

# One Thing Necessary for 2025...

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Date: 05 January 2025

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We'll be starting a longer series, just to mention kind of next week. We're going to be looking in Genesis, from Genesis chapter 12 onwards, looking at the life of Abraham. So that's the plan for the first part of our year.

But this morning, the first service of our new year, I think these verses in Luke's gospel, this teaching from Jesus, is a really good place to be. I'm sure plenty of us have made some resolutions for 2025.

In our house, there seem to be lots of suggestions for resolutions for other people, less kind of personal resolutions being made. But perhaps also we have goals, we have hopes for the years ahead.

Perhaps, as we mentioned, we've got worries, we've got uncertainties, we've got things which we'll take with us from the previous year as well. I think it's a really great passage with which to start the year, because in it, in the midst of all the other things that are going on in our lives, Jesus tells us the one thing that is necessary.

Jesus simplifies everything down to what is of key importance for us this year and every year. J.C. Ryle, a minister and writer of the 19th century, says about this passage, So long as the world stands, the story of Mary and Martha will furnish the church with lessons of wisdom, which ought never to be forgotten.

[ 1 : 2 9 ] So something here to remind ourselves of and to remember for this year. And very simply, that lesson, what Jesus teaches us in this passage, is that the thing that is of key importance, the ultimate priority, the one thing that is necessary for us as a church and as individuals this year and every year, is that we listen to Jesus.

That we listen to Jesus. And maybe that seems kind of overly simple. We're going to say, actually, that it might be simple, but it's difficult. I think this is a really challenging kind of passage, a really challenging teaching from Jesus.

What Jesus says can be hard, but a challenge for us to shape and organize our lives around. But also, there's something really crucial. Crucial for Christians, but also crucial if you're here this morning and you're not here a Christian or still wondering what Christianity is all about.

But I hope that you'll see, that we'll all see, the importance of what Jesus teaches us here. And not just the importance of it, but also the joy of it.

How it offers a better picture of how life can be lived. As for all of us, we see this picture in which we're able to find rest, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to his teaching.

[ 2 : 5 2 ] So that's what we're going to be thinking about. Before we get to that, before we get to our need, this necessity of listening to Jesus, let's first look at our difficulty and what we see in this passage about that.

And the reason that listening to the teaching of Jesus often perhaps falls off our radar or gets squeezed off our lives. And in this passage, that difficulty is demonstrated, is personified really for us in the person of Martha.

And that difficulty, that issue, we can sum up really in one word. That word is busyness. Our difficulty is busyness.

We're introduced to Martha. She welcomes Jesus into her house in verse 38. And straight away we're showing that contrast between her sister Mary, verse 39, who sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching.

But Martha, verse 40, was distracted with much serving. Martha is someone who is busy. Jesus is in the house. Martha has welcomed him in.

[ 3 : 56 ] But as he takes his place, you can perhaps picture him sitting in the lounge somewhere in the house. Martha is busy all over the place. She's everywhere doing all sorts of things, helpful things, good things.

As we read in the passage, she's serving. And yet we're told that these things are distracting her from being with Jesus himself. That she is too busy.

And perhaps we can relate to Martha, can't we? Are you a person who feels as if life is really full? Are you always dashing around? Are you a person who, if someone asks you how your week has been, you know, your default reaction is just to kind of say, oh, it's been busy.

We just assume that that's how our weeks are lived. I'm sure that's something that resonates with a lot of us. That's something, it certainly resonates with me, that kind of treadmill of life, where we never quite get to the end of our list of jobs.

There's always just one more thing to do, or one more place to be, or that season of life, which is particularly busy. And yet when we look back, we realize that we've been in that season for as long as we can remember, and it shows no sign of coming to an end.

[ 5 : 06 ] We can so easily be Martha's, people who live busy lives in a world of busyness. And let's be honest, when Martha complains then to Jesus in verse 40, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her to help me. Our first hunch is probably to agree with Martha there. You know, we think of that person who over the Christmas break has had a remarkable ability just to kind of sit comfortably on the couch while preparations for dinner are kind of happening all around them.

