

**“ONE THING IS NEEDED.”****LUKE 10:38-42**

Have you noticed the growing complexity of life? One example is the ever-widening array of choices available to you and me. For example, have you looked at a Cheesecake Factory restaurant menu lately? There’s over 240-plus selections on the menu, not including lunch or brunch specials. Back in 1980, a typical credit card contract was about 400 words long. Today, many are 20,000 words long. Do you know how many different varieties of Cheerios cereal you can buy? Not just different cereals. Just different Cheerios cereal. Well, there’s Original, Honey Nut, Honey Nut Medley Crunch, Apple Cinnamon, Banana Nut, Frosted, Chocolate, Multi Grain, Multi Grain Peanut Butter, Dulce de Leche, and Cinnamon Burst. Do you know how many apps are available to download onto your phone? As of March 2017, Android phone users could download 2.8 million apps. Apple phone users? A measly 2.2 million apps. Whew!

We live in a very busy, distracted, complex world where we’re overwhelmed by all the choices at our disposal. Sometimes we yearn for what’s simple and clear. Truly, in many areas of life less really is more. Less is often more spiritually, too. We’re reflecting on five very different Scripture passages that have one thing in common. The phrase – “one thing.” So, here’s today’s “one thing” statement... “‘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.’” (Luke 10:41-42 NIV) “One thing is needed.” Many things in life are good; only one thing is truly necessary or essential. Let’s read the story that prompts Jesus’ statement.

Today’s Scripture passage is about Jesus and two sisters, Martha and Mary. The Bible never tells us how they got acquainted with Jesus, but it appears they – along with their brother, Lazarus - became some of His closest friends. So, why did Luke, the Gospel writer, include this little story in his version of the big story about Jesus? After all, Jesus didn’t perform a miracle here. He didn’t share a parable here. Jesus didn’t present a major teaching here. Why was it important to Luke to include it? The point of the story isn’t even that Martha’s activity in the kitchen or her home was somehow inherently wrong or bad. Instead, the story is about priorities and choices. It’s really a story about discipleship – about what it means to follow Jesus well every day of our lives. It underlines the truth that life is full of tough choices, and that every day we have to discern between the good and the best. Here’s a question? Are you a believer in Jesus or a disciple of Jesus? A believer in Jesus is simply content to believe in Jesus and leave it at that. A disciple of Jesus, however, pursues a personal relationship with Jesus. Mary wasn’t content simply to believe in Jesus. She pursued a personal relationship with Jesus and made it the first priority in her life. She was a disciple. So...

**WHY PURSUE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?**

There are many great answers to that question, but here’s just two for today. First of all, a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, is the reason we were both created and then redeemed. I think of what God said through the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. “Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in

their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things.” (Jer. 9:23-24 NLT) I think of what Jesus said on one occasion, “And this is the real and eternal life: That they know you, the one and only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.” (Jo. 17:3 MSG) In a few moments, we’re going to share Communion together. Why did Jesus die on the cross? To provide forgiveness for our sins. True enough. But that was a necessary condition in order to get to something even more important and fundamental. Restoring a personal relationship with the God of the universe. God created us for a personal relationship with Him. That was forfeited by and through our sin. The opportunity to restore that relationship was only made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice at the cross for our sins.

“Having a personal relationship with God.” Sometimes we forget how odd that concept sounds for many people who didn’t grow up in a church. A few people question if there’s even a God out there to relate to. Many question whether you can ever know God personally. Some believe that such an idea sounds downright silly from a scientific, empirical perspective. But many others are intrigued by and open to the possibility of knowing God personally. The Bible from cover to cover makes it clear God actually desires to have a personal relationship with you and me. Because of Jesus, you’re now able to enter into that relationship. Through the Holy Spirit living in you, you can cultivate and grow that relationship throughout your entire life and then in eternity.

