

“Distinguishing Good and Bad Distractions”

// Luke 10:38–42 // *Distracted* #2

ServeRDU announcement

Introduction

Luke 10... Last week we talked about being a tired people who need rest. This week I want us to talk about being a distracted people who need focus.

It's safe to say that our society deals with more distractions than any previous society in history. Most of us feel like we are **constantly** pulled in different directions.

- **Other people pull at us:**
 - I saw a bumper sticker once that said, “**God loves you and everyone has a wonderful plan for your life.**” I certainly feel that—and it seems like the older I get the more people that have expectations on what I should be doing for them.
 - Do you ever find yourself wishing life **came with one of those “Do Not Disturb”** buttons you could just flip on? Sometimes I wish I could put one my kids’ foreheads. “*No, we’re not watching Frozen again, don’t even ask. I don’t care if you wanna build a snowman; I need to prepare a sermon!*” **Let it go.**
- **Speaking of the (PHONE)**, this is the single-most distracting thing ever invented. **This gives everyone**—including huge swaths of people I’ve never met—instant access to me at any point.
 - **It quite often disrupts some of the best parts of my day.** I use the **Summit app for my QT** and for a while I didn’t have the notifications turned off so whenever I sat down to do my QT I’d get assaulted by news stories. I sat down to dive into God’s word and 20 minutes later I’m reading about the top 5 most bizarre things Justin Bieber plans to do on his honeymoon.

- **Tony Reinke** in a really important book I’ll recommend to you, *Twelve Ways Your Phone is Changing You* (**hold up book**) says that the average person checks their phone **81,500 times each year**, or once **every 4.3 minutes** of our waking lives... which means you many of you will check your phone 8 times before you finish this sermon!)¹
- **I love this pic: Older lady taking in moment pic.** You have one little old lady in the moment and a bunch of other people trying to **make their friends jealous** with this moment. *This is how we go through life...*

Distraction does not produce a happy, well-balanced, or productive life:

- In fact, **get this:** There was a form of torture in the Middle Ages where they tied a man’s limbs to four horses and let them loose. The French called this **distraction**. (I kid you not!)
 - **What a great picture of what is happening** to our lives!
 - **Do you ever feel like** you are being literally pulled apart? Death by distraction.
 - (BTW, if you think, “No, I’m great,” just take a quick **peek at your spouse** or whoever is sitting around you that knows you well and ask them what they think about your distractibility)
- **I know of one Christian counselor** who says that distraction destroys more relationships than just about anything else today. **Distraction, he says,** makes intimacy impossible, **because, you see, in order for someone to feel intimate** with you—be that a spouse, a child, or a good friend—they have to believe **(1) That you consider them a priority in your life; (2) You have plenty of unrushed time available for them; (3) You are giving them your undivided attention.** *Busyness and distraction make those 3 things impossible.*
 - **So, distractibility, this counselor says, keep our most important relationships shallow**—including our relationship with God.

¹ Adapted from Tony Reinke, *Twelve Ways Your Phone is Changing You*

- **Furthermore, studies now show distraction makes us ineffective.** I read a book last year by Greg McKeown called *Essentialism* in which he explains that the new cool word for “distraction” **multi-tasking** one of the great hoaxes of our generation. We **think it means we are on top of things** and efficient but all it really means is that we are **distracted and not doing anything** well.
 - The word “**multitasking**” was 1st invented in 1965 by IBM to describe how a computer could do multiple things at once. But the problem is that the human mind isn’t wired up exactly like a computer. Consciousness is pretty much designed to be in one place at one time and switching back and forth takes time and energy.
 - For example, **when the average person is sitting at their desk** they check their email every 5 minutes in the midst of whatever else they are doing. The problem is that it takes an average of 64 seconds to resume the previous task after you finish—which means that because of email alone, we typically waste 1 out of every 6 minutes.²
 - **McKeown says:** “So, when I hear people say they are ‘multi-tasking,’ all I hear is, “My attention is scattered, I feel stressed out, and I don’t do anything well.”

Bottom line: if we are going to live productive spiritual lives, we have to learn to deal with distraction.

So I want to explore the only passage in the Bible where the word “distraction” is actually used, and show you what Jesus said about it.

