



**Near the Cross 3:  
SETTING PRIORITIES  
Luke 10:38-42 (2/28/16)**

We're taking a look at our priorities this morning—specifically at “setting priorities.” Do you ever find this to be a problem in your life? Sometimes I do.

Even just for life in general, **setting good priorities and sticking to them can be challenging.** If I do this in light of my commitment to Jesus Christ, however, getting my priorities right gets even tougher.

If you've ever second guessed your actions—questioning why you spent so much time, effort, or money on something that didn't turn out to be nearly as worthwhile as you thought it would be—then you know what it's like for your priorities to get confused.

**Nobody has an unlimited amount of time.** In fact, **we all have precisely the same amount** of time. None of us can add to his time or subtract from it. It is what it is, and it's exactly the same for everybody!

There will always be people who are smarter than us, wealthier than us, more gifted than us; but not one of them will have any more time than we do. That's the same for us all. **Those who succeed** make the most of their opportunities by **learning to**

**prioritize—seeing what’s most important and living accordingly.**

In Luke 10, we find Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha. We get a glimpse into their lives and discover something about what makes them tick as we see where these two women place their priorities when Jesus stops by. **(Luke 10:38-42)**

**<sup>38</sup>As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup>She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup>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!"**

**<sup>41</sup>"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup>but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

There are several lessons here, but we’re focusing today on setting priorities. Jesus seems to be saying here to Martha that on this particular occasion, Mary has set better priorities.

At least **in this moment, Mary’s decision to sit and listen to Jesus was more important than Martha’s emphasis on preparing a meal.** I don’t think Jesus is saying that food is always secondary, but in this case, it was. Hopefully this will become clear as we take a closer look at what happens here in the text before us.

**1.** First, let’s talk about some **problems we face with priorities**, starting with this. Our failure to set good priorities leads to many wasted opportunities. We often see this in that wide-spread problem called **“procrastination.”**

Richard Armour wrote a little poem about this. It's called "9:00 to 9:15 AM." You can change the title to whatever time you begin your work day. The poem goes like this:

**I've dusted my desk and I've wound up my watch,  
I've tightened, then loosened, my belt by a notch.  
I've polished my glasses and removed a small speck.  
I've looked at my check stubs to check on a check...  
...I've sharpened each pencil till sharp as a dirk  
I've run out of reasons for not starting to work!**

Anybody relate? Of course, this was obviously written before the internet. Now the author would have to find things that rhyme with surfing, tweeting, face booking and online shopping—to name just a few of the possible wasters of our time. And I suppose the title would need to be lengthened a bit as well!

Do you remember the occasion when Jesus and his disciples met a man who had been born blind? The disciples launched into a discussion about the reason for the man's handicap. "Who sinned?" they wanted to know—"him or his parents?"

It was popular to debate such issues in that day—it was one of their ways of wasting time--but Jesus would have none of it. He said the question was off base and debating it would cause them to miss their opportunity to help the man. Jesus' priorities were in order.

In school, we learned that **there are three tenses in the English language: past, present, and future. Anytime our lives get stuck in just one time frame, we run into problems with our priorities.**

If, for example, we dwell on **the past** tense, we fall into one of two traps: either **nostalgia**...or **guilt**. Nostalgia is a desire for something that's long gone.

It's a preoccupation with an experience, a relationship, a moment in time from our past. No amount of hoping, praying, or fretting

will bring it back. If we're not careful, nostalgia will cause us to miss the opportunities we have today.

With nostalgia, we want to return to the past. But on the other hand, there's guilt—which means we regret the past. We would like to have a "do over"—but that's not going to happen either.

So what good does it do to carry around all that guilt? People who are caught up in the past—for whatever reason—are not going to set good priorities for their lives now.

It's not just a preoccupation with the past that gets in our way, though. Concerns about **the future** can also do this. On one hand, there's "**fantasy**"—which is an unrealistic anticipation of what the future holds for us.

On the other hand, there's "**anxiety**"—worrying about the future and assuming only bad things will happen. How can we set priorities for the present when we're preoccupied with something that might possibly happen to us in the future. It's such a waste!

Now, this leaves us with **the present**. So, are we only to live for this moment? Well, in a sense, that's **the only way we can live**. That's not to say that we should turn a blind eye to the past or future. **There are lessons from the past that need to be learned, and consequences of future actions that need to be considered**.

You remember Jesus' story of the Prodigal—a classic example of what can happen when our only concern is "what I want right now." The boy forgot his roots and past lessons learned. He also thumbed his nose at any future consequences of his actions. None of this turned out so well for him, did it?

**2.** So, there are all kinds of problems associated with "setting priorities." Let's turn our attention now to finding some **solutions for setting priorities**.

This requires wisdom, friends—an awareness of life—the fullness of life--that grows out of a close relationship with God that leads to an understanding of what He sees as being important.