Perhaps maybe you are that person. But we naturally think, you know, they should be busy. We naturally think, you know, Mary should help. And so Jesus' answer here is a surprise to us.

It would have been shocking in its original context where hosting someone was such a privilege, but also a responsibility. There were things that had to be done to be a good host.

But actually, Jesus says, it is the busyness which is keeping you away from me, which is the problem here. It is you, busy Martha, who needs to change, Jesus says.

[ 6 : 17 ] Mary has chosen what is right, what is necessary. I think that is such a challenge for us to hear in our busy lives, at the start of busy years, Jesus saying that actually our busyness might be a problem that we need to deal with.

Now, it is important to say here, Jesus is not saying that following him means just kind of sitting around all day, not doing anything.

That if we feel like we're working hard, that there is something wrong going on. That's not the point here. This section of Luke's Gospel, it begins near the end of chapter nine. It's all about what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to be a disciple.

It opens with Jesus talking about the cost of that and the sacrifice it involves. Chapter 10 begins with Jesus sending out his disciples on mission as laborers, as workers.

Just before our verses, it's the good Samaritan and the way he serves this other man who is commended. So if we read this account of Mary and Martha and we say, well, Jesus doesn't want me to do anything.

[ 7 : 23 ] I'm just supposed to sit around all day serving his bad news. Then clearly we're getting the wrong end of the stick because that doesn't fit with what Jesus has already said. Just as one example, this church only exists and only continues because people do serve and work hard in various ways and that's right to do that.

But really what's in view here is our priorities. Our problem is when our busyness in life, our worries about the world or even our serving other people are taking us away from or functionally, even though we never say it this way, are functionally taking priority over us listening to Jesus.

So where does that kind of busyness come from? Why is it that we're so busy often to the expense of listening to Jesus? I think partly, simply it's because it's what our culture expects.

Our world values, in some ways we might say our world idolizes busyness. To be busy is to be important. To be busy means that we're needed. To be busy means that business is going well.

To be busy means that you're the super parent who is keeping all the plates spinning and doing everything they should be. Or it means that we're living life to the max and taking every opportunity.

[ 8 : 45 ] We're actually living life pretty exhausted at times and simply dashing from one thing to another. We might complain about busyness, but actually the world values busyness in some ways so much that we don't dare tell people if we're not busy because we worry about what that will reflect on us, how that will shape people's opinion on us.

We value the world's approval and the world idolizes this busyness of busy people getting things done. I think that's part of Martha's situation.

When people came over, you had to impress, you had to host lavishly. The quality of the reception you gave reflected in some ways the quality of you as a person, your value. I don't think we're supposed to think of Martha as some kind of crazed workaholic.

She was just doing what everyone else around her would have done in that situation. And yet in doing that, it's keeping her away from Jesus. And we can very much be the same.

And yet Jesus shows us a radically different set of priorities here. And yet one that brings peace that this busyness fails to offer.

[ 9 : 59 ] Perhaps a challenging question for us to ask this morning. What is the root of our busyness? And is it really bringing us the kind of life that we're hoping for? Or is it offering us a reward which always remains just kind of tantalizingly out of reach?

So we need to be alert to our busyness and what lies behind it. There's also, I think, a more religious version of busyness, isn't there? Where we think that actually we need to impress Jesus.

You know, if we want Jesus to love us, there are certain things, certain boxes we must tick. We can get so involved in kind of good moral things, thinking if we can just do enough, we'll earn our way closer to Jesus.

Jesus will be forced to be pleased with us. And so we get busy in different things that way. And yet, as Mary knew, and as the gospel shows us, Jesus doesn't ever ask us to earn a place with him, but instead simply invites us to come and to sit at his feet.

We don't need to be busy. We don't need to achieve. We can simply come and listen to him. I think at the start of a new year, for so many of us, our difficulty, our issue, and important to say here, not just in terms of an inconvenience, but really significantly, this passage says, the thing that will endanger and impoverish our relationship with God himself is our busyness.

