

Attending to the Guest
Psalm 52
Luke 10:38-42

I recently heard a story about a friend's visit with a relative and her family. She told me that every time she makes the effort to visit this relative, the woman and her husband spend the entire visit doing what they would do without visitors. In other words, they go to appointments, meetings, and other activities as if their out-of-state company had not come for a visit. They act as if she and her family were not even there. Rather than make intentional time to visit and spend quality with them, they busy themselves with everything else in life. What then is the point of their visit if they have no one to visit while they are there?

Generally, when we go to visit someone, we expect them to at least take some time to visit with us. Sometimes we find hospitality that is welcoming, friendly, and valuable. Other times we are met with resistance to our visit, but at least some effort is made at hospitality. The point is that it takes effort on both parties to give and receive for a healthy visit. If we invite a guest into our home we should make time to actually spend with the guest. Sure we will probably do our best to make our homes presentable for guests, but when our guests arrive, it is proper to set aside our business and spend time in conversation and fellowship with our guests.

In Luke, we find the same scenario. Sisters Mary and Martha have a guest in their home, but these two sisters take different approaches to their guest. Mary puts her attention on Jesus and spends quality time with him. Martha busies herself trying to do whatever else she could for her guest. Sometimes we approach this text and put an black and white meaning to it. We might say that Mary did the right thing and Martha did the wrong thing. But that is not what the text is saying. For that situation, Mary had chosen the better part. But this is not to say that Martha was wrong in what she was doing. Jesus was just emphasizing that Martha needed to rethink her priorities in that situation.

The work Martha was doing was important and it did need to be done. But at that moment, their special guest, Jesus, should have been her focus. Rather, she chose to focus on herself and what her sister was not doing. By focusing on the chores that needed to be done, she was missing the fellowship and visiting with Jesus. Yet had she, like Mary, taken a break from her chores and made the effort to spend time with Jesus, then her chores could have been done at a later time. Her guest was only there for a short time and she would not be able to spend time with him later.

I think of the parent that is so busy that he spends more time at work than with his wife and children. Or the wife who is so busy at being busy, that she doesn't spend quality time with her husband. Or the Christian that is so busy volunteering to help others that he doesn't have time for fellowship with other Christians or Bible Study.

There is nothing wrong with earning a living, keeping busy, or volunteering in service, but to do so at the expense of quality time with God, family, and friends is to miss out on time that we cannot get back. We cannot go back and watch our children grow up if we miss it. We cannot go back and tell our loved ones we love them if they have already died. And we don't have the time later to go and sit at the feet of Jesus and make changes in our life and faith if we keep putting it off until tomorrow.

Darleene's death reminds us that life is fragile and we don't know what time we have left. We cannot afford to put off tomorrow what we can do today. Like the saying goes, we have to stop and smell the roses while we still can. If we have a guest, then we must stop and fellowship with that guest while we are still able. And while we are still able, we must stop and spend time with God in worship, fellowship, and study.

It is not hard to be distracted by life. Things are always coming up that we have to juggle, and as Martha and Mary had to learn, there is not enough time to do everything. We have to make choices about how we prioritize our lives and our time. Consider this poem:

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish, I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me and grew heavier with each task;
Why doesn't God help me, I wondered; He answered, "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me - He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock;
God gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.¹

As we order our days, we need to take heart of the words of Jesus. The gospel should come first in our lives. With the gospel first, we then learn how to be productive in ways that glorify God. With Jesus first, we learn what is really important in life and what isn't so important. With intentional worship, prayer, and study, we learn how to serve and care for our families faithfully. I grieve for those who put all their hope in their jobs only to lose them in this economy. Numerous suicides are being reported throughout the nation where the main source of income is lost and families are left in debt too much to deal with. Rather than take a loss of home and possessions, they choose to end their lives.

¹ Grace L. Naessens. No Time to Pray. <http://www.ftmagic.com/ntp.html> (accessed 7-15-10)

If only they had taken the time to rearrange their priorities perhaps the love of God would have comforted them through their loss and helped them understand what is truly important in life. It's not too late to put our priorities in better shape. The story in Luke does not tell what Martha did next, but it was Jesus hope that she would set aside her worrying and business and take time to be with her special guest. May you take time for Jesus daily and always know that when you have put Jesus first in your life you have chosen the better part. Amen.

Prayer:

Life giving Lord,
Forgive us when we put business before you. Help us learn how to sit at your feet and learn from you. We invite you to be our special guest in our homes. In your name we pray. Amen.