

I was in college... when I first read it. ... I never read it again... until this past week. That is true - even though I remember it having such a strong impact on me.

Between my friends and fellow students who were involved in Campus Crusade for Christ... we passed around a lot of books and pamphlets to each other – when we found something profound. One of my friends had passed THIS on to me.

Even though it struck such a deep nerve inside of me... and I found it very helpful... the content of that pamphlet had long escaped my memory... but its title sure did stick. The title had become a phrase that I've used frequently over the years. ... And as I studied our passage for today in Luke... the phrase that became entrenched in my vocabulary... (the title of the pamphlet)... echoed loudly in my mind... So I Googled it... and then downloaded it.

I want to begin our time in God's Word today by reading certain excerpts from it. (I hope that it has a similar impact on YOU... that it had on ME... so many years ago.) It is called "*Tyranny of the Urgent*" by Charles E Hummel... and was published in 1967 by InterVarsity Fellowship. (By the way... I noticed that Amazon *still sells* these little pamphlets.)

Have you ever wished for a thirty-hour day? Surely this extra time would relieve the tremendous pressure under which we live. Our lives leave a trail of unfinished tasks. Unanswered letters, unvisited friends, unwritten articles, and unread books haunt quiet moments when we stop to evaluate. We desperately need relief.

But would a thirty-hour day really solve the problem? Wouldn't we

soon be just as frustrated as we are now with our twenty-four allotment? A mother's work is never finished, and neither is that of any student, teacher, minister, or anyone else we know. Nor will the passage of time help us catch up.” ... “Greater experience in profession and church brings more exacting assignments. So we find ourselves working more and enjoying it less.

When we stop to evaluate, we realize that our dilemma goes deeper than shortage of time; it is basically the problem of priorities.” ... “We confess, quite apart from our sins, ‘We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done’.” ...

“We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important. The problem is that the important task seldom must be done today or even this week. Extra hours of prayer and Bible study, a visit with that non Christian friend, careful study of an important book: these projects can wait. But the urgent tasks call for instant action endless demands pressure every hour and day.”

That is all that I want to quote for now. I am saving what I think is the best part... for the end of today’s message. But... do **you** ever experience the “Tyranny of the Urgent”? (Important tasks do not get accomplished – because urgent matters crowd them out?) This is our subject for today.

Right now... I would like for you to turn with me to the passage that I preached on last week. I am going to read it *again*... and then go right into our passage for today.

You may (perhaps) remember how I've explained (before) that Luke did not write his gospel (so much) in chronological order (*this happened... and then **this** happened...*) ... Some times (when Luke writes: "now after these things...") he **did** write in a time sequence. ... But as Luke explained in his prologue... when he opened his gospel... **his** gospel would *PRIMARILY* be in THEMATIC order. (*This event is linked to **this** event.*) ... One story follows another because they portray a certain theme (together) – not because the events occurred one right after the other. And once we see how one story is related to the next one... we will know the theme and gain blessings and insight. ... So I want to show you how *our passage today* is connected to our passage last week. (Now here they are together...

Luke 10:30-42

The parable of the Good Samaritan... and the following narrative about Mary and Martha are two separate pericopes... but there are some lessons to see... by understanding why Luke put them side-by-side.

I merely touched on something last week... that I should acknowledge more clearly... in light of today's passage... **The priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan were doing the right thing.** ... (You probably heard me right!) The priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan were doing the right thing. ... This injured man might possibly be dead... and touching him would render them ceremonially unclean. They would be unable to enter the synagogue to teach and preach. ... They prioritized their important work... and what the Law of Moses dictated. But *legal propriety* kept them from (*what the parable teaches us*) - is to be a **higher** priority. – **Acting in love**... is the higher priority. ... Do you see

what our theme is...? “PRIORITIES”? Martha’s social proprieties kept her from focusing her attention on Jesus and His agenda for her life.