Luke 10:38–42

38 While they were traveling, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was *distracted* by her many tasks (In Greek the

word literally means “pulled apart” (like the French torture). Jesus had come over to spend time with her, but she was being “pulled apart” from him by the “many tasks”), and she came up and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So, tell her to give me a hand.” 41 The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.” **Luke 10:38–42**

Now, **to be clear, Jesus here is specifically warning Martha about being distracted** from him by anything else—because knowing him is the most important thing. But, I think there are some **important principles about distraction** we can learn here that we can apply to other parts of our lives as well.

First, let me give an important clarification:

1. Distraction is not the same as divine interruption

Jesus seemed to be entirely indistractable on the one hand but imminently interruptible on the other!

- For example, **in Matthew 12**, Jesus wouldn’t even let his family keep him away from what he knew God wanted him to be doing—they come to him and he’s like, “This is what God has me doing right now.”
- **In John 4**, we see that not even his own hunger could keep him from pursuing God’s will—his disciples had gone off to get something to eat and he’d stuck around and started to speak to the woman at the well and they say, “Aren’t you hungry?” And he says, “My food is to do to the will of the one that sent me!” **Y’all, that’s indistractable!** (Y’all, if there is **one thing that can distract me from focus in ministry** it is hunger—I’m not a great one to do counseling when I’m hangry. **People are pouring out their problems and** I’m like, “Well, just stop it. Read your Bible. Get saved.” Jesus was **so locked into God’s will**, not even hunger could affect his disposition!

² <https://jamesclear.com/multitasking-myth>

- **So, he was indistractable.)** But on the other hand, he was very interruptible. For example, in **John 5, Jesus freely allows his Sabbath to be interrupted** by a man who needs a healing—and Jewish people thought of the Sabbath as the one day you should not be distracted by *anything* work related.) But Jesus **explains his openness** to being distracted by saying: v. 17, “...my Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” **In other words, Jesus recognized this his Father** was always at work around him, and sometimes the Father would invite into something he was doing that he hadn’t been aware of, and Jesus was ready to respond.
- **This I how Jesus lived his whole life. He’d be doing one thing** and all of the sudden some divine opportunity he hadn’t been considering would come out of nowhere and he’d stop and do that—and he taught us to live the same way.

If **being distractible is one fault**, this is the opposite fault. We become closed off to what God is doing around us and inviting us into!³

This **story doesn’t mean** that we are to perpetually be doing our quiet time and never to be distracted by serving. (We shouldn’t go down to the Summit Kids area right now and say, “What are you all doing? You should be doing your quiet times!”) It **just means there is a time for service** and there is a time for communion with Jesus and we need to know what time it is and be all-in that moment.

Quite often the best moments in our lives come in the form of unexpected interruptions, *right?*

- The best **parenting moments** I’ve had rarely happened on my schedule.
- The **best witnessing encounters** never happen on schedule—God just puts me next to somebody who needs a word from him and I am there and I have to respond.

³ “Some people can be so disoriented to God that when he begins to work around them, they actually become annoyed at the interruption!” Henry T. Blackaby, *Hearing God’s Voice*

- **People I love and truly need something from me** rarely have their moments of crisis on my schedule. “Let’s see, sweetheart, you are scheduled for a meltdown at 2:30 and... it’s 2:30, so go ahead and have it.”
- My **conversion didn’t happen on my schedule!** God interrupted me.

Thank God for divine interruptions, Amen?

- The bottom line is that a **healthy Christian life is one in which** you learn to **avoid unhealthy distractions** so you can be **open to divine interruptions**.
- In fact, here’s how I’d summarize a **successful Christian life: Learning to live free of devilish distractions so we can give full attention to divine interruptions.**

So, let’s get back to our story of Mary and Martha...

2. Distraction is often the good keeping you from the essential

What Martha was doing was not bad. She was serving and taking care of people. Using her spiritual gifts. Jesus’s gentle **rebuke of her** was that she had let the many “good” things keep her from the one essential thing.

That’s always what distraction is.