[ 11 : 30 ] And we need to recognize that, again, not because we're going to get rid of all of those things from our lives, but so that we can ensure that they take their correct place underneath that which is of ultimate importance, the one thing that is necessary, the one thing that we really need, and that is freely offered to us through Jesus.

So let's move on to that now. What is our biggest need this year and every year? Well, as we've said, our biggest need is to listen to Jesus. And if Martha, in this account, shows us a picture or a model of the kind of busyness that we need to be wary of, then really Mary is the model that we are to follow and model ourselves on.

We don't actually hear that much about Mary in the passage. We're simply told, verse 39, Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching, and yet our final verse, Jesus' verdict in verse 42, really is the key here.

He says, one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her. That need, that invitation to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him, Jesus says, is the most important thing for all of us.

What does that actually mean? How do we listen to Jesus? So it means listening to the gospel. It means listening to the message of Jesus Christ that we find in our Bibles. Jesus says, that is the only thing that cannot be taken from us.

[ 13 : 05 ] Mary hears the message of Jesus that promises eternal life. Mary hears the hope that Jesus offers which is not based on her efforts or how busy she is or the important things she's spending her time doing or even on the people she's serving, but is based on his perfect love for her, for each of us.

That is the message that we need to hear. of God's love shown to us in Jesus who came and who died that we might have eternal life.

That is the one solid foundation in life. That is the only thing that offers us true hope and lasting peace in the midst of a busy world.

The love of Jesus and his rescue of us. And yet, that is something we're so prone to forget. We're so prone to go after busyness and the things of the world as well. And so just like Mary, we need to keep on listening to Jesus and his gospel message to us.

That's our need to listen to Jesus. We do that, as we said, through his word, the Bible. We do that reading it personally in our own lives. We do that as a church gathering to hear it corporately.

[ 14 : 20 ] We do that not rushing through to dash on to the next thing, shoe-horning it in somewhere. But we do it through considering it, thinking about it, meditating on God's word as he speaks to us through it.

Now, if you're anything like me, you'll hear that or you'll see this picture of Mary sitting quietly while Martha kind of busies around, bustling about, getting things done.

And your first response to that might well be to say, well, yes, but. Oh, that sounds lovely. but. But actually, there are things that need to be done.

But actually, I have work that I need to get to. But actually, there are people that I have responsibility for. Maybe this all sounds good and yet actually this picture just seems a bit unrealistic or unachievable, naive perhaps.

Remember what we said, this passage is about priorities and not sort of absolutes. It's not saying your whole life is to be spent doing nothing but reading your Bible and going to church.

[ 15 : 32 ] In fact, the rest of the Bible makes it abundantly clear that we listen to Jesus and that shapes how we go out into living our lives and the other things that God calls us to do. God has work for us to do.

Those things are important and yet it's important that we do those in light of what Jesus says and don't let those things crowd out what Jesus says. There are things that we're called to in life and yet having said that, it's also important we don't duck the challenge of this passage because to be able to rest as Mary is resting, to be able to spend that time listening to Jesus, to simply stop in a world that says go, go, go, in a world that says quick, on to the next thing, on to the next thing, to do that does require a deliberate and definite decision.

That's what I said at the beginning. I think this is a really challenging passage. It requires effort to make space to listen to Jesus. It requires sacrifice and yet Jesus' point is that that sacrifice is always worth it because as he says, what he offers us as we listen to him, the promise of the gospel and eternal life in Jesus, hearing that message is the thing that is necessary and hearing that message is the thing that cannot be taken away from us.

That is our need to listen to Jesus and when we listen to him, we hear words of welcome, we hear words of comfort, we hear words of peace, we hear words of hope, we hear words of eternal life, not earned by us but gifted to us through his grace which cannot be taken away and that's why we want to keep on reminding ourselves of what it is that Jesus says.