And thankfully... Luke placed the story of Mary and Martha right after the parable of the Good Samaritan – to make sure that we don’t get the mistaken idea that we are to busy ourselves with all sorts of loving activity – as though that is our highest priority. No... as important as it is... there is an even higher priority. You and I might NOT have known this... if Luke did not place the story of Mary and Martha – right after the Good Samaritan.

You and I can lose sight of the right priority very easily. The good things in life — family... job... church activity... community service... and even any acts of love — can begin to choke-out God’s life in us. Martha was loving Jesus... Her energy was focused on her Master’s comfort and providing Him with a great meal. Yet she is chastised for it.

It seems to me that these two side-by-side pericopes really deal with our goals in life. ... What has our attention most of the time? ... Martha is focused on her own goal. ... She is so busy being gracious and polite and a good hostess... that she has no time to be with the Lord.

We may say that all we have (time... life... money) is the Lord’s... but does He have our primary attention? ... We may be too busy doing good works... even showing great acts of love. ... (LISTEN!)... We need to be actively loving others – but if we are not FIRST giving the Lord our best attention... there will be no blessing (or minimal blessing) for us... in those works. We will (eventually) be unhappy... complaining... cantankerous... griping... (like Martha.) ... The story of Mary and Martha is actually about

the necessity of the priority of prayer... along with careful meditation on the Word of God... in a life of active service for the Master.

If you don't fill up your spiritual gas tank... you eventually run out of gas. In this well-known story of the New Testament... we find two women extending hospitality to the Lord Jesus Christ. ... One woman chose to spend time with the Lord... and the other woman was busy serving the Lord - but was not blessed... because she needed to make some adjustments in her priorities. ... Her frustration and bitterness made her critical (not only of someone who was devoted to the Lord... but also of the Lord Himself...!) ... There is a great deal that we can learn from these two wonderful women (Mary and Martha.) ... Both of them were godly women whose lives continue to touch our lives today.

What we do *with* Christ is far more important than what we do *for* Christ.

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. *The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees.* Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day... we will soon end up like Martha: busy but not blessed.

Luke 10:38

Jesus and The Twelve were traveling. The name of the village at which they arrived is not mentioned. However... Luke *does* state that Martha and Mary lived here. Since John 11:1 and 12:1–3 mention these same sisters... and also their brother Lazarus... and informs us that they lived in Bethany... we know that also here in Luke 10:38 “a village” is Bethany.

Notice how verse 38 only says that Martha welcomed Jesus into their home. Certainly Mary also welcomed Jesus (and probably Lazarus did too.) But this (likely) indicates that Martha was the ruler of the home. A.T. Robertson (one of the highest authorities on the subject of Biblical Greek) said: “Martha is clearly the mistress of the home and is probably the elder sister.” ... For some reason... these three siblings live together. Mother and Father are no longer around... and they share an estate of apparent wealth.

From John’s Gospel... we see that this was where Jesus preferred to stay... whenever He came to Jerusalem. (Mary... Martha... and Lazarus had to be wealthy enough to room and board Jesus and His followers... whenever they came to “the Holy City.” ... The town of Bethany was only 2 miles northwest of Jerusalem... and Jesus could retreat from the crush of Jerusalem... and all its visitors. But He was close enough to go to the Temple every day.

Luke’s phrasing (in verse 38) “*Now as they went on their way*”... suggests Jesus and His disciples made an unannounced visit. ... Luke states it in the plural... which suggests that Jesus came with several followers in tow... and the ensuing scene makes better sense (doesn’t it?) if Martha panicked over the number of guests... who surprised her. Regardless... “Martha welcomed them into her home” (a decision characteristic of Martha’s gracious and loving hospitality.) ... Mary (her sister) appears to be her opposite. (Martha... the energetic... responsible hostess - versus Mary... the attentive... conscientious listener.) The scene was set for conflict.