Sure, that relationship will have its ups and downs. Every relationship has its ups and downs. Sometimes your relationship with God will be blissful. At other times it will be rocky. But your relationship with God needs to be the single greatest and most important passion of your life, my life, and the life of every disciple of Jesus. It’s why you’re here today taking up space on His planet! It’s in God you’ll always find what your heart seeks most. He’s the one pursuit that’s of any real significance in this life. There’s nothing more important than knowing God through His Son, Jesus, and pursuing that knowledge of Him at any and every opportunity. Don’t give your best to anything less! That was a truth Mary somehow knew in her heart and then lived out in the story we read today. “One thing is needed.”

You might ask, “What’s God like?” God is just like Jesus. Here’s an immensely important truth to get into both your head and your heart. God is exactly like Jesus! That’s what the Bible says many times. For instance, Jesus Himself said, “The Father and I are one.” (John 10:30 NLT). Or how about this exchange between Jesus and one of His disciples, Philip? “Philip said, ‘Master, show us the Father; then we’ll be content.’ (Jesus said,) ‘You’ve been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don’t understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, “Where is the Father?”’” (John 14:8-9 MSG) Elsewhere we read these words, “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.... For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.” (Colossians 1:15; 2:9 NLT) That’s why you need to read the Bible – and particularly the New Testament – because it will introduce you to Jesus. What He said. What He did. What others said about Jesus before He came, while He walked the Earth, and after He left.

You'll find there that Jesus is generosity personified. After all, He died for you. You'll discover that Jesus is accepting without being soft. In other words, He met people right where they were at, but never willingly left them there. You'll discern Jesus was forgiving without being enabling. If you want a lesson on how to hate the sin but still love the sinner, get to know Jesus. You'll be amazed at what a high value Jesus puts on you. As you get to know Him and what He's like, you can be very sure God Himself is just like Jesus. Get to know Jesus and then you'll get to know God.

Why should I pursue a personal relationship with Jesus? Secondly, it empowers me for both inner transformation by Jesus and outer service for Jesus. How can you and I be Jesus' disciples today? After all, those twelve men we refer to as the disciples actually, physically, and literally lived with Jesus. Was it important that they spend time with Jesus? The Bible says. "He settled on twelve, and designated them apostles. The plan was that they would be with him, and he would send them out to proclaim the Word." (Mark 3:14 MSG) Notice that Jesus' first priority was a relationship with Him – "that they would be with Him." Being with Jesus was absolutely essential and necessary to being His disciple. The relational piece was foundational! If you ever learned how to play a musical instrument, you were in some sense a disciple of whoever taught you. And you learned from that person by being with that person. If you learned how to play a sport at a high level, you were a disciple of one or more coaches. You learned from those coaches by being with them. The relational piece was key! If I am someone's disciple, I have been with that person.

Most of us want to become like Jesus, at least, to some extent. In other words, if you're His disciple, you want to resemble Jesus in your attitudes and behavior. That means inner transformation. You also want to be for Jesus. In other words, if you're His disciple, you want to serve Him, extend His influence, and help build His Kingdom in this world. OK, so a disciple is a person who makes time to be with Jesus in order to become like Jesus and to be for Jesus. All three are important, but being with Jesus is foundational. Being with Jesus is primary. If you don't make time to be with Jesus, you'll never become like Him. You'll just never truly experience inner transformation. By the same token, if you don't make time to be with Jesus, you'll never be for Jesus in any meaningful sense. Before we can see Jesus' character strongly imprinted in our own lives and before we can flow out in ministry and service to other people in Jesus' Name, we need to have a consistent, growing, and authentic relationship with Jesus. Being with Jesus is the key to being like Jesus and for Jesus. Now, I don't know if Mary could've articulated that truth, but she knew it and lived it at a heart level. More than anything else, Mary just wanted to be with Jesus. In His presence. Listening to His words. Observing what He did. And Jesus praised her for it. "One thing is needed."

