

# One Priority (Mary)

**Text:** Luke 10:38-42

## **Introduction:**

1. There are several examples in the Word of God of godly individuals who aimed at “one thing” and were blessed as a result.
2. Review of series outline:
  - I. One Passion – Closeness to God (David) (Psalm 27:1-5)
  - II. One Priority – Communion with God (Mary) (Luke 10:38-42)
  - III. One Pursuit – Conformity to God (Paul) (Philippians 3:10-14)
3. In our last lesson we looked at the “one thing” in David’s life – Passion for God (Psalm 27:4). In this lesson, we will study the “one thing” in Mary’s life: One Priority – Communion with God.
4. The location: Bethany is located about three kilometres from Jerusalem on the south eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was on the road to Jericho and was the final stop before Jerusalem. Several notable Bible events occurred in this little town. The account before us today, the raising of Lazarus, the feast at the house of Simon (Matthew 26:1-13 Mark 14:3-9 Luke 7:36-50 John 1:2:1-8). Christ also ascended from near Bethany (Luke 24:50-53)
5. The household: Christ has a special love for this household made up of three siblings – Mary, Martha and Lazarus (See John 11:5).

*Observe firstly...*

## **I. MARY’S DEVOTION (VS. 39)**

### **A. She was a Worshipper (Vs. 39a)**

1. Mary had the spirit of a worshipper. She drew close to the Lord like few others, surpassing even the disciples in her understanding of the Lord’s coming death (John 12:7).
2. Mary had a spirit of discernment for the opportunities. It appears she was assisting Martha but then dropped everything when Christ arrived. Martha said Mary had “left me to serve alone” (Vs. 40)
3. “at Jesus’ feet” = right in front of the feet of Jesus (RWP)
4. The secret to Mary’s life is found in closeness to the feet of the Lord Jesus. John 12:3 *“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, **and wiped his feet with her hair:** and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” She kept her head near His feet!*
5. Those who place themselves in a lowly and humble position, will know blessings from Christ few others experience. *“...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.”* (James 4:6)

### **B. She was a Learner (Vs. 39b)**

1. ‘heard’ = imperfect tense. She went on listening to his talk (RWP)
2. Sitting at one’s feet as Mary did was “the ancient posture of disciples or learners...it means she was a disciple of his; that she

listened attentively to his instructions, and was anxious to learn his doctrine.” (Barnes) See also Acts 22:3 (Paul taught at ‘the feet of Gamaliel”). Mary had a teachable spirit. She seized the opportunity to hear the Word of God from the lips of Christ.

3. “Low at Thy feet Lord Jesus; This is the place for me; There I have learned sweet lessons, Truth that has set me free.
4. Application: We need to sit at the feet of Jesus:
  - a. ***In our Daily Walk*** – devotional life. How precious is the Word of God and prayer to us? Does it get priority in our personal life?
  - b. ***In our Weekly Worship*** – church life. Do we come regularly to hear the Great Shepherd’s under shepherd who is His vessel to speak the Word?
  - c. Too many Christians sit in front of the T.V. more than they do at the feet of Jesus! Too many Christians sit at the feet of ungodly authors, pop stars and movie stars than they do at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

*Observe secondly...*

## II. MARTHA’S DISTRESS (VS. 40)

As we look at Martha in this account, we see several things. Take note of Martha’s:

### A. Dedication (Vs. 38)

Martha had:

1. A heart to be hospitable (Vs. 38). Martha “received him into her house”. The word ‘received’ means to admit under one’s roof, to receive as a guest. This was good and commendable. She clearly had a love for the Lord
2. A heart to be helpful (Vs. 40). Martha had a servant’s heart. In John 12:2 we find Martha serving there also – “and Martha served”. A desire and passion to serve Christ is commendable and biblical (Titus 2:14 – “zealous of good works”). Martha’s problem was her approach to her service and the fact it was service at the neglect of something very important.

### B. Distraction (Vs. 40a)

She was distracted and distressed by:

1. The mental burden of her service – ‘cumbered’. The word ‘cumbered’ means burdened down (e.g. a cumbersome load or object). It means to be pulled or drawn away, to be distracted, to be drawn about in different directions, to be driven about mentally, to be distracted, too busy in a thing. She was all “wrapped up” in her activities! **Instead of her service drawing her closer to the Lord, it was drawing her away from the Lord!**
2. The magnitude of her service – “much serving”. Martha had a lot on her plate! However, in her zeal to be the best host she could be for the Lord, she may have loaded herself up with expectations and tasks that weren’t all necessary. “He did not require such

preparations for him, and so much attendance; she gave herself an unnecessary trouble in providing so many things for his entertainment, when less would have sufficed;" (Gill) Sometimes we can even deceive ourselves with a false sense of spirituality because we are "doing" so much for God, all the while neglecting to fellowship with God and walk with God. We need to be a pleasure to God before we can be a power for God.

