

One Thing Is Needed

✚ to relieve frustration

✚ to treasure forever

In the name of Jesus, Friend of sinners, dearly redeemed:

Have you heard the one about “The Dog and His Reflection”¹? It’s not a joke; it’s one of Aesop’s Fables. The dog’s so happy the butcher gave him a nice big bone. He’s trotting home dreaming about that bone as he crosses a river and looks down at the water. There’s another dog with a bigger bone! So the greedy dog drops his bone and jumps into the river. But it was just his reflection, and now the dog is swimming for dear life to reach the shore. He finally crawls out all wet and shaking, feeling stupid because he lost his bone. Moral of the story: *It is foolish to be greedy.*

But what if you’re not being greedy? What if you’re working hard to help others? What if you’re really giving everything you have to work for the Lord? Anybody who knows you, knows your intentions are good. You may even be praying for God to test your heart and your attitudes. He always does. And our loving Lord is always picking us up out of the water, raising us to new heights of love and devotion in our relationship with Him. Sometimes it’s as shocking as a cold dip in a freezing river. Service *for* God is pleasing and wonderful. Service *from* God is essential, vital. **One Thing Is Needed...**

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How many people do you know who love to welcome drop-in guests? No plan – just people popping in and finding a cheerful welcome. Cindy and I were amazed that our sister in the faith, Dorothy Lindig, on her deathbed kept asking about travelers who might not have a place to stay. What could we do for them? Dorothy went home to heaven without an answer. Hospitality was on her heart to the end.

Remember a few weeks ago when Jesus focused on His “Resolute Journey” to Jerusalem? Luke carefully emphasizes our Savior’s progress toward His “goal” (13:32) from the beginning of His journey in Luke 9:51 until He reaches Jerusalem in 19:44 for His *Triumphal Entry* on Palm Sunday. The Holy Spirit inspired at least ten references in Luke (9:51; 10:38; 13:22; 13:32f; 14:25; 17:11; 18:31-34; 19:11; 19:28; 19:41). It’s not a direct path, but a journey with many side trips, all aimed unwaveringly toward Jerusalem as Jesus’ goal of suffering for our salvation. And this first stop is at a home near Jerusalem.

As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Jesus and His disciples were traveling, but it seems as if only Jesus was invited over to spend some time as a family favorite of the sisters. Maybe Martha was older; it says it was “*her home.*” Imagine her excitement to give Jesus a warm welcome and a wonderful meal.

Many volunteers start out that way. You’re all excited for something new. To be able to do something for the Lord is its own reward. What a wonderful opportunity. But then you start to realize that maybe you thought you volunteered, but you were kind of “voluntold” by others who might have helped. They all step back and let you serve, but no one seems to be interested in helping you out. Or think of the young pastors starting out now with twelve years of training for Seminary graduation. And they come to their first parish only to find out that most everyone else seems to know, or at least think they know, what the pastor should be doing – except the pastor! **Frustration** – anyone?

¹ <https://read.gov/aesop/026.html>

Volunteers and highly trained professional caregivers all feel it. But there are a couple things that can take your **frustration** right over the edge. If you really, really care about someone you're trying to serve. And if you had hoped for help from someone you thought you could really rely on. Oh, that hurts!

Sister Mary never showed up in the kitchen. But there she is every time Martha passes that room, maybe trying to hint just a little? No reaction from Mary or from Jesus. "Voluntold" and now Voluminously Crushed. When your heart is overwhelmed with **frustration**, your hurt is only a hair's width away from losing your temper. Suddenly, you don't realize what you're saying or how you look.

You've probably heard about a Christian counselor who helps women see this. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs wrote the *Love and Respect* series with his wife Sarah. After some **frustration** with her husband Dr. Eggerichs advises the wife to go in front of a mirror alone. She's to recreate the whole argument word for word with feeling. I've tried this, not that I can remember the words; what a face. And that's how these very conscientious, loving wives react. They're shocked to see and hear the contempt they've heaped on their husband. One thing worse? If you disrespected your Lord Jesus?

to treasure forever

Martha *had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word.* ⁴⁰ *But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me."* Have you ever asked God that question? Your marriage, ministry, your moments every day filled with worry, and, "Lord, don't you care?"

You're out on a boat, waves raging in the wind, and there's Jesus asleep on a cushion. Same question: "*Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?*" On the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, Jesus *got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind stopped, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?"* (Mark 4:35-40) Jesus is always there to serve us with His Word, **One Thing Needed – to treasure forever.**

Likewise, for Martha and for Mary, a huge lesson for our life too. As a husband, I want to imitate my Lord Jesus, calm and steady under fire. The Holy Spirit's Greek original indicates that Martha was practically standing over Jesus, breathing fire down on Him, not realizing how she must have sounded. Her heart was hurt, and Jesus knew it. He did not scold her. Jesus blessed her with this **treasure forever**: "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her.*" The great gem here, the huge nugget of gold to keep forever in the treasure chest of your heart is this: Serving God is wonderful, God serving you is far better – not with gold of silver, but with His holy, precious Word, the one thing needful.

Twenty-five years ago, I was a not-so-young pastor. Ten years in the parish and I was wondering why the harder I tried, the more discontent all around. Everyone seemed to know what the pastor should be doing except the pastor. The Lord helped me as He helped Martha, so patiently. The **One Thing Needed** came to me in a book called *Motivation for Ministry* – subtitled *Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone)* ². While the children swam in the pool that summer, I got a refreshing restart. Somehow without realizing it and contrary to my sanctified desires, my focus had shifted to pleasing people rather than pleasing God. I wasn't paying attention to God's Word for me. Singing the hymns for me. Speaking the liturgy to my heart. From Martha's frustration, Jesus takes us a step higher into the sublimity of God's great love for us. The greatest worship we can give our good and gracious God is to let Him serve us with Word and sacrament. Counter-intuitive to our human nature, yes, but God loves to give...loves to serve...loves to save the brokenhearted and discouraged. Nothing pleases God more than for me to stop and let Jesus serve the greatest meal of grace and forgiveness. Who'd know without a little **frustration**. Take some time to meditate on God's Word **to treasure forever** what you really need. Amen.

² <https://online.nph.net/motivation-for-ministry.html>