There's a wonderful word that describes this spiritual awareness. It's **DISCERNMENT**. When we **have good insight into a situation**, that's called discernment. When we're **able to look beneath the surface and find underlying truths, relationships and motivations**, we are being discerning.

Closely related to this is **TIMELINESS--doing the right thing at the right time**. My parents would often say, "There's a time and place for everything." This meant, of course, that what I was doing was either at the wrong time or in the wrong place—or both!

Back to our text: when Jesus showed up at the home of these two sisters, Martha immediately got busy in the kitchen—we've got to feed these people, she was thinking. But Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to what He had to say.

As we know, this didn't go over well with Martha. The more she worked without Mary's help, the madder she got. Dinner wasn't burning, but she was! I love how someone put this: Martha was "working like the devil serving the Lord." You hear that?

**When our priorities are off, and life gets out of balance, and we're trying to cram too much into each moment, we get tired, and angry, and critical.** Martha wanted to please the Lord by way of this meal, but instead, she lets Him have it: '**Lord, don't you care that I'm having to do all this work by myself?**'

**What causes the temperature to rise (IMAGE)** at your house? Dinner guests—that was the problem here. Getting ready for church? I hear stories about that. Going on vacation—how strange that that would cause friction. What is it that causes you

to have to let off some steam at the expense of others? You seem quiet...

Now listen again to Jesus' response: "**Martha, Martha,...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.**" (vv. 41-12)

**We tend to pack our lives full of anything and everything and mistakenly see all of it as having equal importance.**

That's what Martha was doing. But Mary was able to discern that some opportunities are more important than others. Mary devoted this moment to sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening. She was discerning. She knew her priorities.

**3.** So, friends, how do we go about **setting our priorities**? If we took this story by itself, we might conclude that we need to just sit and listen a whole lot more, and do a whole lot less—especially in the kitchen. (Which one of you told me you always hide your wife's birthday gift in the oven?)

I'm sure there are those dedicated workers who need to do less in order to sit in the Lord's presence and learn from Him more. But that's not everyone's problem. A bigger challenge when it comes to the Lord's work are those who evidently believe that sitting and soaking it all in is all that's required to follow Jesus. Think about it—**you can't follow anyone by JUST sitting.**

Please understand that Mary's way is not always better than Martha's. In this case, it was—but not always. If you have your Bibles open, look at what happens in the rest of this chapter.

Luke 10 begins with Jesus commissioning seventy-two messengers to help him get His word out. He tells them, "**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.**" (Luke 10:2a) Too many of Jesus' people were sitting down on the job already!

Next, there's an expert in the law challenging Jesus about what matters most to God. When Jesus asks him what *he* thinks, the

man says, **“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 ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (v. 27)**

Jesus says, ‘That’s right--do this and you will live.’ (v. 28) But that wasn’t enough—he wants the term neighbor...defined. So Jesus tells him **the story of the Good Samaritan (IMAGE)**, the one who crossed all the boundaries this man thought were important in order to take care of a man who was hurting. (vv. 30-37)

Surely Luke was inspired to put all this together so we wouldn’t misunderstand what Jesus is saying to Mary and Martha OR what He’s saying to the expert in the law, for that matter—because our priorities can get out of kilter...in either direction!

The chapter begins with Jesus’ concern that the workers are too few. Then we’re told what matters most is that we love God with our whole heart and love our neighbor as ourself. Jesus says DO this—not FEEL this way—but ‘DO this and you will live.’ To make sure we get it, He tells us about what the Good Samaritan did.

The story of Mary and Martha is a reminder—and some of us need this reminder that life in Christ is not JUST about doing. It’s also about sitting at the feet of Jesus, getting ourselves in His presence, so we can listen and learn and grow in Him.

It’s only then that we have something to do WITH! Jesus wants us to find balance. In the Old Testament, people were told to labor for six days and then observe the Sabbath for rest and spiritual renewal. God knows we need good balance in our lives.

As New Testament people, we have much more freedom. We don’t have all those laws prescribing our every move; but this just puts more of the responsibility on us to find that proper balance between working and playing and resting.

**We also look for balance between worship and service, between being WITH the Lord and doing FOR the Lord, between receiving from Him and giving back to Him, between getting dinner ready and getting us ready for whatever our Lord has in store.**

In all our busy-ness, it's vital that our time with the Lord is given priority. He comes first—this is what being Lord means.

Mary reminds us that we are to spend priority time in worship, Bible study, and prayer. Martha reminds us, along with the Good Samaritan and others, that time devoted to service is also a priority. But let's not make the mistake of thinking that serving can take the place of sitting and listening—or, vice versa.

First, we make sure that Jesus Christ is Lord. **When we give Him first priority**, it follows that **we will listen to Him, learn from Him, and follow Him right into the very places of service He has for us.**

**In the process, our other priorities fall into place**, and our lives become balanced and fulfilled—which is what the Lord has wanted for us all along. He only wants what's best for us, friends, and finding His priorities...and living by them...is best!