Better - Part 4

# First Things First

# (Luke 10:38-42)

Today, we’re in week number four of a series called “Better” and if you’ve been with us for the past several weeks, my prayer is that you’re realizing that there are things that are good but that there are also things that God tells us are actually so much better. You know, things like, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (Psalm 84:10); or “Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:6); and last week, “Better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!” (Proverbs 16:16). And so, we talked about the wisdom of choosing the narrow gate, living differently, being holy and different from the crowd. Today we’re going to talk about our priorities and choosing what’s important.

Stephen Covey said it so well, “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.” And so, we’re going to talk about prioritizing what is important to you, choosing what’s important first, because each of us know that every day comes with its own set of problems, many of which come to you with a sense of urgency. To illustrate this point we’re going to look at an example from Jesus life when he visited the home of some friends in a little town called Bethany. Now, in this passage of Scripture, we’re going to read the story of two sisters who each made a choice between what was important and what was urgent. And I believe this is going to be so helpful for us as we’re choosing better because so many times we’re made to feel as if urgent things are always important.

Today, as we’re learning to choose better we’re going to discover that there is a really big difference between important and urgent. The Bible illustrates this point as we look at an example in Luke’s gospel when Martha did what so many of us do. She gets caught up in the moment, so overwhelmed by what seems to be urgent, that she misses that which is most important. And so, what we want to learn is that when life hands you choices, we want to choose better, we want to choose important over urgent.

Seth Godin said it this way, and I love this, he said, “If you choose what’s important you won’t deal with as many things that are urgent”.

In other words, if you’re proactive instead of reactive, if you’re choosing that which is important over that which is urgent, you’ll find you have more time, energy, and resources for things that are most important to you. Therefore, we want to choose the important over the urgent… we want to choose better!

As we turn to the Word of God this morning, if you want to find your place in Luke chapter 10, we’re going to talk about putting first things first. And so, beginning at verse 38, we find two important things taking place, but Jesus tells us that one was more important than the other. Luke records,

“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…” (Luke 10:38-39).

Now, we’ll pause there for a moment to get a little context behind this story. These two sisters, Mary and Martha, also had a brother named Lazarus, and you may remember that name because he was the one that Jesus raised from the dead. John tells us in the eleventh chapter of his gospel that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were very close friends of Jesus. In fact, John tells us that,

“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5).

And so, they were very close, and Jesus liked to visit this family when he was in the area. Luke tells us that, “Martha opened her home to him” and that would’ve been customary in that day, because their Hebrew culture encouraged such hospitality. But just imagine that Jesus doesn’t show up alone; in fact, he shows up with at least 12 of his friends, and so at the very minimum 13 people show up at the door unannounced. Of course, back in those days they couldn’t call ahead, so here they were needing a place to rest for the night and a meal to eat. Of course, Martha is thrilled because this wasn’t just any guest, this was Jesus, but just imagine what was going through Martha’s mind as she considered the ramifications of opening her doors. Suddenly she finds herself rushing around, picking up, straightening, trying to get food prepared, getting a guest room ready, and what was a normal afternoon suddenly became very busy because she wanted everything to be perfect for her guests.

And so, all the things that needed to be done were scrolling through her mind as she’s hurrying around and her busyness was compounded by the fact that her sister Mary was nowhere to be found. Martha is making preparations and as she’s darting around she’s looking for her sister, but she doesn’t see her anywhere. She’s not in the garden getting vegetables for dinner, she’s not out at the barn getting some milk, she wasn’t even in the guest room making the beds, and then Martha catches sight of her out the window. She sees Mary out in the courtyard area of their home where people would often gather to socialize. Jesus was there with his disciples, Lazarus, and a few others from the community, and there was Mary. Luke tells us in verse 39 that Mary,

“Sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made…” (Luke 10:39-40).

As you could imagine, about this time Martha lost it; when she saw Mary sitting there it was just too much, and she interrupted Jesus saying,

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40).

Now, Martha did what many of us do, she succumbed to the urgency of the moment, while Mary chose that which we will discover was better. Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made while Mary chooses what was most important.

I wonder how many of us would honestly say that we’ve been distracted by that which was urgent and that we’ve been significantly detoured from that which is most important? And so, number one, what is that distraction that’s causing you to neglect that which is most important? How are you distracted by the urgent?

