

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

We continue our study together in the Gospel of Luke.

“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!’ ‘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 10:38–42, NIV).

My message today is entitled “Prescription for the Overloaded.” Our society and our church are filled with Marthas, people who are on overload. I like the story of the little boy who was talking to his buddy. He said, “I’m really worried. Dad is working so hard. He slaves away at his job so that I will have everything that I need. He’s saving up money so I can go to the best university that one can go to. My mom works hard everyday to earn money for me to go to a private school and to take piano lessons and to have my own computer. Then, when she comes home at night, she cooks and washes and irons and cleans up after me. It seems like my mom and my dad spend every day of their lives just working for me and I’m worried.” His little buddy said, “What in the world have you got to worry about?” The guy replied, “I’m afraid they might try to escape.”

I believe it was that same little boy’s mother who placed a poem on the door of her refrigerator. He asked her what the poem was about and she answered, “It’s a poem called *Slow Me Down, Lord*. But I haven’t had time to read it yet.”

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

We look at Martha today as an example of a person on overload. We might just parenthetically note, from the text of the Gospel of Luke, that Luke does not mention the presence of Mary here and Martha's brother, who we know from the Gospel of John as Lazarus. Nor does Luke mention the town in which their home is located, which was Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem. Perhaps the reason Luke does not mention the town is that, at this moment in his writing of the Gospel, he diverts from telling the story chronologically. For Bethany is so close to Jerusalem, and at this point he is simply talking about Jesus going to Jerusalem. Perhaps the reason why the story is here and not later is that Luke wanted to make sure that any reader would understand that salvation does not consist of simply being a Good Samaritan, what the preceding story was about; but it consists of that personal relationship with Jesus, which this story emphasizes. We want to take Martha, though, as the person on overload and from this story, we learn that a person on overload has at least four qualities. See if any or all of these qualities are present in you. If they are, you can say, I'm a person on overload.

#### **I. The first characteristic of a person on overload is distraction.**

Martha was distracted. What that means literally is "to draw from around"; that's what the Greek term means. And it represents something that should be "around here" but instead it has been pulled away and drawn around something else. It's to have a focus that should be in one place but instead has been scattered and has been put in other places.

In Martha's case, the distraction was the idea, the fact that she should have had her attention centered upon Jesus. But she was drawn away from centering upon Jesus to, instead, focusing upon her service to the Lord. In fact, there's a word that comes straight out of the Greek language into the English language that is here in the text. Martha was distracted with much "deaconing." The word in the Greek, *deacon*, is the English concept "service." And Martha,

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

instead of ministry to the Lord, got caught up simply in ministry, in serving. We might ask, “How do we get distracted?” And from looking at Martha, we can come up with some ways that answer that question.

The first way we get distracted is—like Martha—if we fail to establish and stick to our priorities.

In Jesus’ case, the priority He wanted of them was a personal relationship with Himself.

Secondary to Jesus was cleaning the house and preparing the food. Martha had those priorities exactly reversed. What are the most important priorities in your life and in my life? Fortunately for us, the Scriptures give us some very clear guidelines on what are the most important priorities.

**A.** Number one priority is to spend time daily with the Lord. To nurture the personal relationship we have with Jesus Christ. If that is absent in our life, then we are distracted from that which should be our first focus of attention—Jesus. A reserved place in our daily calendar for Him. One of the young mothers and wives in our congregation shared with me last Sunday a vision and a dream she had about a month ago. She wrote it out for me. It’s so appropriate to this matter of focusing on the Lord, that I share the dream and vision she felt the Lord had given here: “I was sitting at the back of a church and a sermon was in progress, although occasionally, one or two people would come in and sit down. I appeared to not be listening and had my head propped up in my hand in ambivalence. Before me, lay several unopened Bibles, lined up on a table of some kind. Particularly, directly in front of me, was one Bible that was open. It was like those around me were not aware of my presence or of the Bibles. I looked at the open one and suddenly began to weep deeply. The dream ended there. A few hours later, God again opened my mind and a vision appeared. The heavens were before me and in the heavens, there appeared a very beautiful large Bible and the presence of the Lord was there and His Spirit glorified in this Bible. Then His

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

Spirit spoke quietly to my spirit, without audible words. The Lord said that His Word would be glorified in heaven and that it was a blessing to His people and greatly to be honored. But His people do not value His Word. They read so little of His Word. For the Word will be honored in heaven but His people do not seek His Word while on earth and their heads will be bowed in shame, because they did not read His Word. This was the end of the visions. Take heed to the Word of the Lord your God.”

