

Sermon – Sunday July 17, 2022

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Most of us are good drivers, at least most of the time. We are good drivers because we focus on the road when we drive. We become bad drivers if we are distracted. For example, we are distracted if we chat too much with our friends, text or talk on the phone, or watch something going on by the side of the road. Distracted driving is dangerous. It claimed more than 3,100 lives in the United States in 2020 and injured many others. [\[i\]](#) Good drivers keep their focus on the road.

We are good disciples if we focus on God. We are good disciples when we take the time to listen to God and then use our talents and gifts to respond to what God tells us. If we become distracted from our focus on God, we risk wrecking our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. And we fail to meet our responsibilities as disciples of God.

As presented in Luke's Gospel, the story of Mary and Martha isn't about the relative value of serving God with action vs. serving God by study and prayer. Obviously, every disciple and church needs to participate in study, prayer, AND active ministry. We need a firm foundation in Scripture and tradition to understand how we are to treat others. We need prayer to discern where God calls us to act in the world. To bring about the Kingdom of God in the world, the church needs people who spend more time in prayer and Scripture study AND people who spend more time in active work.

Instead, in the story of Mary and Martha, according to Luke, the problem is that Martha's focus is wrong. Martha isn't focused on preparing the meal as a ministry of hospitality toward her friend and Lord. Instead, Martha is focused on putting on a perfect meal on the table so that she feels good. She's trying to overachieve beyond what Jesus needs. She's also focused on how angry she is with her sister right at the moment.

On the other hand, Mary can put aside her desires for achievement and self-importance to sit and listen to Jesus. If Mary were just sitting and resting to avoid working, Jesus would scold her, too. To be good disciples, we must remain focused on God and what God calls us to do, rather than being distracted.

So, how do we do that?

First, we know our gifts and personalities. God created each of us. God created some of us to primarily be students of Scripture. God created others to have a vital ministry of prayer. God created others as organizers, hospitality leaders, or active workers. Whichever tendency we have is perfect, whether for quiet service or active service.

Next, we need to realize that to remain effective, our ministries need a combination of both active work and contemplation. Even if we are active personalities, we set aside time each day to pray and study the Scriptures because, in that time, we can best discern which activities God calls us to. If we are contemplatives by nature, we set aside some time to engage in active ministries because helping others through our actions keeps the focus away from our own inner selves. We also realize to fulfill their callings,

churches need both those called primarily to contemplation and those primarily called to action.

We also closely monitor our thoughts as we go about our ministry. Why are we doing a particular ministry? Is it because the ministry provides us with an opportunity for recognition or achievement? Or is it because God has called us to it, and we seek only to serve God. Why are we studying a particular Scripture? Is it because we want to be an expert or authority, or because we genuinely want to understand what God says to us through the Scripture?

If we are unsure of our focus and motives, we can invite a friend to help us discern whether our actions or contemplation stems from our love for God and whether our focus is still on God. Sometimes we can start out doing the right thing for the right reason only to somehow get lost on the way by shifting our focus to ourselves rather than God.

When we realize our focus is shifting, we bring it back to God, just like we bring our focus back to the road when we know we've started looking at something on the side of the road instead. No one FORM of devotion is better than another. However, there is only one OBJECT of devotion.

We focus on Jesus – "the better part" – or "the important part," as some translations say.

We seek first the kingdom of God –whether actively or contemplatively. From that, everything else falls into place.

[i] NHTSA: Distracted Driving <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sky-driving/distracted-driving>