

Vistoso Community Church Publication

The One Thing:

There is something that must stand
behind both your ministry
and your walk!



Sermon preached by

Pastor Kevin Redig

At Vistoso Community Church
Sunday, January 19, 2014

Author's Note:

The One Thing

This message was originally preached to the congregation at Vistoso Community Church as part of a series on the *Mission & Disciplines of the Christian Way of Life*. Their unfailingly positive response to God's Word has motivated me to take the extra step of putting the truths we covered to paper.



In addition, I would like to thank the faithful minister of God's Word who inspired me to put this message together, Pastor Kurt Witzig of Duluth Bible Church. He has no idea that he has inspired another pastor in another state, but the Word of God clearly taught—always leaves a legacy!

In His grace,

Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church



Introduction

We are in the midst of an investigation of the *mission* and *disciplines* of the Christian Way of Life. Our mission, as assigned by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself—to make disciples. . . . The disciplines that support accomplishing our mission include the study of God’s Word, prayer, worship, and so forth. Before we press on, we must pause for just a minute and acknowledge that there is something that stands behind all of what we do as Christians. Let’s call it the **One Thing** that must take precedence, the **One Thing** we must not lose sight of, the **One Thing** without which ministry ceases to matter. Let me set it up this way. Imagine that in order to encourage you in your walk and to guide you in your ministry efforts for your remaining days on this earth, you had a short face-to-face meeting with Jesus. The purpose of this meeting is so that He could pass on to you the **One Thing** upon which He would like you to focus, the one piece of guidance or direction that supersedes everything else. What would it be? Think about it for a few seconds.

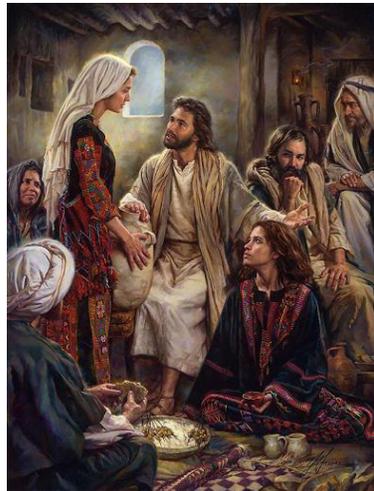
Investigating Luke Chapter 8

So what would it be? Would it be some kind of ministry He would like you to take on? Would it be some kind of correction with respect to your life? Let me come at it from another direction. Would you look forward to this interview? If you are thinking of it in terms of a visit to the principal’s office—probably not. There is, however, another possibility and that’s what this message is about. You see, interestingly enough, the Scriptures address this very question and give us a clear answer—not just once, but at least three times.

Let's begin by looking at Luke 10:38-f.

³⁸Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴²But One Thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

This is a marvelous and very familiar passage, and we will have to be careful not to let its familiarity rob us of its deep lesson. In order to make sure we look at the passage in a fresh way, I am going to lead you through a set of observations, followed by a few points of interpretation, and lastly leave you with some thoughts on application. I am hoping to get you to think about the passage as deeply as possible.



Some Observations

1. Martha sets a marvelous example. Do you see in the text that she welcomed Jesus into her home, and then apparently was working very hard to be hospitable—in fact, I think we can say she had the gift of hospitality. I think many churches would be happy having as many Marthas as possible filling ministry slots.

2. However, there are at least three *warning signs* tucked away within the narrative.

- First, it says that Martha was “distracted,” and then later Jesus describes her distraction as being “worried and troubled”. This sounds like she was so distracted that she had crossed the line into sin.
- Second, what led to her anxiety was “much serving!” In other words, doing too much of a good thing.
- Finally, and this is the clincher, there is just one imperative in the whole passage, and this is the phrase “tell her to help me.” Do you see the problem? Martha is giving a command to Jesus—something is out of balance when your efforts at ministry cause you to boss Jesus around.

3. Now, in contrast to the good works that had Martha distraught to the point of anxiety, there is **One Thing** that should have taken precedence. What was it? It was sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to what He had to say! Do you see in the text where it says that Mary “heard his word?” That means to understand the content of what Jesus is saying. In modern lingo, we might say that Mary was *in-sync* with what Jesus was saying. What’s so special about what Mary was doing? First of all, it stands in contrast to anxiety; and second, it is something that can’t be taken away.

