

The One Thing That Is Needed

by Dr. Steven Riser

Text: Luke 10:41-42

Introduction

Martha was busy cooking and cleaning and entertaining, and she was worried and upset that her sister Mary wasn't helping. Jesus responded, "*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.*"

Most of us are like Martha – pre-occupied, distracted, too busy serving to sit down at the Savior's feet. Most of us tend to be driven by things like: time, deadlines, schedules, appointments, obligations, assignments, urgent demands and other factors beyond our control.

How many people do you know who put cultivating their relationship with Christ at the top of their priority list every day? The truth is, we can't afford not to make our relationship with Christ our top priority. We need it more than we know! There is truly is nothing more important, for to know God through Christ is eternal life (John 17:3).

Corporate worship can become the most important hour of the week if we come with prepared minds and hearts. Someone once put it this way, "*If you are too busy for God, you are too busy!*" Our fast pace of modern living only accentuates the importance of active, deliberate, purposeful, daily worship of the Jesus Christ.

It's my hope that this article will help to rekindle the fire of our devotion and give worship the priority it deserves. What does the Church of Jesus Christ need more than a renewed emphasis on biblical worship?

What are we likely to see when we go into the Christian bookstore? We're likely to see books with intense self-focus such as: self-help, self-esteem, self-love, self-fulfillment, self-development, etc. While it's important to know who we are in Christ, it's more important to know Christ.

What is the one thing needful? Do you know the first question in the Westminster Catechism? It is, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "*Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*" Worship is that one essential activity that must take precedence over every other duty of life.

The song writer expressed it this way: "Jesus! I am resting, resting; In the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart. Thou hast bid me

gaze upon Thee and Thy beauty fills my soul, For by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole.”

There’s only one thing needful for salvation: to have our hearts united to Christ by humble repentance and faith; to trust in Him and submit to Him and rejoice in Him – our good shepherd and wise and loving King. A life of faith in the living Lord will transform the way we think, feel and act.

Personal wholeness and fulfillment is a by-product of a life lived for the glory of God alone! In John 4:23-24, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “...*a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*”

C. S. Lewis said, “*It’s in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men.*” Have we neglected this truth? A. W. Tozer has referred to worship as “*the missing jewel*” of the church. We organize, we work, we set our goals and agendas, and we have almost everything but the one thing that’s needful – the one thing that we need the most – the adoration and appreciation of almighty God.

What is the Essence of Christian worship?

Worship is the submission of our whole nature to God.

It is the quickening of the conscience by His holiness.

It is the nourishment of the mind with His truth.

It is the purifying of the imagination by His beauty.

It is the opening of the heart to His love.

It is the surrender of the will to His purpose.

All of this gathered up in adoration and praise,

It is the most selfless act of which one is capable.

Here’s the dilemma: 1) man was made for worship but 2) the human heart is an idol factory (Calvin). We’re all incurably religious and we all incurably worship. The question is: 1) Who/what do we worship? 2) How do we worship? 3) How should we worship that which is our ultimate source of love and loyalty?

Worshipping God is essential for effective service. If you’re not worshipping God in spirit and truth, your work will amount to nothing more than “*wood, hay and stubble.*” Why? Because without worship you can’t be properly motivated to faithfully serve God. Worship is the horse, service is the cart. We must learn never to put the cart (service) before the horse (worship). Worshipers make good workers but workers don’t necessarily make good worshippers.

Hudson Taylor was a well known missionary to China. It was said, every day before the sun rose in China, Hudson Taylor was up and worshipping God. What was the key to Hudson Taylor’s life? He loved his Lord and spent time daily cultivating that relationship.

How can our love for God best be cultivated? What is the best way to cultivate any love relationship? By spending time alone with the one you love – one on one without distraction or interruption. How about this for a new LIFE resolution? *“I will daily spend quality time alone with God.”*

I. Lessons in Worship

What are some of the lessons in worship that God desires to teach us? Our first lesson is found in Matthew 6:6, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Jesus is saying that, “The first thing you must do is get somewhere alone with Me.”

The second lesson God would have us learn as we approach Him is: we must come in the name and through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ is the only basis by which we can approach and commune with the Father. Because of Christ we’re invited to come boldly before the throne of grace to praise to God, and share our personal requests and our petitions for others (4:16).

Our quiet time will never be what it could/should be as long as we think it’s for us. Our time alone with God is personal worship and worship is to be God centered not self-centered. Our devotional life is not just for reading the Bible and offering petitions but communing with Christ!

