

Only One Thing Necessary

By Daryl Wingerd

If you were given the option during a particular period of time (say, one hour) to either breathe, drink water, eat, or sleep, which activity would you choose? Keep in mind that in this hypothetical situation you would not only be permitted to do that one thing for the hour in question, but would also be required to refrain from doing the other three.

It doesn't take much thought to see that this would be an easy choice. Only breathing is a true necessity for that one-hour time span. Eating, sleeping, and drinking water are all "necessities" at another level, but none are *absolute* necessities every moment of every day.



In Luke 10:38-42, two sisters are faced with a choice between two "necessary" activities. Jesus has come for a visit, bringing the message of the kingdom of God—the word of the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Mary and Martha likely knew He was coming, since He had sent pairs of messengers to every town and village in advance of His visit (cf. 10:1). These men had announced the nearness of the kingdom of God (cf. 10:9), so when Jesus himself came, Mary and Martha must have been anticipating His visit the way one would anticipate a visit from a king.

But what did they each anticipate doing when He arrived? The text clearly reveals their differing anticipations and actions.

Martha thought it most important to busy herself with preparing and serving a meal for their important guest and His entourage. Mary, on the other hand, neglected (in Martha's view) this most important of tasks, choosing instead to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His message concerning the kingdom of God. Martha showed her true colors (and most likely her then-unregenerate heart) by not only becoming irritated with her sister, but also by scolding Jesus for not recognizing and addressing Mary's "error." Amazingly, she even went so far as to command Him—the King himself—what to do: "Tell her to help me."

Instead of correcting Mary, Jesus commended her choice while gently rebuking Martha for her lack of understanding and misplaced priorities. "Only one thing is necessary," He said to Martha, "for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (v. 42). Mary

chose to breathe during Jesus' visit, rather than busying herself with life's less important matters.

So how about you? Where are your priorities in terms of the true necessities of life? Most importantly, where does "Listening to the word of the kingdom" fall on your scale of most important activities? Perhaps a closer analysis of Mary's actions will illuminate a need for change.

Mary planned to listen when the word of Christ was spoken. She may have done other things in preparation for Jesus' visit, but she had only one plan for when He actually spoke. She knew that other matters (even the important matter of hospitality) had to take second place to learning from Him. When He was gone, the one thing she did not want to remember about His visit was that she had missed some of what He said because she was too busy serving.

So how about your own pre-planning—your calendar? Do the events in your life that are centered around learning the Bible take highest priority? Do you aim for a solid night's sleep Saturday night so as to be awake and alert during your pastor's sermon Sunday morning? Are personal Bible study times, weekly church fellowship with preaching, and mid-week Bible studies the "non-negotiable" items in your schedule? Or do you squeeze them in whenever the other "necessities" of life permit?

Mary was willing to disappoint others in order to hear Jesus' word. She certainly knew that Martha was upset with her, yet she did not allow Martha's frustration to move her away from what she knew was most important.

So what do you say when friends or relatives plan birthday parties or other events during times when your church is meeting for Bible study and fellowship? Which one usually receives the "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to make it" message? What about when your unbelieving children would rather you take them to a sporting event or some other form of recreation or entertainment?

Many things in this life are permissible. Of these, many are important. But as Jesus said to Martha in pointing out her misplaced priorities, "only one thing is *necessary*."