

If you've ever hosted an event at your house—a Super Bowl party, a holiday meal, a special gather of people—you know that there are a hundred little details that need to be taken care of before the guests arrive. And one or two details could make the difference between a great event and a hosting nightmare. So, it takes a certain spiritual gift and an inner fortitude to be a good host. Not everyone is cut out for this job.

A woman wrote to a humor website to share the story of visiting her son at his first-ever apartment. When she and her husband walked in, her son asked if they would like a cold drink. The mother was so proud of her son for being a gracious host. She said, “Yes, what do you have?”

He opened his refrigerator door, stared in for a few seconds, then said, “*I have pickle juice or water.*” What a choice! I'm guessing they drank the water.

A journalist with *Bon Appetit* magazine asked readers to submit examples of their worst dinner party experiences. Another woman named Bea Stein wrote about how the candles on her patio table fell over and set the whole table on fire.

Erica Johnson had 50 guests coming over for brunch when the city utility department cut off her water. And Em Thomas tried to make a new chicken recipe that turned out so bad that she threw the whole thing away and ordered pizza instead.

Every time I read our scripture lesson, I wonder how Martha had the energy and skill to host a large group of people on short notice. Our lesson for this morning begins, “*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.*” As she rushed around, getting ready for the dinner, she noticed that Mary, her sister, wasn't helping her. Where was she? She was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him teach.

Verse 40 reads, “*But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*” The Greek word used here for “**distracted**” literally means “to drag all around.” Have you ever experienced this? You feel like you are “**DRAGGING AROUND OTHERS**” *Others who are demanding on your time and energy. You are dragging around others' expectations and standards. You are dragging around other people's priorities. Of course, Martha was STRESSED OUT!!*

Author Anne Lamott has a great definition of *fear* that fits our Bible story today. She says *FEAR* stands for a “future event already ruined.” Isn't that what is happening when we get worried and distracted and weighed down by others' demands? **That's exactly what Martha was experiencing in our story today: FUTURE EVENTS ALREADY RUINED. So, she brought her fear and her stress to Jesus.**

And that brings us to the **first lesson we can learn from today's Bible story: IN THIS LIFE, OUR TIME IS LIMITED, BUT OUR DEMANDS ARE END-LESS.** Most of us live in a permanent state of distraction and anxiety because we have a limited amount of time and energy to deal with an unlimited number of options. And this was not God's design for human beings.

In Genesis chapter 2, verse 2, God rested from His work of creating the universe. God, who has infinite power and lives outside of time, rested from his work. Because there was no more work to be done? No. Because rest is essential for health and peace and restoration. **Rest is essential for joy.** At some point, if we want to live the life God made us for, we have to lay down our burdens to take up the rest that God offers us.

Author Bronnie Ware wrote a book, *The Top 5 Regrets of the Dying*, based on her years of work in palliative care, and the book's message is vitally important for those of us who are dragged down by the demands on our lives. She wrote that in all her years of working with persons who were dying, she discovered the five most common regrets were these:

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me
- I wish I hadn't worked so hard
- I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings
- I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends
- I wish I had let myself be happier.

**Anytime someone at the end of their lives says, “I wish I had . . .” we need to stop and listen.** In this life, our time is limited, but our demands are endless. How do we keep from getting dragged around by the constant demands on our time? And what would it look like to live the life God made us for?

And that brings us to **the second lesson we learn from this lesson today: JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO LIVE WITH NO REGRETS.**

I bet some of you are confused right now. This is the point in the sermon where I’m supposed to praise Mary for choosing the better way. And it would be easy to make this Bible story into a competition between **Team Mary** and **Team Martha**. But Jesus’ actions, his priorities, are what impress me most in this passage.

