clean the table and dishes. After the dining utensils were cleaned, she would have to prepare the beds. After the beds were prepared, she would have to plan for the morning breakfast. And by the time Martha finished doing what needed to be done there was no time left for Jesus' words. Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, there will always be something distracting you. In high school and college it is schoolwork, and activities, and friends, and relationships. After graduation, it is our occupation, our home, and our family. As we get older, it is our health, and the changes we face in life, and loved ones dying. There will always be something distracting you from spending time in God's Word. It is very easy to be a Martha through life. It is much more difficult to be a Mary. There will always be something more to distract us from God's Word. Satan will always throw something in our way. That's why recognizing that God's Word is the one thing needed, we would be wise to think like Mary. We would all be wise to take time for God's Word first.

And here's how we do that. We pull out our calendars or our appointment books and we schedule personal daily devotion time before we schedule anything else. While we have those books out, we write in worship services on Sunday morning each week. Only after personal devotion and public worship time are written in do we start writing in the rest of our activities. And do that today. Schedule frequent and regular time in God's word right away. If we tell ourselves we'll do it tomorrow, it'll get put off until next week. Before you know it, it'll be put off until next month. Then next month becomes next year. Satan will always try to keep us from spending regular time in the one thing needed. Satan will always have us scrambling around like Marthas, instead of sitting and listening to Jesus like Marys. Schedule time for God's Word and then follow through with it because God's Word is the one thing needed.

Someone has put together a summary of who should read the Bible. The young, to learn how to live. The old, to know how to die. The ignorant, for wisdom. The learned, for humility. The rich, for compassion. The poor, for comfort. The dreamer, for enchantment. The practical, for counsel. The weak, for strength. The strong, for direction. The haughty, for warning. The humble, for exaltation. The troubled, for peace. The weary, for rest. The sinner, for salvation. The doubting, for assurance. Who should read the Bible? All Christians, for daily guidance. God's Word is the one thing needed. God grant that we all fully recognize that fact, that we fully believe that truth, that we live our lives embracing that truth. God grant that we become more and more like Mary, and less and less like Martha.