## 1. Distracted by The Urgent

It’s so natural for us to slip into a martyr syndrome, just like Martha did, and to start believing that you’re the only one who’s doing anything, you’re the only one who cares, and the burden is all on you. You know, if you don’t do it, it won’t get done, and if anyone cares, they’ll only care enough to complain. But it’s the martyr syndrome, the “poor pitiful me” syndrome, and most of us have felt it at one time or another. I know I have and it usually means that there’s something wrong with the way I’m thinking or my priorities. And so, I want to ask you to think about this for a moment, “What are the important things, those priorities, those things that matter most, that you’ve been distracted from doing?”

Some of you, if you’re a follower of Jesus, if you’re a Christian, you might say that you’ve been distracted from spending time with Jesus, that you haven’t put him first. You haven’t been spending time in his Word, you haven’t aligned your heart with his and you’ve just been distracted. Others of you might recognize that you’ve been so busy doing things for your children that you haven’t been able to enjoy them. Or maybe you’ve been so busy with the kids that you’ve neglected the very thing that holds your family together, you’ve neglected your relationship with your spouse. And then, some of you might say you’ve neglected your body, there’s just so much going on, so many urgent things, that you don’t have time to eat right or exercise. There’s just so much going on; but look at how Jesus answers Martha, she’s distracted and in verse 41 Jesus answered,

"Martha, Martha… you are worried and upset about many things…but only one thing is needed” (Luke 10:41-42).

Now, obviously when you’ve got people visiting, they need to eat, they’re going to need a place to sit, and they’re going to need a place to rest for the night. And so, it’s not that Martha was wasting her time on foolish things, she had the right idea, but Jesus was saying, “Only one thing really matters and it’s this one thing that supersedes everything else.”

What was that one thing?

It’s sitting at the feet of Jesus, spending time in his presence, and if you can adapt this spiritual truth into your day, it will revitalize your spiritual life, your relationship with God and others, as well as the way you pursue your purpose in life.

The point that Jesus was making is simply that he wants to be loved before he wants to be served. And so, before you do anything for God publicly, he wants you to spend time with him privately. You see, Jesus wasn’t saying, “Martha, Martha, don’t clean the house, don’t get dinner ready.” That’s not what he was saying. What he was saying is, “Let the details wait for a few minutes. I just got here, let’s spend some time together. We can worry about the meal later, make the beds later, but right now, come sit down, let’s catch up, let’s enjoy one another.”

“Martha, you’re worried and upset about many things.” And then he says in verse 42, he says Mary has done what? He said,

“Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

Mary had chosen what’s better. She’d made a choice. She chose what was important. And today if you and I are not intentional about this, the urgent will crowd out the important in our lives. You see, that’s what happened to Martha, she surrendered to the urgency of suddenly having 13 guests at her door and she became distracted from what was important. Today, you and I have time for whatever we choose to have time for. That’s why we need wisdom to choose better, to choose that which is important over that which is urgent. And so, Jesus was saying, “Before you do anything else, before you get caught up in your chores, your daily responsibilities, get alone with God.” Before you serve him publicly he wants to spend some time with you privately. And so, number two, we need to get our priorities straight.

## 2. Getting Our Priorities Straight

During a press conference in early December 2017, Bill Belichick was asked: "With all you’ve accomplished in your coaching career, what is left that you still want to accomplish?"

He replied: "I'd like to go out and have a good practice today; that would be at the top of the list right now."

You see, Bill knew that this is how champions are made; unyielding focus on what matters most today. Now I don’t doubt that he had great dreams for the season, but he understood that the key to winning the next championship is found in doing first things first.

Now, you and I may not be looking at winning a championship, but we’re certainly running a race; and therefore, we need to run to win because we’ve only got one life to live and one race to run. That means it’s extremely important that we know our priorities, that we manage them well, and that we purposefully choose better.

Today, if you’re always feeling distracted, overwhelmed, and overloaded it’s probably a pretty good indication that you’ve got some things on your plate that don’t belong there. If you’re running full speed ahead 24/7 and yet you’re constantly behind you’re probably doing way too much. In fact, I believe that for most of us, the barrier to being effective, productive, and achieving the meaningful life we want is that we’re way overcommitted.

And I can tell you from experience that I’ve found myself in this position many times; where I’m completely overloaded, feeling like I’m the only one who is doing anything, and like Martha, there aren’t nearly enough hours in the day to get everything done. And so, if you know what I’m talking about, understand that this wasn’t what Jesus had in mind for you and nail down your priorities. Choose better and determine what needs to go, what needs to change, and what matters most.

