

ReGIFTING SERIES
Part One: Just Sit
Pastor Rick Henderson October 1-2, 2022

Did I ever tell you guys about the time I was invited to a private dinner with some well-known pastors and authors? I was at a pastor's conference at a very large church on the west coast. One of my friends from seminary was on staff at that church. He was able to pull a few strings and got me an invite. If I listed the names of the people at the dinner that night, some of you would definitely recognize the names.

My buddy told me not to get my hopes up, but there was a chance Tim Keller was going to be at the dinner. I did my best to not get too excited, but I couldn't help it. Some of you know Tim Keller has had a profound impact on me. He's my favorite pastor and has been a mentor from a distance.

I was a little bit like a fan girl. I hadn't packed for an event like this. I was a last-minute addition. I ended up going to the mall and buying new clothes. I think I annoyed my wife by making her facetime with me, just trying to pick the right look.

I know it's ridiculous. Maybe you can't relate. But for me it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. When I got there, it was almost too awkward how early I showed up. Fortunately, my friend wasn't too far behind. When it came time to sit down for dinner, Tim Keller was a no show. I was big time disappointed, but I was trying to make the most of a chance to talk with some really great leaders.

Right as we were being served dessert, guess who showed up. Tim Keller! He sat down two seats from me. About the exact same time, the two ladies who catered the meal walked in and said that they were stuck in the driveway with a flat tire. If you were in the room that night, and you had to pick out who looked like they didn't belong, you would pick my friend and me. We were young, and we were the low-ranking guys in the room. That's when it was suggested that my friend and I go give the two ladies some help. By the time we finally got the tire changed, the evening was over. Most people had already left. I missed the entire conversation with Tim Keller.

Everything that you are feeling for me right now I want you to hold onto. The story I told is just a story. It didn't really happen. But all the things you are feeling on my behalf are going to help you connect with a story of something that did happen. Jesus showed up at the house of some friends. This is what went down.

Luke 10:38-40 *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!"*

I don't care if you are a man or a woman. I want you to imagine yourself as Mary right now. You're not just sitting near someone whom you admire. You are sitting at the feet of God in the flesh. And maybe you don't totally understand all of that. But you know this is the man who performs miracles. This is the man who teaches with authority you've never experienced before. When he speaks, you know God is

with you, and God loves you. And out of everyone in the room, you are the one who is picked to leave and go do some chores.

As you're imagining how you might respond, this is how Jesus responded.

Luke 10:41-42 *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "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."*

There is a lot to unpack here. Let's start with this question.

QUESTION: Why would Martha expect Mary to give up the chance to ***sit at Jesus' feet***?

The first thing we must do is make sure we understand the significance of this moment and what this question is asking. The passage we read described Mary as sitting at Jesus' feet. It is completely understandable that we might interpret that as descriptive. Perhaps she was sitting on floor, next to where Jesus was seated. While that is understandable, it's not accurate.

Luke 10:39 *She had a sister called Mary, **who sat at the Lord's feet** listening to what he said.*

This is a descriptive phrase, but it's not describing location. This was an idiom, or an expression that means she was in the position of a disciple. She's not just in the room. She was included as a disciple of this rabbi. She's included as a disciple of Jesus. Sitting at someone's feet is about status as a disciple, not location in the room.

We have expressions that work in a similar way in our own language. Think of a phrase like, "He's got you under his thumb." Or "She's got you wrapped about her little finger." These are descriptive statements, but they aren't describing where you are. They are describing something about you. You are under someone's control. Or you are under someone's influence. This phrase meant Mary was a disciple of Jesus.

It may be difficult for us to fully appreciate the impact of what Luke wrote. This was radical. This was revolutionary. It was nothing short of being culturally explosive. Women were not disciples. Now, that wasn't God's idea. That wasn't taught in the Old Testament. Rather, it was the culture that developed. Only men were disciples.

What did it mean to be a disciple? The word means learner, student, or follower. What were the expectations and privileges of being the disciple of a rabbi?

- First, it was an honor. Disciples were esteemed because they were the top students out of all potential disciples. The more highly esteemed the rabbi was, the more prestigious it was to be a disciple.
- Disciples got to be in closest proximity and had the greatest access to the rabbi.
- Disciples weren't simply consumers of information. The goal wasn't to win a trivia contest. The expectation was that they would go on to teach and lead others in the way of that rabbi.
- **REMEMBER:** Leadership is a destination of discipleship.
- Disciples became like their rabbi.

Unfortunately, their culture, just like almost all human culture, had calcified around status, value, and privilege being based on gender differences, ethnic differences, and economic differences. When Jesus stepped on the scene, he dropped a grenade on that way of being. It was disruptive for everyone. It disrupted first-century Israel. It disrupted Greco-Roman culture. Jesus continues to disrupt cultures today.

I'm curious if you've ever heard of these prayers before. It's important that you know them. Because knowing these prayers unlocks the cultural mindset of the world at that time. Knowing these prayers will cause the words of the New Testament to jump off the page!