- **In this case, it was foolish trade:** Imagine if you asked Martha the next day, “*So how was your time with Jesus yesterday? What was it like?*” Well, I don’t remember much... *I was in the back room cooking and cleaning...* **But if you’d asked** Mary, she’d say, “*Oh, let me tell you. Jesus said this... and then that. And I saw this about myself...*” Jesus said, “**What she took advantage of in that moment can never be taken away from her.**”

That’s always how distraction works. You trade something that you only get one shot at for a bunch of things that, in the scheme of things, **aren’t that important.**

Life is short—tweets and Instagram and social media are always there blathering on. (And, honestly, **if you find out about some event 20 minutes** after everyone else—is that really a big deal? I like **to let others filter social media** for me. Let them wade through all the blather and then they tell me and I go read about it...)

That stuff is always happening. But **this moment in front of you**—that person—you only get one shot at it and them.

- **I love how John Maxwell says it, “It’s hard to overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.”** And you don’t want to let the unimportant things to keep you from the things you can’t ever get back.
- **So, whatever situation God has you in, be all there! Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”**** Or, I love how the missionary **Jim Elliott** summarized it: **“Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every moment you believe given by God.”**
 - **In Col 3:23, the Apostle Paul explains ‘When you’re working, be all there.’** Work as unto the Lord and not unto men. Make every moment an offering to God.
 - **In 1 Cor 14, Paul says, ‘When you’re with the people of God, be all there.’** Everybody should come to a weekend worship service, or small group, with something to offer and expecting to hear from God.
 - **When you are with a group of friends, be all there!**
 - **When you are with a group or in a meeting, be all there!** Tony Reinke: If I come into an appointment and I take my phone out and put it on the table, I am saying that I am engaged for the moment, but ready to disengage if something more interesting comes along. And if my phone is in my hand, and I am responding to texts and scrolling social media, I project open dismissiveness, because dividing attention is a typical expression of disdain.
 - **In times of rest and solitude, be all there as well!**

- **Tony Reinke points out** the irony of the phone is that it keeps us isolated from people when we’re with them, and distracted by people when we should be isolated from them.
- (God has a purpose in solitude and silence and many of us never get it because stuff is always on and we’re always checking).
- **Like we learned last week,** God can guard the city while you are sleeping or resting...

Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”

(2. Distraction is often the good keeping you from the essential)

Before I move on to #3, let me say something here to those of you who are not believers. *Distraction with the good is one of Satan’s primary tools to keep us from considering the eternal.*

- **In Jesus’s parable of the seeds,** it was distraction that kept the seed of God’s word from taking root. The sower sowed the seed and the devil came along and just planted seeds of distraction. **C.S. Lewis pointed out** it’s not usually bad or unbelieving thoughts... just ones that keep you from considering what is important! “I’m hungry. I’ve got a report due tomorrow.” And the impact of the Word fades from your memory. You never rejected the word of God, you just got distracted from it. Well, if that is true, **today the devil has a uniquely designed tool to keep the Word of God from taking root.** What are they saying about me? How many likes have I gotten? **

This leads me to #3...

3. Distraction enslaves an insecure heart

- **Martha’s busyness** appears to be driven by a need—a need she probably didn’t even recognize about herself. In **vs. 41** Jesus called her **worried and upset** about many things.

- The word “*worried*” is similar to distraction: it means *to be torn into pieces in many directions*.
- *Upset* means *to be tossed along*—like a capsized boat with no anchor.
- **Jesus diagnoses Martha as having an unhappy, unsettled, unanchored soul.**
- She probably was the kind of person who needed to be needed—you **ever meet someone like that?** The kind of person who only feels significant when everyone is depending on them?
 - To go back to what we saw last week, the kind of person who has “10 lonely seconds” of service to “justify her whole existence” and if she’s not needed and indispensable to everyone she feels worthless?
 - But here’s the **question for Martha**: Why should she need to feel needed *by others* to feel significant? Shouldn’t the fact that Jesus loved her and wanted to spend time with *her* make her feel special?
 - She’s **looking for something in service** she should be finding in Jesus.
- Furthermore, she **probably felt like the weight of serving** was all on her—like the burden of making it come together sat on her shoulders. **But if I don’t do this, who will?**
 - But do you **remember our image** from last week?
- **The image of the yoke? (PIC yoke)** She should just be focused doing what Jesus wants and let him worry about making everything come together. Jesus is like, “Hey, Martha—don’t worry about the food. Don’t you remember what I did in the feeding of the 5000? I got this. Don’t worry about the dishes, I can handle that.”
 - **I wonder if Martha had just trusted Jesus and sat at his feet like Jesus wanted, if we might have another miracle** recorded by Jesus: We had the feeding of the 5K; this time it might have been the miraculous deliverance of the dirty dishes!
- You see—when it was all said and done, her distraction, like ours, came from failing **to believe the promises** of God!