From Observation to Interpretation

1. This is a narrative that teaches us that *good* can be the enemy of *best*. Or, using the words of the text, “much serving” can be the enemy of “that good part.” If we are motivated to follow after Jesus, then all of our lives we are going to have to fight the tendency to allow the good to take precedent over the best. I’ve heard one Bible teacher exclaim that what Martha and Mary show is the difference between a full schedule and a full heart.

I see it as the all-important contrast between doing and being; between an acceptance that is based primarily upon works and one anchored in who we are in Jesus Christ. And don't underestimate the potential for this error to take root in the church. There is often a very strong push to do and produce visible fruit when perhaps the greatest need is to carefully guard one's growth in grace and knowledge. A life busy for the Lord that is barren in terms of having a depth of personal relationship with Him is not God's plan for His children.

2. What exactly does "sat at Jesus feet and heard His Word" mean? First, I want to strongly state that it cannot be reduced to simply a reference to Bible study. Consider the following passage:

But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.
John 5:38-40

Do you see the risk? The Pharisees had spent countless hours studying the Word of God. Yet, it is possible to divorce the study of the Word from the One who stands behind it. We must reach a point where we do not come to the Word of God for the purpose of facts, figures, and detail, but instead we come to the Scriptures for a relationship.

The Word is not meant to be solely a medium of scholarship, but one of fellowship. Christ is the Living Word (John 1:1,14). In the Bible we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Therefore, I try to remember every time I come to the Word of God that behind the written Word that I am holding in my hand stands the Living Word—it is Him I come to meet!

Mary certainly understood this—look at her position. She is at the feet of Jesus fully absorbed in what He has to say. She is a picture of devoted relational obedience. (Which one do you want to be—Mary or Martha?)



Luke chapter 10 is not the complete story, simply because the concept of the **One Thing** has not yet been fully developed.

Rather, the picture of

Mary is meant to whet our appetite, create intrigue, and give us a desire to know more. However, before we move on to additional passages of Scripture in order to gain a fuller understanding, we have a few more points to cover from this passage in Luke.

3. What does it mean, this “*good part. . . will not be taken away from her?*” I think the thrust of Jesus’ comments is to teach us that Mary is building a relationship, and relationships can’t be taken away.

Psalm 84:10 says, “*Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*” When we spend time in building a relationship with the Lord, we have something that can’t be taken away from us—even when we go through a dry and difficult time in our lives.

Have you ever noticed that Scripture even goes so far as to define eternal life in terms of relationship: *For this is eternal life. . . that they would know the One true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.* (John 17:3)

Let me give you a very practical example. My mom recently passed away after suffering for some years from dementia. She was religious all of her life, but at a relatively old age, set aside her trust in religious practice as the means to save, and instead trusted solely in the person and work of Jesus Christ and Jesus was her hope of salvation. She had a very sharp mind, a passion for people, and was a gifted Bible study leader. All this was gone during the final years leading up to her death.

So now you are thinking: “Wasn’t the ‘good part’ taken from her?” My answer would be emphatically, “No.” For “one day,” she actually spent many days in the courts of the Lord which were better than anything else she could have been doing. This earned her a level of spiritual growth she will take with her out of this life and into the next, and very likely led to reward she will have for all eternity. None of these things can be taken from her—they are part of her legacy as a believer in Jesus Christ. They defined who she was and they gave glory to God. They cannot be taken from her. Who knows, perhaps during those final years when for all practical purposes she was not the same person and her soul was a prisoner in her own body, that she wasn’t already receiving glimpses of glory!



Now for some Application

1. What does your *name tag* read? Are you a Martha or a Mary? What makes this question especially hard is that most of us have been encouraged to place a premium on being a committed Martha, while the Scriptures place a premium on following the example of Mary. Could it be that we have been promoting the wrong thing in the church?

2. I believe it is imperative that we learn that there is something that stands behind our spiritual gifts—and it must take precedence in terms of both sequence and weight. By sequence, I mean what must come first. By weight, I mean what must be seen as more important.

Let me explain what I mean. I think from the text that we could say that Martha had the gift of hospitality, which she was using. What I am saying is that the *take-home* lesson for us is this: what Martha needed, first and foremost, was to sit at the feet of Jesus, take in truth, and she needed to realize that this was of greater importance than the activity associated with putting her gift into play.