The third lesson is: What is the purpose of God seeking us? John 4:23-24 – “...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

God is seeking us that we might worship Him. That’s what the Bible teaches. Oswald Sanders says, *“Worshipping God is the great essential to fitness. If you have not been worshipping, when you get into work you will not only be useless yourself, but a tremendous hindrance to those who are associated with you.”* Without the proper motivation, which comes from worship, our actions are empty, vain and futile – of no eternal consequence.

What would you say if you were asked, “What is the one thing needful? What is the one thing to really concentrate on in your Christian experience above all else? How would you respond?

If you are in the Salvation Army, you might say, “It’s caring for the poor.”

If you are a Baptist you might say, “It’s soul winning.”

If you are Roman Catholic you might say, “It’s the Eucharist.”

If you are a Lutheran, you might say, “It’s the Liturgy.”

If you’re a Pentecostal, you might say, “It’s the Baptism of the Spirit – tongues.”

If you are a Presbyterian, you might say, “It’s Christian Education.”

What if you are a Bible-believing Christian? What would you say? *“To glorify God in all things – to do His will, His way, for His glory!”*

What is your preeminent passion and primary purpose in your life?

II. David's Primary Passion – (1 Sam. 13:14)

What was David's passion? He was called "*a man after God's own heart.*" Was his primary passion being a good shepherd, a great leader, a faithful servant or a wise king? What if you could ask David his primary passion? What would he say?

David desired only one thing; but if he had this, all else would follow. What was it? David's answer is found in Psalm 27:4, "*One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*"

What does David want to do? To seek the Lord and to gaze on His beauty. What is that one thing? A lifelong intimate spiritual intercourse with the Lord!

On any given day you might ask, "*How much of the day did I set aside to worship Jesus Christ?*" Your quiet time isn't the end but only the beginning of your worship. In your quiet time you are merely tuning your instrument so you can play it in tune all the day. God wants us to walk in fellowship with Him throughout the day. If we pray without ceasing we're sharing everything with God and relating everything to God. This doesn't initially happen easily or automatically but requires personal discipline on our part.

III. Paul's Primary Passion

What was a ruling passion of the apostle Paul? It's found in Philippians 3:10, "***I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.***"

What does "*that I may know Him*" mean? To know Christ was the primary thing in the life of the Apostle. Didn't Paul know Christ as Lord and Savior? Yes, but his primary purpose was to know Him intimately.

In Philippians 3:8, "*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain [win] Christ.*"

Paul's primary passion was his personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Cultivating this relationship with Christ wasn't a difficult duty but a delight!

What do we do when Christ is central in our heart?

We want to tell others about Jesus. We can't help telling others about Jesus! We share with others what is most important to us. A true passion for Christ is the kind of motivation we need for an effective evangelism ministry. Christ was central in the life of Paul and He needs to be central in each one of our lives as well! You don't have to cajole others to share what is most important to them.

IV. Mary's Choice

What was the one thing needful that Mary chose in Luke 10:42? Jesus said to Martha, "*Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.*" The context here was that Martha was busy serving and

Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus.

What was Martha's attitude? Martha has a complaining, critical spirit and fell prey to self-pity. God has called us to be servants and we ought to be thankful for the privilege of serving Him!

What did Jesus do? Jesus rebukes Martha. He said, in effect, that her priorities were all wrong. Worship is the horse, service is the cart, just as we shouldn't put the cart before the horse, neither should we put serving Christ ahead of worshipping Christ. Worship is the "*central activity*" of the Church. Evangelism is the "*chief duty*" of the Church.

What is the fundamental difference between Martha and Mary?

Is it a difference in temperament? Or ...Is it something else? Jesus indicates that it is a matter of making the right decision. Mary made a choice to be satisfied with Christ rather than to be dissatisfied with the world. Have you? Martha was worrying about many things rather than focusing on enjoying the presence of the Lord.

Which are you more like: Mary or Martha? Because worship is the priority for all Christians, God wants us all to be more like Mary than Martha. But the choice is up to you; you ultimately must decide what is primary in your life!

Have you chosen the one thing needful that David chose?

David chose to be occupied with the One he loved the most and to seek Him with all his heart. Mary chose the better part and it was not taken away from her.

What was Paul's primary passion? Knowing Christ and loving Him and seeking to be like Him!

God loves us with all His heart and He desires that we love Him with all our heart, but until or unless we do, we'll never know the sweetness or the depth of His love for us. **Who** do you share the secrets of your heart with?

You share them with those you know most intimately. So it is with the Lord. Mary knew what it was like to have intimate fellowship with the Lord. And therefore she received a great reward: the unspeakable honor of sharing the deep feelings of God's heart. David was a person after God's heart. Are you?

This is what the LORD says: "*Let not...*
the wise... man boast of his wisdom or
the strong man boast of his strength or
the rich... man boast of his riches,
but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD,
*who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I
delight,*" declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

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