- A **pastor-friend** of mine says that we tend to stay over-busy because we silently tell ourselves:
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I will never make it in life.*
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I’m going to fall behind.*
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I might be poor.*
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I won’t be accepted.*
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I will disappoint someone.*
 - *If I don’t do as much as I possibly can I won’t measure up.*⁴
- This just a **failure to believe the gospel!**

Martha’s disbelief leads to a really awkward encounter: **She rebukes Jesus!** She accuses Jesus of not caring and tells him what to do. You see, what this shows us is that **distraction and the feeling of being overwhelmed and hurried often comes** from being terribly out of fellowship with Jesus.

Here’s one closely related to that one...

4. Distraction entices an empty heart

Because Jesus was not the in right place in Martha’s heart, her soul craved the significance that came from serving.

When our soul is out of fellowship with Jesus, we are always craving more—which is why our radar is always on for that next enticement.

Scientists say the reason many of us are so attached to our phones is that **when we look at social media** a chemical called **dopamine gets released** ... dopamine is the same substance that causes us to get addicted to drugs, or porn, or other things...

⁴ Adapted from Andy Stanley, “Fatal Distractions,” is Part 9 from the series *Intimacy with God* preached at North Point Community Church.

- Ironically, **dopamine pushes are actually heightened** when the "hits" are smaller—thus 140-character messages (i.e. Twitter) seem almost *designed* to create a dopamine-addiction loop.
- **As with other addictions, we feel like we need increasingly more** of it for the same “high.”
- Which might be why studies show that 33% of people check their phone in the middle of the night, or **when they are bored and don’t know what to do** they instinctively reach down for the phone...⁵

John Piper wrote a great little article that **asks why we are so drawn to turn to technology** first thing in the morning and at the first sign of a lull. **He gives 6 reasons.**

1. **Novelty Candy.** We have (FOMO). We’re afraid that our friends are going to know something we don’t know. (**Sociologists have classified a condition** where you experience a legitimate anxiety of being too separated from your phone—it is **called “nomophobia.”** Not kidding. Without Jesus your FOMO will lead to nomophobia. But with Jesus you’ll have NoMoFoMo.)
2. **Ego Candy** (We want to know what people are saying about us, so we get on social media looking for likes and positive comments!)
3. **Entertainment Candy** (We want to feed on what is fascinating, weird, strange, wonderful, or shocking.) – oh look, this woman in Oregon has an Alpaca that can do Calculus.
4. **Boredom Avoidance** (We want to put off the day ahead, especially when it looks routine to us.)
5. **Responsibility Avoidance** (We want to **put off the responsibilities** God has given us as fathers, mothers, bosses, employees, students.)
6. **Hardship Avoidance** (We want to put off dealing with relationship conflicts or the pain, disease, and disabilities in our bodies.)

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/29/apple-iphone-ten-years-old-crippling-addiction>; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-wise/201209/why-were-all-addicted-texts-twitter-and-google>

(Candy and avoidance strategies. Candy is not good for you; it gives you no sustenance—but it tastes good; and if you are starving, it can temporarily entice you even though it hurts you long run, and avoidance strategies keep you from doing what you know you should be doing)

These are signs of **an unhealthy soul** that needs a hit of an entertainment or distraction drug to **find satisfaction and enjoyment!**

We are supposed to have such a satisfaction in knowing and doing the will of God we are not susceptible to other cravings.

- **Again, John 4:** Jesus was so focused on God’s will he could go without food—because doing God’s will was more fulfilling to him than even eating.
- **Martha should have been so full of intimacy with Jesus** and doing his will that she didn’t feel the need to prove herself—and so she could sit when he wanted her to sit and get up and serve when/if he wanted her to do that!

The answer to Martha’s problem is to get close enough to Jesus to sense the warmth of his love and know what he wants!

Martha is **not close enough** to Jesus to sense either of those things!

- **Consider Mary for a minute.** She is said to be “sitting at Jesus’s feet.” This means she is listening.
 - Furthermore, in the Bible, **getting down at someone’s feet** meant to be under their authority.
 - That means she’s both **focused** and **submissive**.