A graphic comparison. The Word of the Lord is honored in heaven. Let it be honored in our own life as well. It’s through it and through prayer that we take that special time with the Lord.

**B.** Our second most important priority in life is to spend time with our family, with those we love. And if we’re absent from family as some of you are, to take the time to write a letter.

Probably the most valuable things I have in my possession are all the letters I began saving from my college years of the correspondence I had with my mom and my dad. I can get my mom and dad’s letters out still and, although they are not living now, they still live in their letters to me; I treasure the writing, that fact that they spent time.

In the first week or so of recuperating from this illness, we took a drive. You get stir crazy and have to get out. We drove out to Redlands, which was my mom and dad’s retirement home, and went past the little one-bedroom cottage in which they lived. I thought, as we drove by that place, of all the pleasant memories of driving into the driveway and tooting the horn and it was like Mom was always sitting by the window, waiting for us to come. Now as I drove past their house, I realized, of course, they were no longer in it and I could not go into that house anymore. There was no relationship with the person living there. I didn’t go out to Redlands enough. And those were the best times. Too often, I let appointments and schedules and tiredness deprive me from treasuring a relationship.

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

The best times I've had in the last fifteen to twenty years are the times not when I've been in this pulpit, which I enjoy greatly, but the times when my kids were smaller and we made it a family project for them to come and sit by me at the closing hours of the day. We would read one chapter a night out of the seven-volume set of C. S. Lewis' *Tales of Narnia*.

Relationships are really important. That's what Jesus is saying to us throughout His Word. We need to nurture relationships with the Lord and with one another.

**C.** And may I add a third priority: ourselves. It is a shame to us if we are so on overload that we don't even have an opportunity to go take a walk. There have been so many days of my life that I have been so busy and have said, "I don't have time to take a walk." I did not have time for myself. Thank the Lord for this surgery. It is really doing marvelous things in reorienting me; I've had to take long hours of time just to rest. I'm saying I'm almost getting as much done lying around a number of hours a day as I did when I was going like crazy so many hours a day and running low on energy.

How about the book you've been wanting to read? And to just have time to yourself; but you get caught up and distracted. Take some time to nurture your mind, your heart, your soul, your body.

**D.** Then, too, a priority is to spend time in the work and the people of the Lord. Spend time giving to the work of the Lord. Spend time with the people of the Lord. When you've fulfilled all those priorities, go out and get a paycheck. Don't be a slave to the job. Let mammon serve you rather than you serving it. Then if you have to go through life on a little less income, have a lot more fun.

I was talking to a person right before this service. I said recently I'd been given a tape called, "How to Get More Organized." But I hadn't had time to listen to it yet. Priorities. That's how we get distracted, by not focusing on priorities.

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

Then we get distracted by letting ourselves get snowballed. I think this is what happened with Martha. She got snowballed. She started out saying, “I know Jesus likes keeping things simple and we want to have time to spend some time together. So I’ll just fix one salad and a simple main course and have some tapioca for dessert or something.” Then, all of a sudden, she got to thinking, “I know he likes this salad and Drew likes that dessert.” And before long, she had ten salads going and three desserts and six main selections. It snowballed on her. It’s like the person who goes out to do one thing and thinks of another, and then thinks of two more, and then thinks of four more, then eight more. He started out to fulfill this particular duty and wound up with a whole thing.

It’s like Martha said, “I’m going to entertain Jesus. I’ve just got to get a meal. But He’s going to visit the bathroom while He’s here and that needs new wallpaper.” So new wallpaper is ordered. “The living room could stand some new wallpaper too,” and before Martha got done, the whole house is refurbished and a new landscaping job done. And she’s on overload.

Snowballing. Watch yourself. It’s so easy to snowball. To start out saying, “I only need fifteen minutes to do this,” but because we’ve got so many other things to do, we wind up spending vast amounts of energy snowballing and wind up at the end of the day with time short. Then we’re frustrated, because there’s so much to do.

