

JJ<sup>1</sup>

Today we're going to have a quick Christmas in July. It's the first Sunday after Christmas and the extended family is coming over for dinner. There's so much to do. Clean the house, plan the meal, get groceries and then make the meal. You went to church on Christmas Eve and Day just three days ago. You figure, "Well, I've had a lot of God's Word lately. It'll be okay to miss church today so I can stay home and finish preparing the meal. That way we can eat sooner."

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? It may sound like your own life exactly. If not, I guarantee each one of you can find something like it. It's not surprising. It's a situation that has played out for thousands and thousands of years. It's what we find at Mary and Martha's house today. We find Martha struggling with her To-Do list. But who doesn't struggle with their To-Do lists? Our To-Do lists can get so long and complicated we're torn on where to start or what to do next. We have such problems staying on top of our To-Do lists that there are entire books written on the subject like, *Getting Things Done*, by David Allen. We struggle so badly to keep our To-Do lists organized that there are hundreds of apps out there to help you do just that.

But the biggest problem we have with our To-Do lists is that all too often, we start in the wrong place. We get so focused on *our* To-Do lists that we forget to ask: **JESUS' TO-DO LIST...OR MINE?**

It doesn't seem like it should be a hard question to answer, does it? Whose To-Do list is more important, God's or mine? That's what we call a no-brainer. Or, at least that's what we like to tell ourselves. But just think of how crazy our lives become or how crazy we let our lives become and then completely botch that question!

Today we see Martha get it entirely wrong. Just like I have, countless times. Just like you have, countless times.

What do you think was on top of Jesus' To-Do list that day when he came to Bethany and the house of Mary and Martha? The same it always is: Speak the truth of God's love for them to build up their faith and to keep their eyes focused on the goal of their faith—eternal life in heaven. Consider how much they needed this intimate visit from Jesus, while unbeknownst to them, it wasn't going to be too long before they would lose their brother Lazarus to a deadly disease.

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

On the other hand, what was on the the top of Martha's To-Do list? We can't really say for certain, but what we do know is that Luke tells us she "was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." The word translated "distracted" means that Martha was being pulled this way and that. Remember, she is a child of God. She's the one who comes to meet Jesus outside their town after their brother died. But today, we see the Martha everyone remembers. Maybe after the initial greetings and conversation she moved to the kitchen, knowing those things needed to be done. Maybe she tried listening at first, but the pull of her To-Do list won over. While we don't know what was at the top of her To-Do list we do know it wasn't: Sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him speak to me of the freedom and joy that is mine through his love and forgiveness so that I can make it through this messy life.

Now, so you know, Jesus isn't bashing her service. It's her timing of *when* to do that service. Martha's desire to serve Jesus was a confession of her faith. She was doing this for Jesus. And you can be sure that had Martha not put her To-Do list first, Jesus would have delighted in all this. Just think, here was one of those rare opportunities where Jesus gets invited to someone's house and doesn't get tested or interrogated. They invited him simply because they loved him.



But Martha's confusion on whose To-Do list was more important ruined all that.

You see, to not only have the desire to serve but also the wisdom to serve wisely isn't something we're born with. These things only live and flourish in the heart of a Christian who has first been well served and fed by sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him. That's why you see Jesus defend Mary as he does, even though she wasn't doing anything at the time to prepare this meal for their special guest. Mary had chosen what was better. Mary set aside her To-Do list and the To-

Do list of her sister for the time being to receive the one thing that could never be taken from her. A clean house and fine meal quickly pass away. But not the words and promises of God. They endure forever.

So, yes, Martha flunked that no-brainer question: **Whose To-Do list is more important, God's or mine?**

It's easy to say, "Silly Martha!" But then we all must also admit, "Silly me! Foolish me!"

How many times haven't we flunked that no-brainer question? Each one of us could have the middle name: Worried-and-Distracted-by-Many-Things. And sure, we could proudly try and defend so much of what we do by pointing out that they are things done for our God-given callings in life in our families, congrega-

tion and community. But no matter how legit and pressing those things are, if God's To-Do list is servant and subject to my To-Do list, then I've got it all wrong. Then I'm starting in the wrong place.

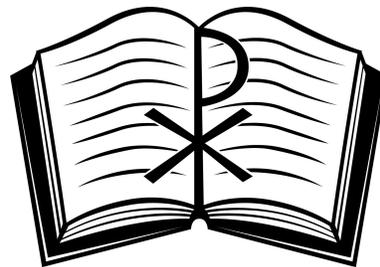
Do you know what is #1 on Jesus' To-Do list for you every day? It's: Speak my life-giving Word to shatter the proud heart of Ben Worried-and-Distracted-by-Many-Things Enstad so that he again finds his comfort and strength in my saving grace that cannot be taken away from him. And all that to prepare him for the trials and challenges he doesn't know he's yet to face.

Friends, how important it is for us to know that we cannot begin to help and serve the people on our To-Do list in a God-pleasing way until we regularly sit at Jesus feet and let him take care of our souls. And how wonderful, friends, to know that every day our Lord Jesus wants to do nothing less than draw us to himself and his eternal love for us!

Our Lord Jesus knows best. And sometimes he throws our To-Do list all out of whack and sets it aside for us so that we would put his To-Do list first. When that happens, we will often find that things fall off our list because others can share

the load. Sometimes heart-wrenching problems suddenly have an answer because we've taken the time to sit at Jesus' feet. And sometimes he just teaches us that he's still in control and he's still going to take care of me and all things needful at the end of the day as we place all our "unfinished tasks...unresolved problems...and unfulfilled hopes" into his almighty hands. (CW, *New Service Settings*, p. 56)

May the Lord continue to patiently teach us, win us, woo us to pause from our To-Do list regularly so that we would sit at our Savior's feet. Amen.



SDG<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