The answer to feeling distracted is to get focused and submissive.

- You can’t just come and sit through an occasional sermon and equate that with sitting at Jesus’ feet. That’s not listening.⁶ Sitting at Jesus’s feet means devoted, personal time paying attention to him.

⁶ Tim Keller, “With the Anxious,” from the *The Real Jesus* series, preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on February 9, 1997.

And when you do that—the problem of busyness will mostly dissolve.

- **First, you'll feel the warmth of his love** and won't feel the burden of always trying to prove yourself or the burden of trying to carry the weight all by yourself.
- Second, **because you'll be more in touch with his Spirit**, you'll be more aware of when something is not a distraction but a divine interruption.
- *That's why Martin Luther used to say that on his busiest days he had to get up even earlier to spend more time with God so he could walk with God through that busyness without it destroying him.*
- And then you should get up from your quiet time and say, "God has things for me to do and accomplish today." And get after them.

Last one...

5. Distraction rules an unprioritized heart

The **necessary component to being focused** on what you need to be focused on is saying "no" to other good things. **Martha needed the ability to say "no"** to legitimately good things so she could say "yes" to the best thing.

- **One of the most valuable things** I ever learned was that whenever I said "yes" to anything I was saying "no" to another—be that my budget or in my time. It's **how I finally learned to say no to good speaking opportunities** that were hurting my family. I'm a people pleaser and like to make everyone happy so I was always saying yes to everything. But when I started to realize that saying "yes" to this assignment or speaking opportunity I was, practically speaking, saying "no" to my children, that helped me. Sometimes I would **visualize me looking in their faces** and saying "no..." to them when I said "yes" to something else, and that changed things.

John Maxwell, "It is impossible to overestimate the unimportance of practically everything."

- **Dr. Danny Akin**, president of Southeastern Seminary, who has served as a mentor to me over the years, told me, "You can accept the speaking engagement and you are important there. But as husband to Veronica and daddy to Kharis, Allie, Ryah, and Adon, you are *irreplaceable*."

Years ago, I wrote out a small, ordered list of things that would determine my success that has served as a type of compass for me.

Like concentric circles...

- Relationship with God
- Marriage
- Family
- Leadership priorities. A few things are really critical in making my job a success. For example, for me, the weekend message (80/20)
- Many of us are asking, "How can I get more done?" when we need to be asking, "Am I sure I'm getting the *right things* done?"
- **Success**, Greg McKeown explains in *Essentialism*, is determined as much by what you don't as it is what you do do.⁷

You've got to get clear on whose opinion matters: The Bible says that in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom, but today we have opinion overload. Through my phone, literally everyone can tell me their opinion about what I've said, what I'm wearing, what I should be doing...⁸ **You've got to learn who to listen to.**

What this story shows us is that distraction grows out of a messed-up heart.

⁷ Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*

⁸ "Today, technology has lowered the barrier for others to share their opinion about what we should be focusing on. It is not just information overload; it is opinion overload."

As with all things, it's not so much of a behavior problem as it is a gospel **problem**.

- **Horizontal dysfunctions** ultimately go back to a vertical disruption.
- **Distraction and busyness** come from being out of fellowship with Jesus.
- **So, focus there**—rest in Jesus and figure out what he wants, and that will **break your captivity** to distraction.

Can I close with a few really super practical things?

- **Take at least the first 15 min a day to be with Jesus.** Don't look at your phone until then. (*Do it as a challenge for a week and see if it doesn't reshape for the better how you handle life!*)
- Throughout the day, **keep your phone in your pocket** and check it only at set intervals
- **Unfollow the people you envy**
- **Review your priorities often**—what roles you need to fulfill to be faithful; what tasks you really need to accomplish to be a success. Do this in community. Review them with your spouse if you have one; people in your small group, or your boss if you have a good relationship with them.

But **most of all, re-prioritize time with Jesus.** That is the key to everything else.

Two decisions today:

- **Have you ever received the love of the Father given in Christ?**
The gospel is that he loves you and gave Jesus as a Savior for your sins if you will receive his offer to come home to him, turn over control of your life to him, and receive his offer of forgiveness. Have you done that?
- Will you **make a commitment to daily quiet time?**