I love a story Stuart Sacks tells from his time as a missionary in Paraguay. He worked among a group of native people known as the Maka Indians. One day, a Maka Indian man named Rafael came to sit on Stuart's porch. Stuart was eating and went out to see what Rafael wanted. He responded, "Ham, henek met." Stuart understood the language, but not its significance. "Ham, henek met" means "I don't want anything; I

have just come near." Again Stuart asked what he could do for Rafael, but the answer was the same. Stuart later shared the incident with a local veteran missionary. The older man explained that it was Rafael's way of honoring Stuart. He really didn't want anything; he just wanted to sit on Stuart's porch. He found satisfaction and pleasure just being near his friend, Stuart. I think Mary was saying the same thing to Jesus by her actions that day in her home in Bethany. "I don't want anything. I don't even want to give you anything, Jesus. I have just come near." Here's a second question....

## **HOW TO PURSUE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?**

Again, there are so many great answers to that question, but let me share just two today. First, I must be intentional. It will just never happen by itself. It's going to require some thought, some effort, and some planning from you to make it happen. Here's three simple principles to making the pursuit of a personal relationship with Jesus intentional rather than accidental. Make it the greatest priority. That's what Mary did. Being with Jesus was her greatest priority that day in Bethany much to her sister's dismay. "One thing is needed."

That's what Martha, her sister, had trouble grasping. You gotta love Martha! I picture her today as this super organized, efficient lady - a little bossy, but with a heart as big and sincere as the all outdoors. She was sincerely concerned about Jesus' well-being. She wanted to meet a legitimate need in His life. He needed food and she could prepare it. But she needed help. Now, the story doesn't say so, but I have to believe that along with Jesus came His twelve disciples. So it probably wasn't just feeding Jesus that Martha was concerned about here, but providing hospitality to a pretty sizeable group of hungry men. Can you picture Martha taking charge and bustling around her kitchen? Can you feel her increasing annoyance with her sister, Mary? Can you see the steam emerging from Martha's ears as Mary delayed her appearance in the kitchen? Can you just imagine Martha's thoughts? "That Mary – always hard to find when there's a bit of work to be done. Doesn't she realize the man needs a meal? Thinks she's so spiritual sitting out there. Well, I'm not about to let her get away with that nonsense!" At some point, Martha must have left the kitchen and entered the room where Mary just sat listening to Jesus with rapt attention. Martha's frustration finally exploded, "Master, don't you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand." (Lk 10:40 MSG)

When it comes to making priorities, we human beings have a hard time discerning between the good and the best. Ironically, we allow good things to become more important and crowd out what's best. That can so easily happen in your marriage. That can so easily happen as a parent. It's not about you giving time and energy to do bad stuff rather than good stuff. Instead, it's about pursuing in terms of time and energy what's good rather than what's best. It can also happen whenever we allow good things in life to crowd out what's the very best pursuit of all – maintaining and developing that personal relationship with Jesus. Ironically, the time and energy to pursue good, worthwhile things in my life can actually become the greatest obstacles to pursuing what's best - my personal relationship with Jesus.

Yes, Martha, feeding Jesus a meal was a good, worthy task. But was it the best? Did it deserve to be the highest priority at that moment? Imagine, now, you've got Jesus – the Son of God Incarnate, the Light of the World, the Resurrection and the Life, the Alpha and the Omega – sitting right there in the next room of your home, but you've stuck yourself off in the kitchen instead! Come on, Martha! Mary got it right that day. She made the right choice. Her priorities were in the right place. Mary just couldn't get enough of Jesus. Listening to what He said. Personal interacting with Him. Hanging on to His every word. There was always something more about God to be learned from and experienced in this man of God. Dinner could wait! She had focused on what was best – being with Jesus and listening to every word that He spoke. Jesus turned to Martha and said, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Lk 10:41-42 NLT)

Here's another part of being intentional when it comes to how to pursue a personal relationship with Jesus. Make a plan and be flexible. Maybe it's 15 minutes five days a week. Maybe it's 60 minutes three days a week. Maybe it's in your favorite chair with a cup of coffee first thing in the morning. Maybe it's at work during your lunch break. Maybe it's at the end of the day before you drift off to sleep. Put together a reasonable plan that works for you, adjust your life to it, and stick to it. And what should you do with that time you set aside just to be with Jesus? Keep it creative and flexible. Change it up. Experiment. Read Scripture. Pray. Think about God and thank Him for what He's done for you. Pray for others. Pray for the church. Take a lesson from Mary. How so? Learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit when you spend time with Jesus rather than being overly verbal. Sing hymns and praise songs. Read devotional books. Use online resources. Jesus wants to have the kind of relationship with you that will fill you up. There is no one way that happens. Find what works for you and go for it!