Now, I realize that this is a *tough sell* when ten people are coming over for dinner. In the case of Martha, we are talking about the fact that she was going to have very few opportunities to “sit at the feet” of Jesus. In our lives, perhaps it is more an issue of time management and planning our day. We need to be sure that quiet time, when we both study and listen, have a priority place in our lives.

3. There are ways to test whether or not we have lost sight of the **One Thing**. The more we are involved in service and ministry, the more we are going to have to regularly test our lives and our priorities.

- If you are busy for the Lord, then watch your life closely and make sure that your busyness does not lead to feelings of spiritual barrenness.
- If you are anxious or troubled, this is a sign that you have already strayed from being *in tune* with your Lord and Savior. Take the time to get away, “Be still and know God,” spend time in prayer, worship, and meditation on the Word.

4. One final point of application, when you feel led to provide insight or correction to someone. do it like Jesus did. Notice the endearing way He addressed her, “*Martha, Martha.*” Recall Paul addressing the Galatians, “. . . *little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you. . .*” (Galatians 4:19). We like to beat people over the head with corrective advice, but Jesus gently called them to reconsider their ways in the light of His truth.

Investigating John Chapter 15

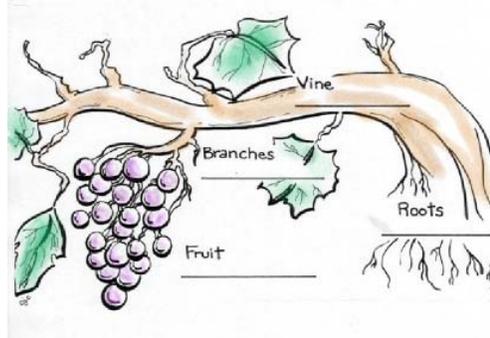
As we move on to John 15:1-11, I think you will find this passage very helpful in furthering our understanding of the **One Thing** God wants us to place a premium upon as we otherwise go about our daily walk.

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. .
. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear
fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can
you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are
the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears
much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. . . If
you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will
ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By
this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit;
so you will be My disciples. "As the Father loved Me, I
also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My
commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I
have kept My Father's commandments and abide in
His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My
joy may remain in you, and that
your joy may be full.*

John 15:1-11

(Note: this is a partial excerpt. For the complete text of this passage, please make use of your Bible.)

Probably the first thing you are thinking is, “I don’t see the **One Thing** label anywhere in this passage. Here is why I think it fits into the category we have established, even though you don’t explicitly see the phrase: **The One Thing**. First, the term “abide” is a good match for “sat at Jesus feet. . .” The grammar associated with this Greek verb adds a sense of urgency or of that which is of utmost importance, that is the **One Thing**!



Second, Jesus and the disciples are on the way to Gethsemane (you will note they left at the end of chapter 14 and arrive in chapter 18). What kind of things do you suppose Jesus passed along during this final time with His disciples? It is no stretch to assume things of the greatest importance. And finally, in Verse 5 of this passage, Jesus makes it clear that apart from abiding, that is apart from this **One Thing**, His followers can do nothing. In other words, abiding in the true vine that is Jesus Christ is the **One Thing** necessary in order to produce fruit. It must come first (sequence) and be of greater import (priority) even than ministry.

Some Observations

1. The concept of “to abide” (we will more fully define shortly) seems to be very important. Take a look at the entire text and count how many times it is used. It will be a little bit dependent upon what translation you chose, but you should quickly realize the high level of emphasis.

2. If you read the passage carefully, and meditate upon what Jesus is saying, you will discover a certain tension. On the one hand, “abiding in Christ” seems a lot more like a state of being than something you do. Yet at the same time it is clearly connected to the idea of bearing fruit.

To help understand the apparent contradiction, we need to better understand the agricultural analogy. When a branch is grafted into a vine or tree trunk, a notch is made in the trunk and a clean cut edge of the branch firmly inserted. The branch is then securely bound to the tree. What happens next? Nothing—at least nothing you can see. For quite an extended period of time, nothing happens externally. However, the whole time woody fibers are being laid down between the trunk and the branch. It is not until all of this unseen, but vitally important work, is completed that life-giving sap starts to flow into the branch. Now the branch can sprout leaves, bud, and bear fruit.