That’s what Jesus was saying to Martha. He said, “Only one thing is needed. What matters most, straightening up the house, preparing the perfect meal, or spending time with me?” And so, we need to choose better, consider our priorities, and make sure that we take care of what’s important first. It’s for that reason that I’ll always encourage you to have your quiet time with Jesus first thing in the morning before you do anything else. And if exercising is important to you, do that second, but get your priorities straight.

I believe this is so practical, because most everybody wishes that they had more time to do something important, but if you’re like most people you’ve got chores, you’ve got the grass to mow, bills to pay and kids to raise. And so, it’s like we’re stuck in a rut, we wish we had more time to do what matters most, we wish we had more time to relax, more time to spend with Jesus, more time to spend with the kids, but the consequences of the choices that we’ve made in the past are affecting us today, they’re impacting who we’ve become and what we have time to do tomorrow. Therefore, we want to choose better. We don’t want to do more, but we want to do more of what matters most. And so, we’ve got to get our priorities aligned with God’s priorities. Because the best parents don’t do more, the best parents do more of what matters most. The best leaders don’t do more, they invest their time and energy into more of what matters. And the most effective servants of God don’t do more and more, they simply do more of what brings glory to God.

It’s all about getting our priorities straight, doing first things first, and choosing what’s important. Yet most of us aren’t actively seeking God first, we’re not letting his Word become an integral part of our lives, we’re not aligning ourselves with Kingdom priorities, and the reason I say that is because it’s our nature to say yes to so many things, to add more and more until all the things on the outside begin to crowd out the most important things on the inside. And it’s for that reason, number three, that we need to commit to doing first what’s important.

## 3. Doing First What’s Important

You see, it’s not when you have time or if things ever slow down, because the urgent will always crowd out what’s important. It’s about choosing better, and so whatever’s most important is what we do first. This is what we’ve discovered today with Mary and Martha; it’s time with Jesus that matters most. Mary had chosen what was better, time at the feet of Jesus, and he said, “It will not be taken away from her.” That’s why I always say, the most important thing we can do, the first thing that we should do, is to make Jesus the first part of every single day. That’s what Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 6, he said in verse 33,

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Today after church, some of you need to put it on the calendar in your phone; or your Google calendar, maybe even set up reminders. If you want time to spend with Jesus, if you want time to work out, time to have dinner with your family or maybe a date night with your spouse, you put your priorities on your calendar and you pursue them first. You choose better, you choose to make time for what’s important, and you’ll find that you have less time for things that don’t really matter.

Every day I wake up, I put first things first, and I put Jesus first, because he’s just better. I’ve come to rely upon him, because I need his Word to renew my mind aligning my heart with his priorities and so I need to seek the One who’s most important first. This is a choice that each one of us can make, a choice that’s made every day as we rise and seek him first, offering ourselves as living sacrifices and praying. Asking that he would give us the mind of Christ, that he would give us eyes to see that which is pure, ears to hear his voice so that we’re spiritually aligning ourselves with him and so that we do first what’s most important.

The problem is, that most of us are seeking everything else first and wondering why we don’t have time to have a meaningful spiritual life. You see, if we want to seek, honor, and glorify God, we must seek him first. We do first what’s most important to us. Mary and Martha both made a choice about what matters, but Jesus said, “Mary chose what was better” because it was time with him that matters most and he said, “It will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

What if we were to choose better? You know, what if we were to have people over and we chose to love on them, building relationships with them, over making sure that the house was just right? What if we were to read God’s Word, to spend some time with the kids, or whatever it is that’s important to you, but just choosing important over that which is urgent, choosing what really matters over the unlimited opportunities for busyness. It’s a choice that we all can make and it’s just better.

And so, as I choose to do what’s most important first, my Bible is out, I’m praying, I’m aligning myself with God's word, aligning myself with the priorities of God; and I find it becomes so much easier to recognize what’s important and what’s just a distraction. Mary had chosen what is better and Jesus said, “It will not be taken away from her.” Each of us are presented with a myriad of opportunities every day. We have time for what we choose to have time for. We can make excuses or we can make progress, but we can’t have both. Martha was distracted by urgent things, while Mary chose what was most important, and in the same way, we want to choose to put Jesus first, to seek him every single day, and with his help, we can choose better.

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