Luke 10:39

Sitting at one's feet (as Mary did) is "the ancient posture of disciples or learners." ... It means ... she listened attentively to His instructions... and was anxious to learn more about Christ's word. It was a position normally reserved for official disciples of a teacher - and never for a woman.

Luke 10:40

As Mary was soaking up the Word... her big sister was getting frustrated: "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made". The sense of "distracted" here is "to be pulled away" or "dragged away."

The implication is that Martha desperately wanted to hear Jesus herself... to be at his feet... but she was pulled away by her duties. Flitting about with her busy preparations... she inevitably caught bits and snatches of Jesus' words... and she was drawn to hear more. ... But the burden of the meal kept dragging her back into the kitchen. ... How she wanted to be at Jesus' feet...! ... But she told herself that true devotion is practical... and that she must put her duty before her desires.

I like what Author and Pastor Kent Hughes has to say about this...

Martha was so sure that what she was doing was what Christ most needed and wanted. We are like that. It is so natural to think that Jesus needs our work and that He cannot do without us. The preacher wonders what would become of the church without him (and perhaps the people dream of what it would be like without him!). The elder thinks that if he were removed, the whole place would crumble. The evangelist imagines that no one would be converted if he were to retire. How self-deceived we tend to be. A fly on the wall of the church might as well imagine that everything going on below him is dependent upon his presence and would cease if he flew away!

Certainly we should take our responsibilities seriously. But to think Christ needs us and that we are indispensable to His program — the

thought is preposterous! God doesn't need me or you to do His work. It is only by His grace that we can serve Him, and He can do quite well without us. To be sure, we ought to take our work seriously, but not ourselves. We ruin our service when we overestimate our importance.

Martha attempted to force Mary to serve Christ **her** way. She wanted Mary away from Jesus' feet and in the kitchen with her... because in her estimation... what she was doing ... was more important. ... Such tunnel vision is common.

Our responsibility... our means of service... is deemed to be everything by us. ... Since we teach in Awana... and it is such a fruitful field... and since more teachers are needed - anyone who is not involved with us... is — well... wrong...!

It is so natural to think this way about one's involvement in the youth program or missions or pet ethical concerns. We assume everyone should be committed to the same Christian cause we are committed to. If others were good Christians... they would certainly live their Christian life like us. If they were together spiritually... they would be doing what we are doing. Martha's attitude... (unchecked)... will destroy the inner soul of any church. Martha's self-appointed responsibilities distracted her from what mattered most. ... So it is with us. ...The self-imposed "necessities of ministry" smother us... and serving becomes drudgery.

Martha was **busy** serving the Lord... but not **blessed**... because her priorities got out of whack. ... She became very selfish and critical. Martha's service to the Lord Jesus Christ became a distraction from spending time with Him. She had lost her spiritual balance. Her work for the Lord pulled her away from the Lord of the work.

Hello! If this happens to us... we too... can get twisted or knotted up on the inside. ... Our frustration and our resentment begins to sizzle... griping surfaces with our groans... and bitterness causes us to start picking unnecessary fights... (which we do not see - at the time - as unnecessary.)

The solution to our imbalance is not to stop serving the Lord... but to make sure we spend time with Him and have a good balance in our life. Balance your service for Christ with your intimacy with Christ. This is what Martha failed to do in this situation. In trying to **be** a blessing... she stopped **being** a blessing... because of her griping.

Have you stopped being a blessing to your family and friends because you gripe all the time? It is not really the way we want to be... is it?

Martha became so irritated that she accused **the Lord** of not caring about her... and **scolded Jesus** for not telling Mary to help her. ... Martha was running around like a chicken with no head... When she neglected her time with Christ... she became burdened down... tired... tense... and critical.

If serving Christ makes us selfish and difficult to live with... then something is terribly wrong with our service! ... If you are bitter... griping... critical... and complaining frequently about those who are also serving Christ... or about your church... Something is wrong somewhere. Make sure that you are spending time with Christ and have a good balance.