Plato introduced this prayer into Greco-Roman thought.

I thank god that I was born Greek and not barbarian, a free man and not a slave, a man and not a woman, but above all, I was born in the age of Socrates. —Plato

Oddly enough, there was daily prayer Jewish men prayed that was almost identical.

Blessed art thou, O God, for not making me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. (Jewish Prayer)

This is a prayer someone like the Apostle Paul would have likely said daily, prior to becoming a follower of Jesus. And it was following Jesus, it was being transformed by the gospel, that completely unraveled that thinking for him. Hold those two prayers in mind as we read these words the Apostle Paul wrote.

Colossians 3:11 *Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

Galatians 3:28-29 *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

EVERYTHING that it means to be a disciple is fully applied to **EVERYONE** who follows Jesus.

So, why would Martha expect Mary to give up the chance to **sit at Jesus' feet**? Everything in her culture would have reinforced that Mary was ignoring her gender role. She should mind her place. Let the men do what men do, and women should do what women do. But with Jesus, everything that it means to be a disciple is fully applied to everyone who follows Jesus. No matter your ethnicity. No matter your gender. No matter your economic status. No matter your age. Everything that it means to be a disciple is fully applied to everyone who gives their allegiance to Jesus. And that's why Jesus responded the way he did.

Luke 10:41-42 *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "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."*

Paraphrasing what Jesus said: "Mary made the right choice. I'm not going to let anyone take that away from her."

There's another question we should ask.

QUESTION: Why would Martha exchange *sitting* with Jesus for *servicing* Jesus?

To be sure, culturally defined gender roles worked on her thinking. Culturally defined gender roles framed the story she was telling herself about herself. And yet, Luke's description and Jesus' response lets us know more was going on beneath the surface.

Luke 10:40a *But Martha was **distracted by all the preparations** that had to be made.*

Martha was distracted by all there was to do. Some of you guys can resonate with this better than others. If you're gifted at hospitality, if you're a manager, if you're a get-it-done type—you instinctively know what she was thinking and feeling. What do you think that might have been?

- ***If I don't get this done, what will people think of me?*** She's feeling the pressure to meet expectations.
- ***People will think I'm a bad host.*** That would have made her a failure culturally. The kind of host you were was a cause of honor or shame.
- Who can relate to this one? ***Everyone is just expecting me to get this done!*** Feelings of resentment were probably starting to emerge.

Whether you can relate to Martha or not, there is biblical wisdom just sitting here for all of us.

More things **DEMAND** your _____ than **DESERVE** your _____.

- Attention
- Time
- Emotional Energy

More things demand your **DEVOTION** than deserve your **DEVOTION**.

This isn't pop psychology. This isn't bumper sticker theology. This is the deep-down stuff of the gospel.

What is going to get your devotion? Walking through the mall one day, I saw this t-shirt.



It didn't offend me. It made me laugh. But it also gave me serious pause. This perfectly summarizes a religious mindset. This perfectly summarizes a mindset that isn't yet framed by the gospel.

You've probably heard us ask the identity question:

"What is the story I'm telling myself about myself?"

What is the story you are telling yourself about yourself? From a 30,000 ft view, there are two kinds of answers. And it's just too easy to go with the wrong answer.

What is the story I'm telling myself about myself?

- What I do determines who I am.
- Who I am determines what I do.

Whatever is the best way to describe the mix of thoughts and feelings of Martha, they robbed her of the ability to simply be with Jesus and enjoy those moments with him.

I think she is exactly like most of us. ***What I do determines who I am.*** I am the sum total of my successes and failures. I am what others perceive of me. It's so easy to live in that mindset. It's one of the devastating impacts of sin. And it's part of what makes the gospel shine brightly. The gospel means good news. It's the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

He lived the life we could never live. He died the death we should have died. He rose from the dead, proving he has the power to forgive and offer eternal life. We were unacceptable. Jesus made us acceptable. We weren't good enough. Jesus was good enough for us. The gospel is good news and bad news. We are far more guilty, sinful, and morally broken than we could ever dare admit, AND we are far more loved, forgiven, and accepted in Jesus Christ than we could ever dare hope.

Jesus gives us a better story to tell ourselves about ourselves. This is why he deserves our devotion. This is why our church is committed to leading others to be fully devoted disciples of Jesus. And this is part of what that means.

IDENTITY: I find joy in defining myself by what Jesus did, not what I do.

People who don't understand that will be enslaved in a religious way of thinking that will always elevate serving and striving and doing for Jesus. People who understand the gospel are free to just sit with Jesus. And that's exactly what Martha should have done.

As I've prepared for this series, I've benefitted from a book called *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*. It's been a benefit to other pastors on staff, too. We recommend it to you. If you read it, you'll see that it's had a major impact on this series. The author is Peter Scazzero.