At the risk of contradicting myself, however, there is one constant in pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus. I must meditate on Scripture. No flexibility there. It's non-negotiable if you want to maintain and develop a relationship with Him. Why? Interacting with Scripture is the only way to grow in your knowledge of Jesus. A relationship with Jesus can indeed be real and personal, but it's unlike any other relationship you will ever have. You can't relate to Jesus like you do everyone else. The Bible – and particularly the New Testament – introduces you to Jesus and expands your knowledge of Him. What He said. What He did. What others said about Jesus before He came, while He walked the Earth, and after He returned to Heaven. Meditating on Scripture is something deeper than just reading it. It's taking it in, mulling it over, and considering how it might impact your life and how you live today.

Let me share with you a simple, quick tool that will help you move from just reading Scripture to meditating on it. It's called SPECK and it's a tool many of us who are in discipleship triads have learned to use and enjoy. I use it regularly myself. As an example, let me apply SPECK to the Bible passage on which today's message is based, so you get an idea of how it works. Consider Luke 10:38-42 with me again. The

S in SPECK stands for a question we ask ourselves, “Is there a sin to avoid?” in this passage. Well, not explicitly. I suppose you could say, however, that not making pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus the greatest priority is a sin to avoid in our own lives. The P in SPECK stands for the question, “Is there a promise to claim?” Jesus said the choice Mary made was better than Martha’s, and He promised Mary that the blessing of being with Jesus would not be taken from her. So, when I make pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus a high priority, I can expect to receive some kind of blessing or positive outcome.

The E in SPECK stands for the question, “Is there an example to follow or avoid?” Yes, both, actually. I need to avoid Martha’s example of preferring the good over the best. I need to follow Mary’s example of doing just the opposite – recognizing what’s best – being with Jesus - and not allowing something good to cancel it out. The C in SPECK – “Is there a command to obey?” No, not really, not in this story. Finally, the K in SPECK stands for the question, “Is there knowledge about God to receive?” By all means! God, in the person of Jesus here, both desires and blesses the priority of being with Him. Whenever I put pursuing a personal relationship with Him as my highest personal priority, it pleases the heart of God immensely. So, I think you can see, that by using SPECK, I haven’t just read this passage like I would read an ordinary book or magazine article. I’ve meditated on it. This is just one tool; there are many others which are helpful, too. Meditation means I apply the passage to my life. I invite and allow it to speak to me and impact me. One outcome of meditating on this passage is a reminder of what Jesus greatly valued back then and still values today. And not just for Mary, but for you and me today as well. “Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42 NIV)

Have you ever heard of the “Shultz Hour”? When George Shultz was Secretary of State in the 1980s, he liked to carve out one hour each week for quiet reflection. He sat down in his office with a pad of paper and pen, closed the door and told his secretary to interrupt him only if one of two people called: his wife or the president. He called it the “Shultz Hour” Shultz, who turned 96 this year, claimed that his hour of solitude was the only way he could find time to think about the strategic aspects of his job. Otherwise, he would be constantly pulled into moment-to-moment tactical issues, never able to focus on larger questions.

But in our day that's gotten even harder to do. We carry supercomputers in our pockets and place them next to us as we sleep. They're always there, with a new status update to be read, a new photograph to be taken, or a new sports score. Even before smartphones, many of us have come to venerate “freneticism.” Freneticism? What’s that? Living every day frenetically and thinking that’s how it should be or how it just inevitably is. We all need a “Shultz Hour.” No, let me rephrase. We all need a “Jesus Hour” and probably more than once a week. Are you pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus? It’s one big, important difference between being a believer in Jesus and a disciple of Jesus. “Only one thing is needed.”