Jesus gently chided His friend (Martha.)

Luke 10:41-42

Jesus offers a mild rebuke to Martha. Notice He mentions her name twice... indicating He wants her to pay very close attention to what He is

about to say. He tells this wonderful woman she is careful and troubled about many things. ... “*You are too anxious*”... He said. ... “*You are too agitated.*” ... Her wonderful gift of service was being spoiled by a wrong spirit.

God’s primary concern is not our activity or doing. He is more concerned about our being what **HE** wants us to be. Martha was concerned about doing... Mary (however) was focused on “being.” ... This must come first before our “doing.”

Service is important but it is a natural byproduct of ***being*** what God wants us to be. ... Doing comes from being. This is the reason why it is important to spend time with God and grow in faith and in the Word. If you don’t do this... you will spiritually dry up.

The “one thing” that is “needed” (the thing that is “better”)... is listening to the Word of God. The highest priority for those who would be activists for God... is listening to His Word. ... Jesus informs Martha that the benefits will not be taken away from Mary.

Jesus here provides wisdom for all who are serving Christ in various callings. It is all too common (and too easy) for our service to Christ to drag us away from his Word. ... Ironic as it may be... this is an epidemic among preachers of the Word. ... Ministers of the gospel often admit that the Word is not at the center of either their devotion or their ministries. ... The reason is... they are too busy serving Christ. ... Youth pastors... missionaries... executives of Christian organizations... and church leaders often admit to this disorder. ... The programs and the unending needs are so pressing that reading and hearing the Word of God is neglected.

There is a tendency for people who are wound tight like Martha to give everything to their particular area of calling... or interest (be it evangelism... the protection of the unborn... holding government accountable... marriage and family... care for the poor... or whatever)... and to allow that interest to so dominate their lives... that they have little time to let God's Word speak to them. ... Without the benefit of the Word... they adopt a mind-set of narrowness... judgmentalism... or fault-finding. ... And eventually the creativity and vitality they once gave to their area of ministry - sours. They have unwittingly lost the "one thing" (the "better" thing) that Christ promised would not be taken from Mary. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

I began today by reading Charles E. Hummel's Tyranny of the Urgent... and I said that I was saving the best part for the end of this message. That time has now come... so I'll close with more from it.

Freedom from the tyranny of the urgent is found in the example and promise of our Lord. At the end of a vigorous debate with the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Jesus said to those who believed in Him:

John 8: 36 (ESV)

³⁶ *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Many of us have experienced Christ's deliverance from the penalty of sin. Are we letting Him free us from the tyranny of the urgent? He points the way (*in the surrounding verses*): "If you continue in My Word." This is the way to freedom. Through prayerful meditation on God's Word - we gain His perspective.

P. T. Forsyth once said, "The worst sin is prayerlessness." We usually think of murder, adultery, or theft as among the worst. But the root of all sin is self- sufficiency -- independence from God. When

we fail to wait prayerfully for God's guidance and strength we are saying, with our actions if not our lips, that we do not need Him. How much of our service is characterized by "going it alone"?

Prayerful waiting on God is indispensable to effective service. Like the timeout in a football game, it enables us to catch our breath and fix new strategy. As we wait for directions, the Lord frees us from the tyranny of the urgent. He shows us the truth about Himself, ourselves, and our tasks. He impresses on our minds the assignments He wants us to undertake. ...

Psalm 103:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. ¹⁴ For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

It is not God who loads us until we bend or crack with an ulcer, nervous breakdown, heart attack, or stroke. These come from our inner compulsions coupled with the pressure of circumstances. ...

A quiet time of meditation and prayer at the start of the day refocuses our relationship with God.

Life is short. We need to choose our activities very deliberately. Life does not automatically arrange itself into proper priorities. ... Amidst a thousand **urgent** duties... make sitting at Jesus' feet the "one thing" (the "better" thing)... the primary focus of your heart and life. Don't let it get crowded out.