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Luke 10:38-42

The Certain Gospel: Ministry Burnout

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Do you ever feel **burned out by church**? Churches have a tendency to burn people out. When first-time guests **Benjamin** and **Olivia Smith** walk through our door, we hope they'll come back the next week. When they do we're **so excited**, we invite them to our **fellowship dinner**, and when they're at the fellowship dinner we tell them about all our fantastic ministries and ask if they'd like to join any of them.

When we find out Benjamin can play the drums, we might ask, "Are your Wednesday nights free to try out the worship team?" And when Olivia tells us she loves children, we say, "We have just the ministry for you." Pretty soon Benjamin is on the **worship** team **upstairs**, and Olivia is helping teach the **children's** ministry **downstairs**, so they're **no longer sitting** together in church most weeks.

And when they are **in the service**, they hear announcements for upcoming **Outreach events** like the Apple Blossom Parade or the Trunk or Treat. Of course those are good things, so they sign up. And when Pastor Jonathan preaches on the importance of spending time with their **frontlines**, they try to spend time with their neighbors and non-Christian friends. And they just keep getting more and more **busy**.

But pretty soon, they also feel themselves getting more and more **exhausted**. They find they're giving much of their **physical** and **emotional energy** to serving the church, and have no time for **small groups**, even less time for **personal devotions** and **prayer**, and rarely have a **date night** together as a couple. Some weeks when they're not signed up to play the drums or volunteer in children's ministry, they **skip out** on church so they can rest and have a break. It's just getting to be too much.

What's happening is Benjamin and Olivia are **slowly burning up**. The busyness of ministry is exhausting them. Maybe they'll stay at the church, or maybe they'll look for **another church** where they're asked to do less. As a church we just want to love and care for the Benjamins and Olivias, but somehow that becomes us asking them to do stuff, at least to help **us do less**. We don't want to burn out either!

Today's text **teaches us** about **ministry burnout**. The story of Mary and Martha tells us how one woman got so wrapped up in **serving** Jesus she forgot to love Jesus. The **Gospel of Luke** records the story of Mary and Martha right after the story of the **Good Samaritan**. A lawyer asks Jesus, "**What** should I do to **inherit eternal life**?" The short answer is "**Love God** and **love your neighbor**." Then Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan as an example of a person sacrificially loving their neighbor. The last thing Jesus says at the end of this story is, "Go and **DO likewise**."

So I think **Luke** gives us this story of Mary and Martha **next** to remind us it's not all about **doing** ministry. Yes **God wants** us to **get out there** and serve him. God does want us to love our neighbors, to do **good deeds**, and serve the church. But Luke makes sure to add this story to remind us at the end of the day Christianity is not about **staying busy** for Jesus, it's about **loving Jesus**. My **big idea** for my sermon is this, "Do less for Jesus to be more with Jesus." Let's see how Mary and Martha teach us to do less for Jesus.

Do less for Jesus. (Luke 10:38-40)

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what

he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” (NIV®)

I want to start out by by **defending** Martha a little bit. We can be too quick to condemn her.

Martha is doing a good thing (serving Jesus).

Martha has a **servant’s spirit**. She is **hospitable**. She **opens** her **home** to Jesus and his 12 disciples. She knew he was an important **Rabbi**, a teacher, so she wanted to do a really **good job**. Do you ever imagine what it would be like to have a **President** over for dinner, or a famous **celebrity** or **Christian speaker** you really like? You’d **clean** the house, pull out your **best china**, and make your **special dish**. You’d try to be the perfect host. Martha was just like **Martha Stewart**. She wanted to serve Jesus well.

The Greek word for “preparations” (v40) is **diakonia**, which means “service” or “ministry.” This is where we get the church word “Deacon.” We have a Board of Deacons dedicated to serving the church and people. What Martha is doing, “**servicing**,” is a **physical act**. But serving also has a **spiritual component**, which is why we also translate diakonia as “**ministry**.” Martha’s act of service to Jesus is an act of ministry to him. But she seems to have gotten so caught up in the **ministry itself** she’s forgotten who she is ministering to.