An emotionally healthy disciple slows down to be with Jesus, goes beneath the surface of their life to be deeply transformed by Jesus, and offers their life as a gift to the world for Jesus. —Peter Scazzero

I want my life to be gift. I know many of you want your life to be a gift. It would be the thrill of a lifetime to play a role in helping other people discover the gift of Jesus. Think about that. Your life can be the gift of helping other people discover the gift of Jesus. With that in mind, I want to introduce you to our series thesis. This will be the drumbeat every week.

SERIES THESIS: We are the **WRAPPING PAPER** that people have to get **THROUGH** to get **TO** Jesus.

Each week we are going to unpack this more.

People will experience me, and they will experience you, before they experience Jesus. If we are going to play a role in helping others discover and know Jesus, they will experience what we are like before they experience what Jesus is like. We are the wrapping paper that people have to get through to get to Jesus.

What kind of wrapping paper are you?

As you look at this package, doesn't it look nice? It feels like someone invested a lot of effort to present it perfectly, like it's got everything together. Believe it or not, we have a vulnerability to do the same thing with how we present ourselves. It's so easy for us to wrap ourselves up with the appearance that we've got it all together. Any church culture or any individual follower of Jesus who loses commitment to the gospel, who loses being centered by the gospel, who loses understanding of the gospel—can easily settle for presenting themselves like they've got it all together.

When that happens, we accidentally communicate that you have to dress the right way, act the right way, and say the right words in the right way to be acceptable. We accidentally communicate that we're defined by what we do. But that's not the gospel. When we trust Jesus, we are defined by what he did, not what we do. Your approval and acceptability are not based on your performance. Martha was distracted and unable to simply be with Jesus because she was stuck in the wrong mindset.

QUESTION: What could have Martha done differently?

So what if the dinner preparations weren't done? It's Jesus. Viola! Dinner is ready.

Seriously. What was she supposed to do? Let's get practical. If I could snap my fingers and transport you to five minutes before that moment, what would you say to her? What exactly should Martha have done with all those frantic feelings? What should she have done with the mounting anxiousness and pressure distracting her? Would it have been better to just ignore those feelings and thoughts? Would it have been better to suppress the feelings and thoughts? Should she have pretended she wasn't feeling and thinking those things and just sat there? Who's tried that?

Here's a crazy idea. What if she had simply said to Jesus, "I'm feeling pressure to get things done right now, and it feels like everyone is just expecting me to do it. Jesus, what do you want me to do?" Imagine. How would this be different if she was able to express what she was feeling and thinking to Jesus as a way of giving him permission to lead her?

This is the big idea I want you take with you.

BOTTOM LINE: Just **SIT** with Jesus first.

Yes, there's plenty of work to do and ways we should serve. But that's not where we start. If we want people's experience with us to grow their desire for Jesus, step 1 is being with Jesus. And it's not: "OK, did that—now on to step 2." This is a regular practice of being a disciple. We make a habit of sitting at Jesus' feet.

I say that, and I know it sounds like pastor-speak. I know it sounds like Christian-ese mumbo jumbo. You say stuff like this at church, but we don't really know what it means. So I want to model for you exactly what it is I'm talking about.

I might be the most insecure person I know. My insecurity isn't anybody else's fault. That's one of the impacts of sin and living in a broken world. Adding to that, I've got some father wounds. My insecurity grew all on its own. But my dad wounds added some fertilizer to it. I can totally relate to Martha's inner frantic feeling of not being enough. I can totally relate to the anxious feelings of "It's time to get to work, and if I don't perform, then I'll be exposed, and people will know that I'm not enough."

I wish I could tell you that giving my life to Jesus meant the insecurity monster magically went away. Giving my life to Jesus means I don't have to face it alone. Jesus is with me, and if I will just sit with him, he wants to speak words of truth and life over me. By the way, that is basically what you're reading all through the Psalms.

Dear God,

I'm sad and scared and jealous. I don't understand what's happening. But I'm going to just worship you and think about your truth, goodness, and beauty. And when I do, I see myself and my situation correctly.

That's a basic outline of half the Psalms. So, here is a snapshot of how I just sit with Jesus.

Jesus,

I don't feel good enough or smart enough. I feel insecure. I feel defensive. I feel like I need to look like I have it all together. I feel vulnerable to defining myself by what I do, and I feel vulnerable to defining myself by what others think about me. I'm vulnerable to forgetting the good news of the gospel. Will you speak to me through your word? Will you show me your truth, goodness, and beauty? Will you help me to better see and enjoy you, so that I can look more like you?

And then I read his word urgently. It has everything I need for the life he has called me too.

As we approach communion, I invite you to do the same thing. "Jesus, I feel anxious, hurried, defensive, prone to gossip, struggling with gratitude, self-reliant...(whatever it is.) And I take communion now as a way to remember your truth, goodness, and beauty. You gave your life for me. I'm defined by what you did, not what I do. Help me remember the gospel."