Then I think Martha was distracted, not only because she didn’t have good priorities and because she let herself get snowballed, but she was driven by what I call the “shoulds”—“I should do this, I should do that.” Or we say, “I’ve got to do this.” When we let ourselves be driven by shoulds, we’re letting either our own unrealistic expectations or other people’s expectations drive us. (“You know a good hostess should do this.”) We need to strip those shoulds out of our language in cases like that, and say, “I choose to do so and so,” so we’re not driven by external

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

guilt, but we're driven by internal choices. Distraction... first quality of an overloaded person—not centered on what's really important.

#### **II. The second quality of an overloaded person is to be a negative thinker.**

Not that Martha was negative all the time, but just in this context, she was. We know she was negative because of what she says to Jesus: “Lord, don't You care?” And underlying that, and in between the lines, she is saying, “Lord, You don't care. Because if You'd have cared, You'd have told Mary to quit being so lazy and get up and help me. But the fact that You let her sit there means that You heard me clanging those pots in the kitchen and You heard me when I dropped that one on purpose and You didn't care, even then, to send her in. You don't care.” People on overload get totally distorted perceptions of other people, of other people's motives and just life around them. They're on overload, so their circuits are overloaded. And their perceptions are bad. Which brings us to the third characteristic of a person on overload.

#### **III. She blamed others for her problems.**

She was distracted, she was a negative thinker in this case, and she blamed others for her problems. It was all Mary's fault. She didn't stop to evaluate her own unrealistic schedule. She just laid the whole trip on Mary.

I might add here that Mary would be at fault if all she was doing was sitting there. But Martha's words let us know that Mary had actually been working. I think sometimes we look at this story wrongly and just think Mary's a loafer and Jesus should have lit a fire under her. Martha says, “My sister has left me to do the work by myself.” I think that Mary was helping Martha. If she left her, it means that she had been helping. I think she left when Martha said, “We've got seven salads but I think we need three more.” And I think Mary said, “Enough is enough. I want to spend some time with Jesus.” So she left Martha alone, overloaded.

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

What's happening with a person on overload is they're blaming others for why they're not getting things done. It's all your fault. If you would bend yourself to my schedule, then we would get things done.

By the way, blame is the one attitude that will kill all growth in our life. It for sure will kill all joy. Almost to the degree that you don't have joy in your life, to that same degree, there will be blame. It's sort of like you can't have joy and be living with blame. Blame destroys joy because we're finding fault with the other persons. "It's all your fault."

If we're ever going to make progress in our life, we must learn how to cope with getting away from being a blaming person.

There is a story that is told by a newspaper columnist and minister on this whole subject of blame and assigning someone else the responsibility for the fix that we're in. He tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. She came to him as her pastor and said, "I don't like him. I not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even with him. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as I can." The pastor suggested to her an ingenious plan. He said, "Go home and act as if you really loved your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait that he has. Go out of your way to be as kind and considerate and generous as possible. Spare no effort to please him and to enjoy him. Make him believe that you love him. And when you've convinced him of your undying love, and convinced him that he can't live without you, then drop the bomb. Tell him you're getting a divorce. That will hurt him. That will help you get even." With revenge in her eyes, she smiled with glee and exclaimed, "Beautiful! Will he ever be surprised!" So she went out and began to do this with enthusiasm. She acted as if she loved him for two months. She showed love, kindness. She listened, she gave, she shared. When she didn't return, the pastor called her. "Are you ready now

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

to go through with the divorce? It's been two months." She said, "Divorce? Never. I discovered I really loved him."

The bottom line of that story is this: All the really great changes that need to take place in our lives are in us, not in another person. As long as we place our fate in the hands of someone else, we will never be whole. If we say, "I am what I am because my parents dropped me when I was a baby," or whatever they did to us. It may be true. Maybe you have the worst parents and it would be a nightmare for you to describe it. I don't want to minimize that. There are people in this congregation today who have lived in hellholes. So I don't ever want to trivialize that. But I know enough about mental and spiritual health to say that it will do you no good to saturate yourself in that negative thing that happened to you, that your hope for success in life and with God is to say, "Now what? And with God's help, I'll be responsible for the attitudes that I have in life now and the actions I will perform for others. I will have no success in life by fixing blame. If I even am able to fix blame, it doesn't do me any good if I am able to tag it on somebody. So I must move away from blame and accept responsibility and go on."