As Christians, we can serve Jesus **lots of ways**. We can serve him by serving **inside** the **organization** of the church: leading a **small group**, joining the **welcome** team, playing on the **worship** band, and so on. We can also serve Jesus by serving **outside** of the **weekly service**: inviting our **neighbors** for **dinner**, volunteering at a **service project**, going on a **missions trip**. These are all good things just like Martha’s act of service. But sometimes we can do a good thing the wrong way.

Martha is doing a good thing the wrong way (forgetting Jesus).

She is so focused on **doing ministry** for Jesus that she actually tries to **use Jesus** to accomplish her own **plans**. When she comes up to Jesus and says, “Tell her to help me” (v40) the word “**tell**” is an **imperative**. Martha is **commanding** Jesus to do something for her. She wants to serve him, but now she’s telling him what to do. Martha is using Jesus for her **own ends**.

We **never** do this, right? We never make lots of ministry plans and then tell Jesus to bless them... We never spend so much time working for Jesus we forget to spend time with Jesus... We never make great **plans** then **blame Jesus** when our plans start to fall through... “Jesus, this outreach event would be so much better if Benjamin and Olivia had just shown up to help! Why aren’t they mature like me? Don’t they love the church? Don’t they care about you?” We can get so **wrapped up** in serving God we forget to love him, and we start to **blame him** and **others** when our plans fall through.

When we started Cornerstone, our **Core Team** read a book entitled Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by Church Starts. The first and most important mistake church plants make is “Neglecting the **Great Commandment** in Pursuit of the **Great Commission**.” In other words, we’re so excited to reach the world for Jesus and do lot’s of great ministry we forget the greatest commandment.

Luke 10:27b “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (NIV®)

*Martha is doing a good thing (serving Jesus), but she is doing it the wrong way (forgetting Jesus). But Luke doesn’t just give us the **negative example** of Martha, he gives us the **positive example** of Mary. *We do less for Jesus to...**

Be more with Jesus. (Luke 10:41-42)

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (NIV®)

Before Jesus corrects Martha, he **emphasizes** his **love** for Martha by saying her **name twice**, “Martha, Martha.” If you’ve been so overcome by busyness and doing ministry for Jesus you’ve forgotten Jesus, Jesus will correct you, but also remind you of his love. Jesus loves us so much he **bore the punishment** for our sin on the **cross**. He loves us so much he takes the consequence our sins deserve. He **sacrificed** himself for us so that our sins can be forgiven and we don’t have to be afraid that he doesn’t love us.

Jesus loves us so much we don’t need to be afraid to receive his **correction**. He provides a **safe space** so he can **addresses our sin** and **we can repent**. **Repentance** means to turn from sin and to God. What’s taking Martha’s eyes off Jesus is the **sin of worry** and **fear**, the fear of not getting **stuff done**. Jesus calls her to **repentance** (to change what she’s doing) by leading her to a **better pathway**, Mary’s pathway.

Mary is choosing the one thing that matters (Jesus himself).

In the **ancient middle-eastern culture**, women were expected to **serve** and **run** the **household** and men were expected to get an **education** and **work**. So when Mary **sits** at the **feet of Jesus**, she’s **breaking typical gender norms**. She’s taking the **posture** of a **disciple** (Acts 22:3). Women could go to **synagogue** and listen to teachings, but **Rabbis** didn’t teach **girls in schools**, only **boys**.¹ Mary is choosing to follow Jesus, to learn from him, to choose him even though **culture** and her own **family** say to do **other** things.

Some of you have **family** that question your faith and why you’re a Christian. Maybe some of them have asked you not to be a Christian. I want to encourage you that you are **choosing the right thing** by choosing Jesus. Likewise, culture tells us it’s not **who** you believe in that matters but how much you can **accomplish**. Sometimes we as **Christians** pick up and **repeat** this message, “How much **I do** for Jesus determines how **good** a Christian I am.” Maybe you’re **not a Christian** but you’ve believed a similar message, “If I can just be a **better parent**, or a better person, God will **accept me**.” The world wants us to believe this false message. The **message of Christianity** is that Jesus loves us and he wants to **spend time** with us. Jesus wants to **know** you, and be **known** by you.