### 3. Practical lessons

- a. There is nothing wrong with serving, so long as our serving does not cause us to lose sight of the Saviour!
- b. Serving Christ is right and good, so long as it is an outflow of our time spent at His feet and done in his power and not in the strength and energy of the self-life.
- c. Illustration: An engine without oil quickly overheats and service without the sweet oil of Christ's spirit soon becomes hot and explosive.

## C. Frustration (Vs. 40b)

Martha expressed:

### 1. Frustration at the Lord – "Lord, dost thou not care"

- a. **Martha was abrupt** – "came to him". Martha stepped up to or burst in upon Jesus. An explosive act as with her speech (RWP). Martha was rude to the Lord! Internal tension and unrest eventually lead to outward displays of fleshly anger and frustration. How we need a sweet spirit in our service that comes from walking closely with the Saviour!
- b. **Martha was accusing** – "dost thou not care". She accused Christ of being uncaring towards her. Do you ever vent frustration at the Lord when strained or stressed over the "to do" list? E.g. "Lord, why on earth is this happening!"
- c. **Martha was assertive** – "bid her therefore that she help me". Martha seems to have forgotten **who** she is speaking to! Martha is giving orders to the Lord instead of getting her orders from the Lord. She was trying to get the Lord of the Universe on board with her program rather than submitting to His plan. A fleshly "my way or the highway" assertiveness in Christian service is wrong. There is a world of difference between a gracious suggestion to an authority vs a carnal demand.
- d. **Martha was self-absorbed** – "left me to serve alone...help me". Martha was too big in the picture. What had started out as an act of service of the Lord had become all about her. We need to pray, "Lord, keep self out of my service for you. May my motives for serving you be produced by the workings of the Holy Spirit in me, and not the impulses of the flesh."

### 2. Frustration at Mary – "my sister hath left me to serve alone"

- a. Even though Martha was directing her comments to the Lord, there was a clear barb intended for Mary. When we serve in the

- wrong spirit, we hurt those closest to us, particularly with our tongues. We grieve the Lord and we grieve others close to us.
- b. Believers who are serving in a carnal fashion, will misunderstand and misrepresent the Spirit-filled Christian.
  - c. Mary would later attract criticism from the disciples (especially Judas) when she anointed Christ's feet with that costly ointment (John 12:1-8). You can get in a lot of trouble for simply being close to the Lord Jesus!
  - d. **Challenge: Do you feel encouraged or annoyed by others devotion to Christ?**

Observe thirdly...

### III. THE MASTER'S DISCOURSE (VS. 41-42)

Christ's words to Martha contain...

#### A. A Profound Insight (Vs. 41)

1. The compassion towards Martha. Christ's correction of Martha came from a heart of love. John 11:5 "Now **Jesus loved Martha**, and her sister, and Lazarus."
2. The call to Martha – "Martha, Martha". It is interesting to note how often the Lord does this in Scripture (e.g. Luke 22:31; Acts 9:4). It reveals Christ's tenderness. It also served to get her attention!
3. The condition of Martha – "careful and troubled"

Christ, as the Great Physician, diagnosed Martha's heart problem with perfect accuracy. Her heart was filled with:

- a. **Care** – "careful". The word means anxious, worried. The same word is used in Philippians 4:6-7 "Be **careful** for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Psalm 55:22 encourages us, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and **he shall sustain thee:**"
- b. **Commotion** – 'troubled'. The word 'troubled' was a common word for tumult (RWP) A 'tumult' refers to the commotion, disturbance or agitation of a multitude, usually accompanied with great noise, uproar and confusion of voices. (Webster) She had an agitated state of mind. Martha had a noisy soul ("many things"). "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer."

#### B. A Pointed Instruction (Vs. 42a)

1. "one thing is needful" = only one thing is necessary! That means all other things are negotiable but this one thing is not. Note the contrast between the "**one thing**" and the "**many things**". If we are not careful, "the many things" can consume us to where we neglect the "one thing".

2. If spending time at the feet of Jesus is the “one needful thing”, why is it that we so often cut it short or neglect it for the “many things”? By our actions we tend to relegate it to the “one needless thing”
3. What is your first priority? The “many things” or the “one thing”? Which comes first? Which gets the best of your time?

**C. A Precious Illustration (Vs. 42b)**

1. “Mary hath chosen that good part” = the word ‘part’ means ‘portion’. Mary reflected the right order of priorities. We are all faced with the same choice on a daily basis. Mary had made the right choice. It is always the right choice to give the “one thing” the first priority.
2. “which shall not be taken away from her” = spiritual priorities reap lasting rewards. Time spent with the Lord is not wasted time.
3. Christ is concerned not just about the quantity of our service but about the quality of our service. Christ is concerned that our service be empowered by Him and done for His glory (right motive)

**Conclusion:** What are your priorities for this year? Resolve to have just **one priority**, to sit at the feet of Jesus!