Martha was trying to put the blame for her overload on someone else. But Martha could have had twenty people with her in the kitchen and she would have still been on overload, because the fundamental things of establishing priorities with her time had not been made.

**IV. The fourth thing about the person on overload is they want others to approve their wrong solutions.**

"Tell her to help me, Jesus. You endorse the way I'm going about this. You approve my wrong solution." And Jesus refused to give into the psychological coercion that Martha tries to put Him under and refused to endorse her wrong solution.

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

What the Lord does instead is give her a prescription for coming out of the overload. Here is the prescription:

**A.** The first thing He does is give her a tender rebuke. “Martha, Martha!” The double repetition of her name is meant to arrest her and to focus her attention upon Him. Maybe here’s an instance in Scripture we would profit from having had a tape recorder present, because sometimes, interpretation is all in the tone of voice. A person on overload has a difficult time stopping and listening, has a difficult time even focusing on eye contact. I think what Jesus does is He reaches out to Martha, “Look at Me, Martha. Martha, Martha.”

**B.** With that tender rebuke in His voice, Jesus moves on to stating the problem. “You are worried and upset about many things.” That’s the problem.

I did a little skullduggery here with the Greek words this week and found out that, in the Greek, they mean exactly what they mean in the English. The true translation of this verse is “You are worried and upset about many things.” “Worry” is not the same word and does not have the same meaning as “upset.” “Worry” refers to the inward condition of turmoil. And “upset” refers to the outward manifestation. The linkage is that confusion on the inside leads to commotion on the outside. And because she was confused or worried within, it manifested itself in her helter-skelter kind of conduct. Worry.

Jesus’ words are such a direct opposite to where we often are in life. In Matthew 6:25, “Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear.” Jesus doesn’t say to not be concerned or demonstrate proper planning. He’s talking about the kind of concern which is fueled by anxiety, which offers no solutions. Matthew 6:34, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.” You say, “Jesus, You’ve got to be kidding! You’ve never lived in Orange County!” “For tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

enough trouble of its own.” Jesus is saying to us, “Treasure every single day.” Jesus is not saying, “Be careless or frivolous, but don’t be anxious about it.” Matthew 13:22, “What is sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word but the worries of this life choke it making it unfruitful.” Jesus says that the Word of God in our life and the presence of Jesus in us can be choked by an atmosphere of anxiety in our life. Philippians 4:6 uses the same word in the Greek that’s used in all these verses and in Luke 10, “Do not be worried about anything. Spend time with the Lord and the peace of God will guard you.” 1 Peter 5:7—again the same word— “Cast all your worry upon him, for he cares for you.” Statement of the problem. Anxiety and upset.

C. And the solution. The rebuke, the problem and the solution. “Only one thing is needed.” He asked Martha to reorient her life according to what is important to Him. And the meal, from His vantage point, did not require that many dishes. He wanted time with her. That was what was important.

I suppose men often look at things differently than women in the whole area of entertainment and hospitality. I remember an incident when we were first married; I was director of student life and spiritual life at Evangel College. As if anyone could direct either student life or spiritual life. I had that position. One morning, at about 11:15, I called Jewel. We were living in a small utility apartment on campus with very little furniture. I said, “Guess what! The president is going to go to lunch with me. I’ve decided to bring him home. Could you get a sandwich ready? We’ll be there in about fifteen minutes.” There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. We came about fifteen minutes later and had baloney on white bread. I enjoyed the conversation, we had a good time, sitting around the table, and I thought everything had gone really well...until I got home later that afternoon. I found out that more than one thing was needed.

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

But what Jesus was saying was, “Martha, I just wanted to spend time with you. I didn’t want to have an atmosphere with all this noise and you being upset. You didn’t have to prepare a feast. Just a sandwich would have done.” He asked Martha to reorient her life by what was important to Him.