Notice back in **verse 39** how Mary chose Jesus. She sat at his **feet** listening to what he **said**. The word “said” is the Greek word “**logos**” which means “**word**.” She is purposefully listening to the words of Jesus, which are the words of God. So if you want to be like Mary, you need to **first accept** that the world’s message is not true and second you need to **make time** for Jesus through his **word**.

I want to ask you a question. Is right now, this **35 minute sermon**, the only time you spend focusing on the word of God every week? What if you only **ate one meal** every week? You’d be **malnourished**, now matter how much food you packed in. Are you so busy with work and family and church activities that you don’t have time for Jesus? Jesus says right here that he is the **one thing** that really matters. We need to spend **personal time** with Jesus reading and studying his word (the Bible) and praying, but also **corporate time**.

The **Elders** oversee **small groups**, and we’ve talked about why small group attendance is so low at Cornerstone. It seems like it has **decrease** most semesters and this semester we **cancelled** one of our small groups because only three people signed up. And yet, I think **most people** (maybe 80%) are serving a team or a ministry. If we’re already doing church **one night** of the week, and then on worship team and a ministry

¹ NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. Zondervan 2017. Luke 10:39 footnote.

team, we don't have any more time to be apart of a small group. But if **Ministry Teams** are where we **do for Jesus** and **Small Groups** are where we **be with Jesus**, maybe we need to **do** something differently.

I don't know what the **solution** is, but we all need to know the problem. We can **grow in Jesus** in our Ministry Team meetings and as we **volunteer**, but that's not their **primary focus**. Their primary focus is **doing** the ministry of the church. The primary focus of a small group is helping you **sit at the feet** of Jesus and learn his word. If the choice is between you serving a ministry of the church and being **discipled** in a small group, I'd rather you **join a small group**. But maybe you just **don't like** small groups. Sometimes I find them exhausting. Let your Elders know if there are **other ways** you'd like to sit at Jesus' feet. We want you to choose Jesus first. *Mary is choosing the one thing that matters (Jesus himself).*

Jesus loves both Marthas and Marys.

It's tempting to think that Jesus loves **Mary more** because she's a better disciple, but that's not the gospel. Jesus loves all of his disciples. Jesus has **another encounter** with Martha and Mary when their **brother Lazarus** dies and Jesus raises him from the dead. I read through that story again this week in **John** chapter **11** and I noticed how much Jesus loves them.

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (NIV®)

Jesus loved both of them, and actually, it's **Martha** that get's her **name** here, not Mary. Jesus loves the Marthas and the Marys of **Cornerstone Congregational Church**. Jesus **doesn't tell** Martha to **stop being Martha** and become a Mary. He loves her for who she is. If you're a Martha and you **love to serve** and you **sometimes forget** who you're serving, Jesus still loves you. And if you're a Mary, who loves to be **with Jesus**, Jesus loves you too, but you're **not better** than Martha. If you're a Martha, you do need to focus on Jesus and his word **before** you worry about serving. You can even focus on him **as** you serve, and **as** you minister. *Jesus loves both Marthas and Marys.*

Do less for Jesus to be more with Jesus.

I've been working on getting our **nursery** ready for "Lancelot's" arrival in June. I'm not much of a handy man so it's been a lot of work to sand and stain the floor, and paint, and fix the window, and put up a ceiling fan. I've gotten a **lot done**, and many people have helped me, but I have more to do. I'm so excited to bring our baby home and show him the room. I'm sure the first thing he'll say is, "Great job on the room dad! It looks like you put a lot of hard work into it."

But what if the big day came for our baby came into this world and I just kept working on the baby room. What if Monica told me, "It's time to go to the **hospital**" and I said, "You go ahead **without me**. I got a few more things to do here." There comes a point where we need to recognize we've done enough for Jesus, and it's time to just be with Jesus. I can't wait to be there for my son's arrival, and to **meet** him. We have an opportunity to meet with Jesus, and to **sit at his feet**, every day. *Do less for Jesus to be more with Jesus.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).