Well, let's finish up then by thinking about what this might, I suppose, a bit more specifically look like for us this year and in our lives. A few ideas, maybe some of these will really resonate with you, maybe others less so but hopefully they'll stir us to think about our own situation that really encourage us to go away and think and pray about what this looks like to be listening to Jesus, to have that as our priority this year.

[ 17 : 42 ] Here's kind of four, I suppose, maybe four applications of this that came to mind for me in terms of us as a local church and the first one is this, very simply, that even sitting here in church this morning or week by week but our minds can be off all over the place, you know, with what's going on in our lives, what we're going home to, what our plans are for Sunday afternoon.

You know, as Jesus says in verse 41, we're anxious and troubled about many things and we bring those things to church with us and rather than seeing those issues in light of what Jesus says, we let those issues get in the way of hearing what Jesus says.

So, example for me, last week I wasn't, was here at church but I wasn't preaching, in fact I wasn't doing anything in the service, it was great and yet my brain was all over the place.

It was thinking, you know, is it too noisy from kids church at the back, how many people are here, who's not here, who do I need to speak to after the service and I really had to kind of consciously say to my brain, just be quiet, you know, shush and listen to the Bible being taught.

Take this opportunity to hear Jesus speaking to you because that is what is most necessary in your life. The reality is it's hard to switch off just because we're at church.

[ 19 : 12 ] It's not a kind of a magic thing that happens as we walk through the door and it's absolutely not to say that these other things on our minds are insignificant and yet I do think that one key aspect of listening to Jesus is to discipline ourselves into saying, you know, actually Jesus, for this time you have my full attention because it is listening to your teaching given through your word, the Bible.

That is the thing that I really need. That is actually the thing that is necessary and will make the difference as I face these other things many of which are outside of my control but which are not outside of his control.

So there's one application. Even as we sit here this morning, even as we're shivering away this morning because it's so cold, to really focus our minds week by week on what Jesus is saying to us in his word and listening to him, to listen to Jesus and dwell on his word as we gather together.

Second, at the start of a new year is a good time to think about how we organise our time, isn't it? How we put our priorities into practice. I think, having thought about what we've been talking about, if we're honest, most of us probably don't have 24 hours every day fully accounted for and there's just no way we could possibly stop to listen to Jesus by reading our Bibles or responding to that in prayer.

Our days are not actually chock-a-block in that way. John Piper has a great quote where he says, one of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the last day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time.

[ 21 : 01 ] You can add Instagram, YouTube and various others to that list that we flitter away so much time. And so for many of us it may simply be a matter of making sure that we plan in our schedule, we plan in our diaries the time to read our Bibles, to pray, that in our calendars we put in church something fixed and the times that we gather as God's people as the things that everything else fits around rather than the things that kind of budge about or that we put them in if we're able to.

That kind of classic illustration, some of you might have seen this, of filling up a jar. If you fill a jar with kind of sand and a few little pebbles and then you try and put some bigger stones and rocks in, you can find well there's not space for these bigger things to fit into that jar and yet actually if you empty everything out and you put the big things in first then the rest can often fit in and fill in around that.

So often that's what our time is like. Remember this account of Martha and Mary is not about not doing anything, it's about our priorities and making sure that we put in place the one thing that Jesus tells us is necessary, the one non-negotiable of listening to him.

That that priority in our lives works itself out and means it's also a priority in our schedule as well. So there's number two. Thirdly, and I suppose in each of these we're kind of upping the ante a little bit but actually as we said prioritising listening to Jesus is not easy and there might be sacrifices that have to make and actually it might not just be a case of reorganising.

Thirdly, we might actually have to cut something out of our lives this year or we might actually have to make significant changes to make space for what's important and it's important that we don't shy away from that challenge.

[ 22 : 57 ] Again, when I'm tidying at home which is not a not a regular occurrence sometimes that works isn't it when we're tidying just by putting things back in the right place or reorganising things a little bit.

Actually the time when I know I'm kind of making progress is when I can get bin bags of stuff out of the house or sacks of stuff down to the charity shop and actually clear up some space so that other things can fit in there better and so that there isn't that kind of mess and confusion.

