

Balancing Inward and Outward Service

Luke 10:38-42

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

I remember the day when I said YES to the Lord. I was born that day of the water and Spirit and felt an overwhelming peace that comes from being eternally adopted as God's son. The more I think about having been bought at the price of Jesus's very life (1 Corinthians 6:20)



the more I desire to be not just be a hearer of the word (James 1:22-25) but one who offers Him my best service! I know that many of you share this same desire, so we try to have the nicest buildings, finest music, most interesting programs, eloquent preaching¹ and outreach that like the Good Samaritan demonstrates our love for one another (Luke 10:25-37). But I cannot help but think that 5 percent doing 90 percent of the service in a church² is what God wants from His own. Those who over-estimate "their" importance and frantically spend all their time on

outward service to God do great harm to their souls,³ not only do they often become possessive and prideful⁴ but also spiritually weak because they are not depending on⁵ and spending time with He who sustains and feeds their souls! Such a person has the tendency to serve so heartedly that the object of one's service, Christ, gets drowned out in business!⁶ Those who do not regularly commune with the Holy Spirit will "do commonplace things very well"⁷ but without

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 231.

² C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 229.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 234.

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 236.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 234.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 237.

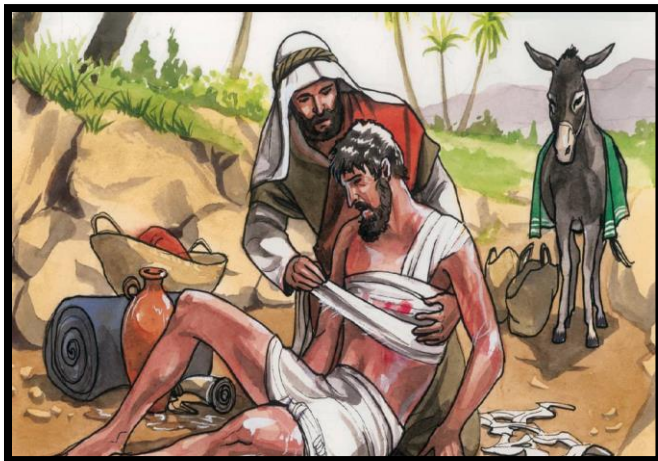
⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 238.

taking time to be holy⁸ their service will never attain the divine fruit intended. The following sermon is going to begin with the parable of the Good Samaritan to emphasize how important it is for us to not just be hearers but doers of His word. The final part of the sermon is going to focus on Mary and Martha's different approach to pleasing Christ in Luke 10:38-42 and suggest that to please God one must obtain a balance of both service and reflection.⁹

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37)

One day an expert in the law tested Jesus with the question “what must I do to inherit eternal life” (25)? Jesus answered him by asking him the question “what is written in the law” (26) to which he answered, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself” (27). To justify his meager service towards others he asked Jesus who is my neighbor to which Jesus spoke the following parable:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he



saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave

them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ 36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

When the expert in the law answered, “the one who had mercy on him” (36), Jesus told him to “go and do likewise” (37). “The priest and the Levite of the Parable of the Good Samaritan needed to learn that God and people are better served by deeds of mercy than by religious

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 233.

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 306.

rituals.”¹⁰ When presented with an opportunity to serve the Good Samaritan dropped everything he was doing and demonstrated his love through service of both time and money! Likewise, we too are to be ready and willing to serve whenever God asks! Though we are not saved by our works we are “God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:9-10)! Since we are to be doers of the word God expects all of us to use our spiritual gifts to build one another up in the faith (1 Corinthians 12) and to offer cups of water (Mark 9:41) and love to those in need (Matthew 25:31-46).

Mary and Martha (10:38-42)

To keep one from thinking that one should serve 24/7, Luke introduces another story about two sisters of Bethany,¹¹ Mary and Martha.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 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!” 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. c



Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

We are told that Martha invited Jesus,¹² His disciples and probably others that were with them¹³ over to her house for a meal. Martha was probably a widow, the housekeeper¹⁴ and older than

¹⁰ Craig A. Evans, [Luke](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 177.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 229.

¹² Tony Evans, [“Putting First Things First,”](#) in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015), Lk 10:38–42.

¹³ J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, [A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 424.

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1859.

her sister Mary.¹⁵ While both sisters shared in their desire to honor Christ they differed in their methods.¹⁶ With “great plenty, great variety, and great exactness”¹⁷ Martha spent most of the day preparing a large banquet for her guests¹⁸ while Mary honored Christ by sitting at His feet, as a rabbinic disciple would,¹⁹ and listening intently to His teaching. In her business Martha gets frazzled and asks Jesus to rebuke Mary for not helping. Jesus responded not by stating that Martha was wrong for her service²⁰ but that her attitude of being too busy was hindering her spiritual growth. If on only she made fewer or only one food item for the banquet²¹ she could have been like Mary and made spending time with the Lord and listening to His word a priority in her life.²² While the fact that two women dominant this story would have “been shocking in the first-century context, where men often dismissed women as marginal, the account is designed to make a point about all disciples”²³ ... taking time to be holy must be a priority in our lives!

Balance Between Service and Striving for Holiness

Both the parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Mary and Martha emphasize the need to have a balance of both service and reflection in our Christian walk.²⁴ When the pendulum swings too far towards service obsession, pride, and exasperation fills one’s soul and drowns out reverence and awe of worshipping and being fed by one’s Creator.²⁵ While one can

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 210.

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 230.

¹⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1859.

¹⁸ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 295.

¹⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 326.

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 10:38–42.

²¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 327.

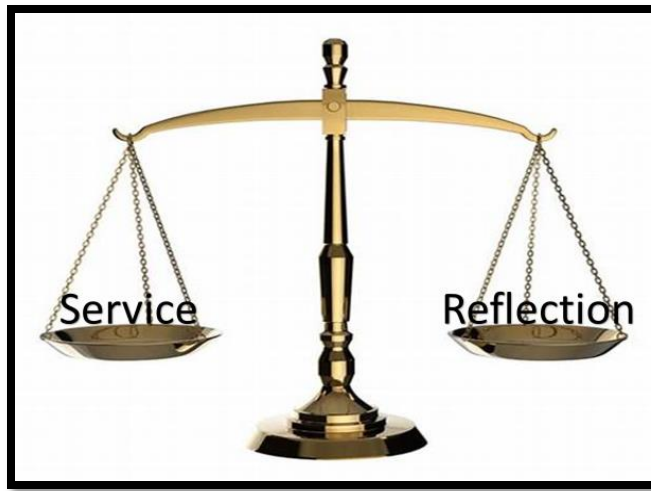
²² Walter L. Liefeld, “[Luke](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 945.

²³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 10:38–42.

²⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 305–306.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 238.

fully understand Martha's desire to give her very best service by preparing an exquisite banquet,²⁶ in her business she forgot her soul also needed to be fed by the Master!²⁷ "Life has



few real necessities and at need we can do without much on which we lavish time!"²⁸ When one becomes busy unfortunately the first thing that seems to go is time with the Lord that enables one to grow spiritually, know His will and to serve effectively in His kingdom!²⁹ However, when the pendulum swings towards doing nothing but being fed by our Lord, our lives tend to be too focused on self and we become like the priest and the Levite of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and neglect God's second command to love one another in action. Does not Scripture tell us that we have

been given spiritual gifts to build one another up in the faith (1 Corinthians 12) and to spur one another onto love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)? When Jesus stated Mary's service was better than Martha's, He was not saying that internal was better³⁰ than external service but merely that Mary's attitude of constant fixation on pleasing her Master was better than Martha's distracted business. The remainder of this sermon will focus on four additional points that are noteworthy from today's passage concerning obtaining a balanced perspective when serving God.

Our Attitude when Serving Must Always Focus on Christ

While our service to our Lord, Savior and King ought to be based on our absolute best efforts³¹ it will not only fail but be to us an albatross around the throats of our spiritual lives

²⁶ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 295–296.

²⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 306.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 210.

²⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 306.

³⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 10:38–42.

³¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "*Martha and Mary*," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 231.



when it is done merely in the flesh!³² Martha became very frustrated and grew weary because she over-estimated the importance of the banquet³³ and in doing so lost sight of the object of her service, loving, and taking time to be fed from her Lord! She learned that day that “Jesus would be better pleased with a grain of love than a heap of ostentatious service.”³⁴ “Thoughtless service done while our souls are asleep,”³⁵ distracted with worry about what others are doing or not doing, “falls flat to the ground”³⁶ because without the Holy Spirit³⁷ and

our eyes fixed on Christ we are merely serving for ourselves and in our own abilities! Service marked by distractions and worry rather than a genuine expression of faith³⁸ is not an acceptable sacrifice unto God because our primary focus is not on seeking first the kingdom of God!³⁹ This means for those who serve 24/7 they need to do less serving and take more time to feed on the Bread and Living waters that will sustain and enable them to do miracles in Jesus’ name! Like Martha we should be less interested in what the Mary’s of this world are doing and more interested in expressing our love for others by taking the time to be holy so that we might know and rightly serve His children!

³² C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 231.

³³ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 236.

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 231.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 238–239.

³⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 236.

³⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Martha and Mary,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 233.

³⁸ Joel B. Green, [The Gospel of Luke](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 436.

³⁹ D. A. Carson, [“The Gospels and Acts,”](#) in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1849.

Serve Others, Not Self

While Martha's service was an honorable endeavor it fell short of high praise from Jesus because she was focused on what Mary was doing instead of on pleasing her Savior.⁴⁰

"Martha's concern seems to have been that she had to work alone rather than that she could not sit at Jesus' feet."⁴¹ Like Martha it



is quite easy when serving the Lord to look around and condemn others who appear to be doing nothing! For example, when serving for long periods of time it is easy to fall into the trap of being like a Pharisee and become so confident in our own righteousness that we thank God we are better than others whose external service seems to be sadly lacking (18:9-14). "We often spend too much time evaluating the walk of others and too little time being self-critical about our own

actions for Jesus."⁴² In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told the crowd that those who serve to make themselves look good to others would not receive any reward from the Father (Matthew 6)! Only that which is given out of a humble and generous spirit⁴³ and with the goal of pleasing God will be acceptable in His sight! Inside of the church it is critical that "each member take individual responsibility for his or her own walk"⁴⁴ while encouraging the body of Christ to serve with an attitude that exemplifies the summary of all of God's commands, to love Him and one another!

Do not Become too Busy to Take Time to be Holy

We do serious damage to our souls when we place all our strength in outwards service while neglecting our inward souls! Even though God often requires us to accept goals of service

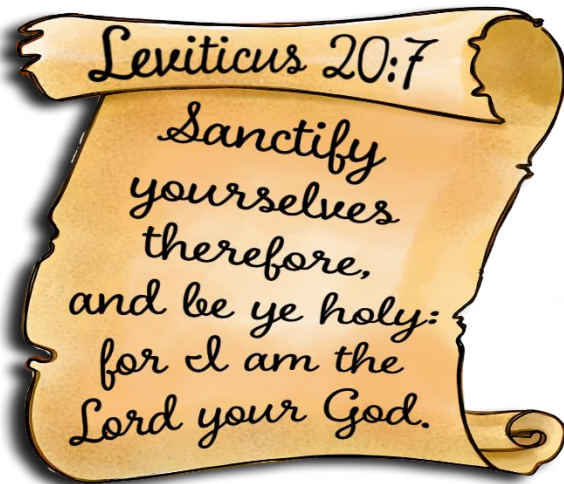
⁴⁰ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 304.

⁴¹ Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 945.

⁴² Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 306.

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 237.

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 306.



that are beyond human capacity to achieve,⁴⁵ He never does so without giving us ample time to invest in deep principles of inward beliefs that are grounded in His word and will!⁴⁶ While those of us who are “serve-aholics” might view taking the time to invite God to feed our souls as “idle time,”⁴⁷ this is far from the truth for until one learns from the Master about love one simply cannot serve in a way that fulfills His command to love one another! Remember Jesus did not tell Martha to do nothing but merely that “when the work you do for Me breaks your relationship with Me, you need to reassess the kitchen.”⁴⁸ It is only

when the believer is like Mary and surrenders at the Master’s feet in “listening, learning, feeding, edifying, and loving”⁴⁹ that our attitudes are guarded in Christ and all things become possible (Philippians 4:13). The moment we forget our utter dependence on He who sustains all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16)⁵⁰ we slip back into our old human nature that can do nothing. However, if we abide in the Vine⁵¹ then with faith as tiny as a mustard seed our service will not only move mighty mountains but also be pleasing in God’s sight (John 15:5; Matthew 17:20)!

⁴⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 234.

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 239.

⁴⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 237.

⁴⁸ Tony Evans, “[Putting First Things First](#),” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015), Lk 10:38–42.

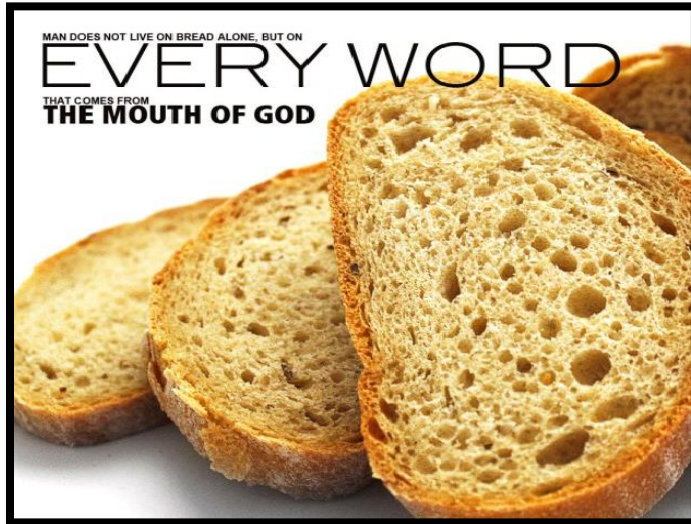
⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 237.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 234.

⁵¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Martha and Mary](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 234.

Striving for Food that Does not Perish (Deuteronomy 8:1-3)

Let me finish this sermon by stressing how important it is to feast on the word of God. I believe we are living in the era that has fulfilled Paul's prophecy that there would come a day when people would not longer put up with sound doctrine but instead would choose only to listen to teachers and pastors that say what their itching ears want them to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). May we not give into the spirit that despises the Lord's teaching, preferring only outward



service, "for if we do, in prizing the fruit and despising the root we shall lose the fruit and the root too."⁵²

How desperately we need Christians to stand up for the doctrines of Scripture,⁵³ and in humble and in total submission⁵⁴ be like Mary and kneel to view every jot and tittle of His word (Matthew 5:18) as a pearl and treasure (Matthew 13:44-46)⁵⁵ that truly is learned and obeyed (James 1:22)! In today's passage Luke refers to Deuteronomy 8:1-3 which states that we are not to live by bread alone but every word from the mouth of God.⁵⁶

When we take time to be holy may we be like Mary, "so wrapped in devout wonder,"⁵⁷ in our times of prayer and meditation that in those precious moments we become oblivious to self and utterly devoted to God! In conclusion, may we never forget that to please God we need take time to be holy and then out of the love we get from the Father serve others and show them how much we love them too!

⁵² C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 232.

⁵³ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 231.

⁵⁴ Tony Evans, "[Putting First Things First](#)," in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015), Lk 10:38-42.

⁵⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 232.

⁵⁶ Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 177.

⁵⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Martha and Mary](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 230.