Let’s go back to the first verse in this passage again. Verse 38 reads, ***“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.”*** “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way . . .” ***On their way where?*** We’ve been talking about this for four weeks now. They are on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Only Jesus knows that he is on his way to his arrest, torture and crucifixion. This is the stark truth of the matter. **JESUS IS ON THE WAY TO HIS DEATH!!**

**If anyone had the right to be distracted and anxious about many things, Jesus had that right. And yet, he wasn’t.** What was the secret to his PEACE? **His life had a singular focus: sharing the truth and love of God through teaching, preaching and healing.** HIS PRIORITIES WERE CLEAR!! His focus was unwavering. His mind was at peace, and his life was effective. **And Jesus wants that same peace and effectiveness for each of us.**

For more than a decade, British journalist Oliver Burkeman wrote an advice column for **The Guardian newspaper.** In his final column, he shared some of the lessons he’d learned over the years **on the secret to living a happy life.**

Here is just an excerpt from his final article: ***“There will always be too much to do—and this realization is liberating. Today more than ever, there’s just no reason to assume any fit between the demands on your time—all the things you would like to do, or feel you ought to do—and the amount of time available . . . The only viable solution is to make a shift: from a life spent trying not to neglect anything, to one spent proactively and consciously choosing what to neglect, in favor of what matters most.”***

I think Jesus would agree with this idea that we need to proactively and consciously choose what to neglect in favor of what matters most. **We can’t do it all.** We can’t have it all. In fact, the “all” we are looking for cannot be attained by our striving. The “all” we so desperately need for peace and fulfillment and happiness can only be found in knowing God. Jesus knew that, and he focused his time and energy accordingly. **Mary understood that, so she neglected her hosting duties to sit at Jesus’ feet and enjoy her time with him.**

In a Scandinavian country there is a statue of Jesus. A tourist standing in front of it appeared dismayed. A local resident asked what his problem was.

He replied, ***“I cannot see His face.”***

The resident explained, ***“If you desire to see His face, you must kneel at His feet.”***

If we desire to see Jesus’ face, if our desire is to find the purpose of our life in the one who is the **Way, the Truth and the Life,** then **we need to kneel at his feet.** We can’t get to know him if we are rushing around chasing after our own agenda. It is time to lay down our burdens and take up the relationship God offers us.

**And that brings me to the third lesson we learn from today’s scripture: YOU WIL NEVER HAVE TIME FOR EVERYTHING. . .so focus your time on the most important thing.** In verses 41-42 of our Bible passage, Jesus says, ***“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”***

Historian James Truslow Adams tells a time-honored story he heard from a friend who had spent a couple of years living with indigenous peoples in the upper Amazon. A group of Amazonian men had been traveling through the forest for two

days, making great progress on their journey. ***But on the third day, they stopped and rested. There seemed to be no reason for their stop.*** No one was injured. They weren't suffering from exhaustion. **The American man asked the group leader why they had stopped.**

The leader replied, ***"They are waiting. They cannot move farther until their souls have caught up with their bodies."***

When Martha brought her stress and her complaints to Jesus, he heard her deepest need. **He wanted Martha's soul to catch up to her body.** So, he encouraged her to follow Mary's example and neglect her work in favor of resting and enjoying time with him. **He was saying to her—and to us, "Lay down your temporary burdens and take up my eternal purpose. It's the only thing you need, and it's the only thing that can never be taken away from you."**  
**How would it change your life if you believed that?**

In 1938, a Jesuit priest named Pedro Arrupe moved to Japan to serve as a missionary there. After the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, Father Arrupe led one of the first rescue groups in the area. He and his colleagues risked their own lives to find survivors and get them medical care. He was also influential in getting the Jesuit order to focus their ministries on those living in poverty.

While there, Father Arrupe wrote a beautiful poem on what it means to live with only one purpose, only one focus. **I think its message perfectly expresses what Jesus wanted Martha—and us—to discover.**

**He wrote:**

*"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.*

*What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.*

*It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.*

***Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."***

- STRESS comes from the sense that someone always needs something from you.
- PEACE comes from the realization that you need something from God. The one thing we need, the only thing that can never be taken away from us, is our love for Jesus Christ.
- And this LOVE will change everything about our lives.
  - It will decide what gets us out of bed in the morning.
  - What breaks our hearts.
  - What amazes us with joy and gratitude.

And that LOVES comes from spending time at Jesus' feet. So, I encourage you to lay aside your agenda and your distractions and spend time praying, meditating, worshipping Jesus every day. Fall in LOVE with him, stay in love with him, and it will decide everything.

**\*\*There will always be "stuff" to do... but will there always be someone to love???**

It is time to get our priorities right... Before our "TIME" is Gone...**Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything. Amen.**