Often I fail to do that because I'm holding onto these things which are actually unimportant and so that mess kind of gathers again. Maybe that's a good kind of picture of our lives. There are some hard choices that we have to make.

We actually have to cut some things out to make space and keep space for what's important. One author on this passage puts it this way. He says Jesus is not suggesting that his disciples abandon all the activities of daily life but rather that we make listening to his teaching the priority that overrides everything else.

If a disciple has chosen a career path that makes listening to Jesus' words nigh on impossible owing to work demands Jesus is clear what needs to change.

[ 24 : 11 ] If a family has developed patterns that have relegated listening to his word to a secondary place Jesus is clear what needs to change. If a disciple is attending a church where listening to his word is not the priority Jesus expects change.

If individuals or churches have developed patterns of seemingly worthy activity and service which in fact go against what Jesus considers to be of first importance listening to him change those patterns.

That's quite a stark kind of commentary isn't it covering a whole host of different areas of life and yet I think that is taking seriously the words of Jesus himself here as to what is necessary and as to change that that might require in our lives but always remembering that whatever that changes whatever it costs it is worth it because Jesus alone is able to speak to us the words of eternal life.

Jesus alone offers us that hope that can never be taken from us. So there's kind of three practical outworkings things for us to think about as we kind of organise and look ahead to our lives in this new year.

Let me finish with one kind of final outbox for this as disciples and as a church this year and that's this that as we prioritise listening to Jesus that we would be quick to speak with each other about Jesus.

[ 25 : 39 ] I just think it would be amazing this year to move toward being people who when asked maybe after a service like how was your week that our first thought would be to speak about what Jesus has been teaching us rather than how our work was or how busy we are.

Our first thought would be to speak about the thing that has been most necessary and most important for us this week hearing Jesus. Now that doesn't mean that we always have to say oh it was great my Bible reading was great we might say to each other you know it was really hard or I was reading this and I was really struggling with it or actually I found it difficult to do what I know I should have been doing but still that our first thought would go toward what is the priority in our thinking so that we can share that with one another.

That doesn't mean that work is unimportant. Again that doesn't mean that we don't want to hear what is happening in each other's lives or the struggles we have of course we do and we must but again together we want to think about those things we want to help each other in those things in light of and in response to what Jesus is teaching us in his word the Bible.

Day by day as we build that into our patterns of life and week by week as we come together to be reminded of and celebrate all that he has done for us. Jesus the one who offers us rest as we sit at his feet and listen to his teaching to his word of the gospel offering that forgiveness offering that redemption offering that eternal hope through the blood of the cross that we might be his people now and forever.

Our prayer this year is that we would keep on returning to him keep on listening to that voice and that that would be what shapes our lives and that that would be what we shape our lives around.

[ 27 : 32 ] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we do thank you that at the beginning of a new year you invite us once again to come and to sit at the feet of Jesus and to listen to him as he teaches us.

we thank you that you are the God who continues to speak to us that you have spoken to us through your son that we have your word to us in the Bible pointing us back to Jesus time and time again.

We thank you that Jesus' teaching to us is good news. We thank you that Jesus offers us grace and forgiveness and restoration and eternal life with you.

We thank you that what is given to us in Christ is that that can never be taken away from us. That relationship with our creator made possible not through our own efforts and not through what we achieve or not through what we busily strive after but made possible by the sacrifice on the cross of Jesus our Redeemer.

We thank you that your words are good for our heart and our soul as we come to listen to you. And yet Lord we recognize and we confess that in the busyness of our lives it is often listening to Jesus that gets squeezed out that we put far less significant things in the place of the one thing that is necessary.

[ 28 : 56 ] So Lord please help us this year to prioritize listening to Jesus our Lord and Savior. Please help us recognize decisions perhaps tough choices that we need to make to have your word where it deserves to be in our lives that we might continue to strengthen our hope in you and give you the glory that you and you alone deserve.

Please be with us this week and this year and please help us to help one another as we listen to you and we pray that we would continually do this for your glory and in your strength and pray all these things in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen.