**Slowing Down to Savour the Saviour: Intro** (Jan 9/20)

**Luke 10:38-42**

Welcome back Centred Community.

We will be meeting every Thursday night at 7:15 and would just love if you made this part of your week. As Paul said I’m going to be the primary teacher over the next few months. One of the limitations I’ll have in doing this is that I won’t have enough time to prepare sermons each week. This means that going forward after this week, most of the time will be discussion questions. I will still be doing some teaching before we dive into those, but just want you to know what’s ahead.

With this in mind my hope tonight is to prepare you for what’s ahead in this new series: Slowing Down to Savour the Saviour.

For some of you this is the first week back from holidays, and I imagine that like me, somewhere along the way you also sat down with family and friends and enjoyed a nice meal together. There’s something about having a meal like that that forces you to slow down. Especially if it’s turkey or ham, you have to take time and chew- and when you do that you savour your food – you let the flavours sink in.

But this just doesn’t happen all that often anymore – sitting down and enjoying meals together. Instead if you’re like me you wolf down your food in record speed and you get on with whatever you’re doing next.

Now what I’m not trying to do is paint a picture of how the fast food industry has taken North America by storm (we already know that- anticipate laughs). Instead what I want us to see is just how fast our lives have gotten.

As you made conversation on your way in tonight, you were likely asked the question something to the effect of, ‘how are you?’ And what did you say? “Good, just busy.” “Busy, busy, busy.” We’ve only been really back to work or school for not even a week and already we’re busy.

So, what gives? You don’t need to go far to find stats on the influence your pocket-sized computer is having on you. On average we check our phones every 10 minutes.

And then there’s our jobs. Did you know we’re working more hours per week now than ever before? Back in the 60s with the rise of the leisure – travelling and recreation – it was predicted that the 40-hour work week would be cut in half – that we’d be working no more than 20 hours/week.

Do you know what happened? Rather than pursue more time on hobbies – we chose a more expensive lifestyle – a bigger home, a second car, a longer vacation, and now we’re actually working more. The average North American is putting in 44-47 hours per week – many well over 50.

Some of you are coming in here tonight feeling anxious. You have so much on your plate in 2020, you’re already worried that you won’t be able to keep up.

And if that’s you, I want to extend to you the invitation that only Jesus is offering. He says in Matthew 11:28-30: **28**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30**For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

I want you to know that Jesus has this on the table for you, and even right now in the stillness of your heart, you can pray, and Jesus will begin to lift the burdens in your life.

It’s okay to be busy, it’s okay to have a full schedule but so quickly it gets out of control, and you no longer experience the rest that was intended for you.

Commenting on this same passage, the late Dallas Willard said, “**Most Christians probably find both Jesus’ statement here and its reiteration by the author of 1 John [in chapter 5 verse 3, when John says that Christ’s commands are not burdensome] to be more of an expression of hope or even a mere wish than a statement about the substance of their lives.”**

Is this true of you? Is your soul really at rest or do you, like most Christians, feel as if you’re bouncing from one thing to the next and if you’re honest, you don’t think anyone, let alone Jesus, could slow down your life?

What I hope this series offers is fresh perspective. God has given you every blessing in Christ Jesus (the Bible says). Everything you need to know about following Jesus is right in here.

However, often you come away from a sermon where you’re challenged to have greater joy or greater peace, and this can be just what you needed – don’t get me wrong, but sometimes after a couple weeks or months it can feel like you’re back to square 1.

What we’re going to do differently is we’re not just going to consider the principles of Jesus, but we’re going to consider the practices of Jesus too.

That’s where we’re going. Tonight, we’re still setting the stage and we’ve got Mary and Martha to help us do that: Slowing Down to Savour the Saviour. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 10:38-42 (Read and Pray).

As many of you know Luke is one of the gospel writers. He along with Matthew, Mark and John are the books in the Bible that recount the life that Jesus lived on this earth: they act as different biographical accounts if you will. Where we pick up Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. This is the place where he will eventually be crucified, and at this point Jesus is in the final 6 weeks of his life. So as their making this trek, they come to a village, Luke doesn’t tell us the name – he leaves out that detail, but we know based on other encounters Jesus has with Mary and Martha (recorded in John) that this is in Bethany, about 3 kilometres from Jerusalem.

Once in Bethany, Jesus is welcomed into the home of Martha. Just Jesus, don’t know where the disciples are at this point. For all we know they found a nice spot for a nap or maybe thought Martha’s home might be a little crowded, but the story isolates on Jesus. The text says, “she opened her home to him” (Luke 10:38). Martha wanted to show Jesus some Bethany-style hospitality – “come on in.” What we learn next is that it’s not just Martha at home, her sister Mary is in the house too. And what’s interesting is they actually have different ideas of what hospitality for Jesus looks like. Check it out, Mary takes a seat – she’s ready to hear stories from this travelling visitor – she’s listening. But Martha, she’s running around the house making everything perfect for their guest.

Now notice how Luke describes Martha in the midst of this, he doesn’t just contrast the sisters by saying ‘Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said, and Martha, got preparations done for supper and so that they had a bed made-up for Jesus.’ It wasn’t a matter of Mary being on entertainment duty, and Martha on cooking and housekeeping. Luke says, “But Martha was **distracted** by all the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40).

IN ORDER TO SLOW DOWN, OUR LIVES NEED TO BE MARKED NOT BY DISTRACTION, BUT DEOVTION.

Martha was distracted. She has the son of God in her living room – she wanted to make her home immaculate. Can you blame her? But, it’s like I said already, you can be busy, you can have a full schedule – we all have different capacities and different seasons – but the danger is when this gets out of hand. Ultimately, distraction stems from disorder. When you have a disordered schedule, or better yet when you have a disordered heart, you’re no longer just busy, but now you’re in a hurry.

For Martha, she falls into this trap. She had all of these jobs she wanted to get done around the house. You can just imagine the to-do list she must have had – get out the best china, make the finest homemade bread…It’s not like any of these preparations were bad – Martha wasn’t in the other room looking at porn, she hadn’t snuck out the backdoor to steal some food from her neighbour’s house.

But, it’s as if somewhere along the way Martha forgot the reason, she was even doing these tasks in the first place. Her very saviour, the one who would soon go to the cross and die for her sins – he was in her house. Suddenly, the work she had to do for Jesus became more important than simply being with Jesus – that’s what made her distracted, and now she had her priorities out of whack.

Perhaps you too are not necessarily distracted by deadly sins, but maybe it’s staying late repeatedly after work to show your worthy of a promotion. It could even be that you’re part of too many church commitments. You see, it doesn’t really matter what you’re involved in, you can catch hurry sickness in any job and at any phase in life.

And when this happens you get in a continuous cycle of setting out to achieve more and more things or you participate in more and more events, but guess what? You’re doing this in less and less time. Yeah, you can be stretched – you can create rhythms and systems in your life that allow you to be more efficient, but there comes a point where you become stunted – something breaks down- you start to cave and sadly it’s your relationship with Jesus that typically suffers.

John Ortberg puts it so well, he says, **“for many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it [our faith]. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.”**

Isn’t that scary? To go weeks where you don’t even stop and pray, to become bitter towards someone else all because of a small irritation, to realize you’re losing God’s heart for the world. I believe the first step in slowing down to savour the Saviour is to identify what the distractions are in your life. Once you do that, diagnose how they became disordered. How did simply scrolling through your Instagram take you away from your Bible reading? How did being out every night with friends take you away from taking care of your own wellness?

Your life doesn’t have to be marked by hurry. The invitation of Jesus is still open – come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. You have the ability to choose devotion instead of distraction.

Now unlike Martha, her sister Mary wasn’t distracted by preparations that had to be made for Jesus. In fact, Luke says she just sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he said (Luke 10:39).

It sounds so simple, but yet there’s something about this stillness that just seems unproductive. It’s counter-cultural and yet Mary’s devotion is exactly what we’re called to. Let’s Consider her position alone – she sat at the feet of Jesus. Martha later refers to Jesus as “Lord” in her words, but I would argue that Mary expresses Jesus to be her “Lord” far more in her actions.

To sit at someone’s feet implied reverence, it implied being teachable. The Apostle Paul is said to be brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. This scholar-to-tutor relationship is one that Jesus broke a real cultural barrier allowing Mary at his feet. Normally rabbis didn’t let woman to do this in Jesus’ day. And get this, Jesus doesn’t just welcome Mary’s posture towards him, he affirms it, even after being chastised by her sister Martha. What does this teach us?

POSTURE POINTS TO PRIORITY.

As we consider the practices of Jesus over the next several weeks, one of the things that we’re going to be dialling in on is the role our bodies play in slowing down and instilling Christ-like disciplines.

Willard says, **“to withhold our bodies from religion is to exclude religion from our lives.”** In other words what he’s saying is that the essence of faith is not just mental. There is very much a physical sense to following Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says at the end of his first letter to the church at Thessalonica: “May your whole spirit, soul and **body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Isn’t that interesting? Even though we so often refer to following Jesus as being spiritual, and I don’t mean just in terms of not compartmentalizing your faith (to Sundays or when you’re around other Christians) – I mean in terms of expressing your faith. We often isolate the spiritual: the soul and spirit, but hold the phone, your body is just as much part of this. They’re all inter-connected. The flesh may sin, too bad, it’s still connected to the soul and spirit (a little bit of theology for you). You have to learn how to control it. \*Too dense?

One of the best ways of yielding your body to Jesus is with your posture. This sets up what will come with your soul and spirit. So, for Marry, she sits at the feet of Jesus. Why is that so helpful? For one, by sitting at his feet we already touched on the humility – she is submitting that Jesus is her teacher – he has the truth that she needs to learn from – there is a humility. Second, she is sitting, meaning that she’s focused – she’s not walking around texting and watching the hockey game at the same time – she’s doing one thing: listening to her Lord. By sitting there is also a level of engagement, she’s not lying down in a posture where she could potentially drift off. She’s locked in. Our physical position precedes our mental condition.

We underestimate how helpful our posture is for what we receive from Jesus. It demonstrates our seriousness towards what we’re doing. If we’re in a group of people having a conversation and I’m only looking at you, but not making eye contact with the three others– what does that say? It says I didn’t realize they joined our conversation or that I don’t really care to share what I’m speaking to you. Body language says a lot.

And for Mary, in the other two encounters she has with Jesus, she’s also sitting at his feet. When Mary’s brother Lazarus dies, and Jesus comes to comfort her and her Martha. It doesn’t just say that Martha cries with Jesus, but before she speaks – it says Mary falls at his feet (John 11:32). And then when Jesus comes back to Mary and Martha’s house later (six days before Passover) it says that Mary took out some expensive perfume and poured it, where? On Jesus’ feet (John 12: 3). Trust me, Mary doesn’t have a foot fetish, this is just her posture towards Jesus – this is her posture towards God.

It’s beautiful. In this case, by sitting at the Lord’s feet, the act of sitting enables Mary to best listen to what Jesus had to say.

As you devote your life to Jesus, are you doing so in a posture that would suggest that? Is your faith something you’ve grasped intellectually, or would your closest friends say that you live this out practically too?

Perhaps, you ought to better position yourself as you listen to the Lord.

I believe there is a reason why Jesus instructs you to go into your room and close the door before praying to the Father (Matt 6:6). It’s not that you can’t pray while you’re driving, but your attention is split. You want to avoid distractions: where is your phone when you’re doing your devotions or quiet time with Jesus? Is it right beside you or is it a distance away? How about putting it on ‘do not disturb’? How about turning off notifications?

Your posture points to your priority.

Last Saturday just a few days into 2020, a Pastor from London, Ontario finally died after a long battle with cancer. Howard Katz was his name, a dear pastor to many of my friends from university. I only met the man once but have been thinking about our one interaction lots this week, what a Godly man he was.

I visited Open Door Christian Fellowship one Sunday, about a year ago.

I still remember walking into this church determined to find my friend Nik to sit together. Pastor Howard who I wouldn’t formally meet until after the service, do you know what my first impression of him was? This man greets me at the back of the sanctuary (much like you would coming into Emmanuel). I’d never even met this guy in my life and the first thing he does is go in for a big barrel hug, he says “Welcome to Open Door, Jesus loves you, and I’m so glad you’re here.”

Now I get how that might turn some people off, but I was touched – this was the senior Pastor of a sizeable church. That hug, that loving welcome, it ministered to me way more than the sermon did and this guy was like a popular conference speaker. I mean, he could preach, but it was his posture that showed me how much he loved God and how much he loved people. I’ll never forget that.

Just like Mary didn’t have to put up a sign to say that she loved Jesus, neither did Pastor Howard, his warm welcome spoke volumes to me.

That’s Mary let’s get back to Martha. Luke says at the end of verse 40 that Martha comes to Jesus and asks him, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

Are you following this? Martha is accusing Jesus that he doesn’t care – the one you cast your cares on (1 Pet. 5:7) – yeah Him. She’s lost her mind. Do you realize who you’re talking to? And then, she says this, “Tell her to help me.” ‘My sister, the one who’s just sitting there at your feet – tell her to give me a hand.’

Martha has become so disordered that she’s exploded, and now she’s trying to justify her condemnation. But how does Jesus respond to this? In typical Jesus-fashion, so full of compassion, he gently and directly addresses her.

“Martha, Martha.” “You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

So, do you think Martha understood? What did Mary do that was better? How could she have missed it? I think Martha missed it just like we often do – we’re running around, going to work, writing papers for school, doing errands, trying to eat well, trying go to the gym, wanting to be social with friends – the original intent of all of this is to glorify God, to live your best life for Him, but we fail to do the most important thing: to stop and listen to God.

When we care more about working for Jesus than being with Jesus, we’re getting it wrong. That’s the most important thing: listening to God – that’s the priority.

Charles Spurgeon was considered the prince of preachers. Based at a church in London, England, he was perhaps the leading Christian voice in the 1800s. Because of his ability to interpret the Bible, all of his life people would ask him questions about it. They would come to him asking about difficult passages in the Bible – asking about points of theology. And do you know what he would always tell them first, **“There is much desirable, but this is second to what is needful [this is second to what’s most important]. You never advance beyond this. It is needful to sit at Jesus’ feet.”**

Jesus cared Martha; Jesus just cares more about your first priority. He cares more about you listening to him and abiding in him than anything else.

Do you know what a priority is? Priority comes from the word ‘prior’ –something that comes before everything else – its foundational, it’s preeminent, its antecedent, its supreme.

What in your life comes before anything else? It is truly Jesus?

When you prioritize, what you’re doing is simplifying. I’ll do this first today – nothing else before that.

WE NEED A SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS.

This is what makes a Christian.

David said in Psalm 27, “one thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” One thing: to behold the beauty of the Lord.

Paul said in Philippians 3: “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.” One thing: to know Christ.

One thing is needed for David, one thing is needed for Paul, that’s it.

If you stripped everything out of their lives, it wouldn’t matter because they’d have this – and that’s just it.

Check out the last thing Jesus says to Martha, “Mary has chosen what is better, and it will **not** be taken away from her.”

Essentially Jesus tells Martha, ‘Mary’s choice to sit at my feet and listen, I’m not taking that away from her.’ The amazing thing is that the same is true for you and me. Everything in our lives will fade except for this – even the good things about God that you desire. In eternity the only thing that will remain is you sitting at the feet of Jesus.

And if that’s all the matters, is it not worth slowing down to savour? Accepting Jesus’ invitation will enable you to experience the one thing that is needed: listening to his Divine word – not in between text messages, but truly knowing God.

We need to live lives marked not by distraction, but devotion. Our posture needs to point to our priority. And we need single-minded focus. STEER – STOP – SIMPLIFY, that’s slowing down to savour the saviour.

Okay, so if that’s all there is to it, why do I want to do an entire series on slowing down? As simple as it sounds, this is something that we all need to Jesus is going to introduce us to some practices that he did when he was on this earth. We’re going to look at what are commonly known as “spiritual disciplines.” Each week we’ll consider how things like solitude, sabbath, and prayer help us to see Jesus more clearly.

As we do this, I want to be very clear that this does not mean the Centred spiritual barometer turns into, ‘I’m doing well in my faith *if* this discipline is going well in my life’. We all have things to improve on but the reason we began in Luke with Mary and Martha is because as I’ve shared tonight, we measure our faith by our love of God first. And second, based on the parable of the good Samaritan (directly before this evening’s text) we measure our faith by our love of people. These disciplines then become practices to help us better love God and better love people. Let’s pluck out the distractions in our lives and let’s savour Jesus together.