

The Priority of One Thing

A resident of Atlanta noticed in the Yellow Pages under restaurants this entry: Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused his curiosity, so he dialed the number. Sure enough, a man answered with a cheerful, "Hello! Church of God Grill!" The caller asked how the man's restaurant had been given such an unusual name. "Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. People liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name that we started with, and that's Church of God Grill." (Adapted from Making it Happen by Charles Paul Conn).

Would you agree that the Church of God Grill got its priorities confused? I admit that happens to me sometimes. No, I don't literally sell chicken dinners, but I sometimes allow busyness, family, children, finances, job, transitions, the war...to crowd my focus and muddle my priorities. I forget what I am created for.

The story of the Church of God Grill reminds me of another kitchen that Luke describes in his gospel account.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:38-40)

Martha had a lot to do. After all, Jesus was coming to dinner and everything had to be perfect! I can picture Martha now, hot and sweaty, mopping her brow, looking every bit like she had spent hours over the hot stove of her day. I can see her frustrated expression, totally exasperated, overcome with work and utterly put out with Mary. Luke describes Martha this way: "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." The word *distracted* in the original language means *to be pulled different ways at the same time.* Can you identify with Martha? Do you know what it's like to be pulled apart by competing agendas?

Jesus, however, puts Martha's distractions into perspective with His reply.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42; emphasis mine)

I'm reminded of a statement by Thomas Kelly: We are trying to be several selves at once without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us. That might be an apt description of Martha. She was trying hard to succeed at activities that would not ultimately matter. Her energy was misplaced. Her worries were doing nothing to change her condition. She was pulled apart because she was not submitting all the components of her world to the single mastering Life. Mary, however, was attentive to the only One who could bring order to her circumstances. Mary had the right idea, eyes focused on Him, sitting at His feet. She recognized the priority of one thing.

The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13-14:

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do:
Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the
goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
(Emphasis mine)*

David also grasped the priority of one thing:

*One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple. (Psalm 27:4, emphasis mine)*

According to Merriam Webster, priority means something meriting attention before competing alternatives. Priority is measured by the value we place on something. Matthew clearly gives us the order of priority.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well (Matthew 6:33)

Mary, Paul and David lived a life of singleness of purpose, focused on **One Thing**. I want my life to be like that. Relationship with Jesus comes wrapped in priority. I don't want to lose my focus like the people of the Church of God Grill. And I don't want to be overcome by life's concerns like Martha. Do you feel that way too? Perhaps the answer for both of us is very simple: Get out of the kitchen!