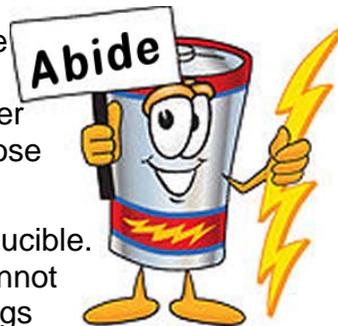
The unseen bonding between branch and vine is analogous to what it means to abide. If we abide, in time, the life of Christ will overflow into our lives and we will produce real fruit. If, as Christians, fruit came right away, we wouldn’t have the spiritual structure to support it nor have the stable walk with the Lord necessary to bring that fruit to maturity.

From Observation to Interpretation

1. To abide—the Greek word is *meno*—means to remain, wait for, and to dwell. In the special case of the dative, it can mean to *exist in a certain location.*” Although you wouldn’t normally talk about staying *in a location* with respect to a person, since this is a spiritual concept, consider the meaning of *meno* to be an admonition to: *abide in the sphere of Christ.*

This is just a short version of saying: "...think His thoughts, fix your mind upon Him, consider things from His perspective, cast your concerns upon Him, and so on." Do you see how this was Martha's problem—the tyranny of the urgent had crowded out all spiritual perspective? On the other hand, Mary was content, even in the middle of the hustle and bustle of everyday life, to "abide in Christ" while she had the blessing of being in His presence. Who made the better choice?

Furthermore, in the same way, the blessing that Mary received could not be taken away from her, neither will it be taken from us as we choose to daily abide in Christ.



2. By its nature, "to abide" is irreducible. By that I am simply saying you cannot reduce the concept to a list of things that you do. However, it does have certain knowable components.

- It is to share divine viewpoint (thinking). (Isaiah 55, 2 Timothy 3:16, John 15:7)
- It is to share affections: *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."* (1 John 2:15-16)
- It requires time. I think of it like a battery requiring time in the charger in order to effectively power an electric tool.
- It requires the indwelling and filling of the Spirit. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." (Romans 8:8)

3. Verse 9 is absolutely mind-boggling in the truth it communicates—just think it through for a minute.

*“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love.”*

First, we have to realize how the Father has loved the Son. Of course we know that the first and second members of the Trinity have had an eternal love for each other; nonetheless, look at these words from Scripture that tell us how God views his Son, Jesus Christ:

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him...Isaiah 42:1

*...my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased...
Luke 3:22*

but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 1 Peter 1:19-20

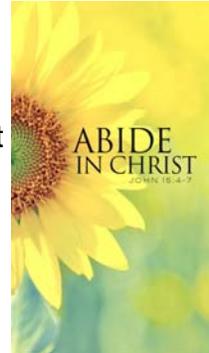
What is mind-boggling is that this is the same love that the Son has for us—His children! We are told to remain, or *abide*, in the sphere of that love. This is not something we can truly even begin to comprehend or benefit from, unless we set aside time to open the Scriptures, meditate upon them, and let the Spirit speak to our hearts.

Now for Some Application

1. Do you remember from Luke 10 that we learned that “sitting at the feet of Jesus” and “listening to what He had to say” was the **One Thing** we really need to pay attention to in terms of both sequence and priority? “To abide,” expands upon and gives us a better picture of what it means to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to what He has to say.

We can't physically sit at His feet, but in the Word of God we have the "mind of Christ" (1Corinthians 2:16). That means that through study and meditation we can "sit at His feet" if we will but make it a priority to set aside the time and, through the ministry of the Spirit, listen to what He has to say.

2. Although it is vital, there is nothing *automatic* about the believer abiding in the vine who is Jesus Christ. If we are not very careful, either the tyranny of the urgent or the appeal of the good can squeeze it out of its rightful place. Another way of making this clear is to answer this question: *Do you think most Christians find it easy or hard to set aside time to study the Word, reflect deeply upon it, memorize it, meditate upon it, and walk in the Spirit?* The number of Marys in our midst, the number of those who are clearly "abiding in the vine," answers this question for us.



3. Perhaps you are thinking, "Tell me plainly—what does it look like to *abide* in Christ?" Here is the way I might answer this kind of question: it starts with a Bible and being filled with the Spirit. It requires study—not for the purposes of scholarship, but rather for fellowship. This leads to deep reflection and listening to what the Spirit might have to say. When stymied—just worship. A spiritual sage of the past, said it this way:

“. . .you have been in the arena, you have been endeavoring, you are a failure, come out and sit down, and as you sit there behold Him, look at Him. Don't try to be like Him, just look at Him. Instead of letting that fill your mind and heart, let Him fill it. Just behold Him, look upon Him through the Word. Come to the Word for one purpose and that is to meet the Lord." (N. Douty)

Taking either approach, there are some things we should be Scripturally certain of:

For it is God which works in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

That the life of Jesus might also be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 2 Corinthians 4:11

For to me to live is Christ. . . Philippians 1:21

For those He foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. . . Romans 8:29

And we. . . are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

All of the above are true—and not realized because of “*much-serving*” —but realized because the individual *sat and listened* to what Jesus had to say.

Firming It Up With Psalm 27:4

While we are on the issue of the **One Thing** that God wants us to keep in mind, let's make sure to incorporate the Old Testament by going to Psalm 27.

*One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days
of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to
inquire in His temple. Psalm 27:4*

To begin with, you can see that at this point in his life, David is a mature believer: the Lord is his salvation; He is his strength; even in the face of overwhelming enemy odds, David is not afraid!

Nonetheless, even in a state of spiritual maturity, he realizes there is **One Thing** he had better not ignore. Thus he both desires it—that is he asks God repeatedly for it—and he seeks after it. What is the **One Thing**? Actually, David assigned it three components—see if you can identify them in the passage and then we will discuss each point briefly:

1. **“To dwell in the house of the Lord.”** Would you be shocked to learn that the Hebrew word translated “to dwell” carries the connotation of to abide? You see David is not asking to sleep in a building. Rather, he knows that the temple—that is “the house of the Lord”—is the place where God dwelt in that very special part called the Holy of Holies. David is asking and seeking to abide *in the sphere* of the Lord’s presence all the days of his life. Of course, Jesus’ guidance to “abide in the vine” strengthens and enriches this concept.



2. **“To behold the beauty of the Lord.”** This request carries the idea that David wants to perceive the goodness of the Lord in any and every situation. There is nothing more enheartening than to know that a completely *good* God is in charge, even in the darkest of situations.

3. **“To inquire in His temple.”** To inquire raises the issue of asking God questions. Bringing our concerns to Him. Do you know why we can do that? Because we are the “friends of God” (James 2:23); and He never leaves us nor forsakes us! (Hebrews 13:5)

In Closing

If you pore through the Scriptures, I have no doubt that you will find many more passages to support the **One Thing** that must take precedence in our lives over both ministry and the everyday demands of life. For now, let me encourage you to make it a priority to daily do the following:

- Sit at the feet of Jesus
- Listen to what He has to say
- Abide in the True vine that is Jesus Christ
- Dwell in the presence of the Lord
- Behold His beauty and fellowship with Him.



If you are reading this, I know that it is very likely that you have a sense of God's calling on your life. In order to fulfill that calling, I think it is imperative for both of us to remember the **One Thing** we must do in terms of both sequence and priority. And what better blessing than to abide in the love that Jesus has for us, which is the same as that which the Father has for Jesus.

As a final point, I want to make sure I am not asking you to do something for which you are really not ready. There is one consideration that you must take into account before you can "sit" and before you can "abide," you must personally know the Father through the Son.

The very same Martha we got to know in our Scripture readings earlier was later deeply engaged in conversation with Jesus when He said, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?**"

She answered him, "**Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world.**" (John 11:25-27)

Before you can abide, it is necessary to have a personal relationship with God the Father through His Son. We begin by believing that Jesus is the Christ—through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead—the Savior of the world for all who will trust Him for their eternal destiny. If you haven't taken this initial step, won't you trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ today? Then you can begin to sit at His feet and listen to what He has to say?

Vistoso Community Church

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Vistoso Community Church
is to bring glory to God by completing
the work He has given us to do.

John 17:4

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to be used by God to help
the lost receive eternal life,
and those with eternal life to grow
in grace and knowledge.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Christ is the only Lord and Savior. Acts 2:36
- The Bible is the inspired word of God.
II Timothy 3:16-17
- We honor God through traditional worship.
Psalm 19:14
- Our loving fellowship strengthens us.
Hebrews 10:24-25
- Seeking the lost is our commission. Matthew 28:19-20
- The principles of divine establishment are God given.
Nehemiah. 4:14



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Published November, 2013

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