This week, I ran across a rendition of the Psalm 23, translated out of a Japanese version. It really deals with what I’m talking about:

*The Lord is my pacesetter. I shall not rush.*

*He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals.*

*He provides me with images of stillness which deepen my serenity.*

*He leads me in ways of efficiency through calmness of mind and His guidance is peace.*

*Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day I will not fret, For His presence is here.*

*His timelessness, His all-importance will keep me in balance.*

*He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity.*

*By anointing my mind with oils of tranquility, my cup of joyous energy overflows.*

*Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours.*

*For I shall walk in the pace of the Lord and dwell in His house forever.*

I love that phrase: “I shall walk in the pace of the Lord.”

The solution—the comparison. Mary has chosen what is better. She sat at His feet, which is the position of one being taught. By the way, in those days, women were not accorded the position of learning from the rabbis. Jesus, right off the bat, is saying that in Him, churchwomen are going to have a different place. She has chosen what is better. And the rationale—it will not be taken away from her. The meal will wash through the system and it will be gone, but these hours

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

### **Luke 10:38–42**

you spend with Me are timeless. The secret of life is so often not making the choice between good and evil, which is often easy to do. But it's making a choice between the better and the best, which is more difficult to do. She has chosen the best.

By the way, we miss the point to this story if we see it as a conflict between Martha, the practical type, and Mary, the spiritual type. For all the Marthas in us reach out to say, "Those lazy Maries." If the work of the church or the family depended upon Mary, the dishes would pile up, the bathroom would get dirty and people would live in filth. It takes the Marthas of this world to make things go. And the Maries of this world are saying, "Those Martha's always busy, busy, busy. Never taking time for relationships."

If we understand this story correctly, it is not a conflict between Mary and Martha. It is a matter of balance. Mary was in balance. She had worked with Martha. But there came a moment when she said, "There's something else that's important, and I must give my priority to that, and that is to spend time with Jesus." Martha is not being put down by Jesus for having worked. She's being put down by Him, in effect, for being out of balance. Jesus is calling her into the proper balance between practicality and relationships.

Obviously, what Jesus taught stuck with Martha because we read of Jesus' relationship with this family again, later in the gospel text of John 11 and 12. We find that Martha again fixes a dinner for Jesus, six days before His death at Bethany, in John 12:1. And that dinner was marked without the acrimony of this dinner, without the hustle and bustle. There is a calm in that meal, which is sufficiently tranquil for Mary to anoint Jesus with oil for His burial at the conclusion of it.

Martha learned her lesson by being overloaded. In the midst of learning that lesson, Jesus never rejected her, He didn't rebuke her harshly. Rather, John 11:5 tells us Jesus loved Martha and her

## **RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38–42**

sister and Lazarus. He didn't just love Mary. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Martha reformed her patterns. She took time to sit herself at the Lord's feet because it is she who will later say to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). She didn't learn that in the busyness of fixing a dinner. She learned that in the context of a relationship, which she entered into.

For the overloaded: Come into balance, get priorities and keep them (the Lord's priorities for life). Take on what is manageable. Let the day's trouble be sufficient for the day.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, anoint these words in our heart today. It is difficult to live in Orange County. We have to work like crazy just to pay the rent or make house payments. It's hard, Lord, to live in a culture where there are so many things to do, where there's work and adult education, where there's work and school. Where there is so much opportunity for leisure. Sometimes, Lord, we get worn out just recreating so much. Help us, Lord, to be still. Help us to reform our lives so that, rather than modeling a pattern before You or before our family of anxiety and being upset, of motion and commotion, we are able to live with energy and yet with peace. With effectiveness, and yet with calm. Bring balance in our lives, Lord. Help us, we pray.

*One of the great needs of our lives as Christians is to spend time daily with the Lord. With a message like this, which has talked to us about nurturing as our first priority with the Lord, could I ask you for a commitment that says, "Pastor, for the next seven days I'm going to make a special place in my schedule to meet with Jesus in His Word and in prayer"? Many of you are already doing this. Many of you are not. The Lord is calling us to set priorities. He really wants to spend time with us. In our own family, with our kids being older, I want to say, "Sit down and talk with me. I want to spend some time with you." That's how the Lord feels toward us: "Sit*

**RX FOR THE OVERLOADED**

**Luke 10:38-42**

*down. I want to talk with you. I want to spend some time and enjoy you.” Would you give yourself to a seven-day pattern of spending some time every day with the Lord?*

Let these times, on a daily basis, be a great oasis for our lives, Lord. Help us to treasure that which really matters. In Your name. Amen.