

# Choosing the Better

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Today's reading you can find on page 1042 in your Bible, and it's Luke chapter 10, verse 38, all the way through to chapter 11, verse 13.

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 few things are needed.

Or indeed, only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples. He said to them, When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation. Then Jesus said to them, Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread.

A friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him. And suppose the one inside answers, Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed.

Yet I can't get up and give you anything. I tell you, Even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, Yet because of your shameless audacity, He will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives.

The one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, Will give him a snake instead?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, Know how to give good gifts to your children, How much more will your Father in heaven Give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

This is the word of the Lord. Matt, thanks for reading that for us. And if we've not met, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. It would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bible open.

If you've not looked at the reading as it was read, It's page 1042 in the church Bibles there. And as is our custom as a church, We're just going to look and try and bring out what's there in the Bible.

[ 3 : 26 ] And we're in this series in Luke's Gospel, Working through it so that God is setting the agenda for us. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful. And we're going to ask for God's help first.

Let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, Thank you for your word to us And this opportunity to hear you speak to us.

So we depend on your spirit And ask that you will open our ears to hear your voice. And that you'll give us heads that can understand And hearts willing to respond rightly to you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Sometimes on Back to Church Sunday, like is today, We've done this before, And aimed at things being especially accessible for guests.

And sometimes our focus then becomes To look for somewhere in the Bible Where we really get to see the building blocks Of what it is that Christians believe. And explain what Christians believe.

[ 4 : 28 ] Today, this portion of Luke's Gospel Gives us something different. We see much more what the Christian life is really like. And if we're thinking about What it would be like to be a Christian, There are all kinds of things we might think of.

Maybe we think Christians are people who've decided They want to be good. They want to be better people. So they start going to church. Or maybe we might think Christians are people who love tradition.

Who love being rooted In something that's gone on for centuries. In the pattern of a service. Or maybe we see Christians And think they're looking for community In an individualized culture.

Or maybe we just think Christians are people who need help. And they're struggling to get through life. And they come to church. Well, Jesus shows us in this passage What it is to be a Christian.

And a Christian is called Into this extraordinary Personal relationship with God. It's about knowing the living God Who made us.

[ 5 : 35 ] We're going to look at it in three sections. The first scene with Martha and Mary. Our first point is Choose the blessing of devoted listening. Jesus arrives at this village Where Martha lives and opens her home For him to stay.

And her sister Mary Sits at his feet as he teaches. It's the first century posture Of learning from a wise Godly teacher and leader.

But Martha has found herself too busy To join in with that. She's distracted by the preparations. And she actually then gets exasperated That Mary isn't seeing the need that she sees.

And she takes it out on Jesus. She says, Lord, don't you care? Tell her to help me. And Jesus gently corrects her In verse 41 With this lesson for all of us.

If we look there. 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.

[ 6 : 44 ] And the lesson for us like Martha Is that we need to be aware That having a very busy life Can carry with it the danger That it's an empty life It's a dry life spiritually.

Maybe you feel sympathy for Martha. Maybe you're someone who feels That you're the one who always notices Things that need doing. And you step in to help.

And you start thinking to yourself Why is it always me? Why does it always seem to be me That's the one who offers to stand in When the crash rotor has a gap. Or offers to stand in When the person doing the tea and coffee Is ill last minute.

Or the life course needs someone Cooking the dinner for week one Or making my space  
Making space in my diary For the person at church Who really needs to talk over  
something With somebody.

And then we start to feel a bit Bitter about that And we turn to God And we say God, could  
you have a word With the rest of my church family? Could you tell them to help a bit  
more?

[ 7 : 48 ] Because it always seems to be me. And that's what's so powerful Really about this scene  
Is that when you think about it Martha is doing something really good. She's not stopped  
listening to Jesus To go out on a run While he's there.

She's not decided she'll revise instead. She's not bunked off to watch Traitors. She's  
actively serving him. But Jesus is right there speaking.

And Martha has allowed her busyness To divert her attention Away from what really  
matters. In other words It's possible to have a very busy life A very active life Full of doing  
good things Including church activity and ministry And yet For that busyness To draw your  
heart away From true devotion to Jesus.

And when we get busy like that We can end up doing things for Jesus But really doing  
them independently of him As though we've got clear in our heads That Jesus was for us  
in the past And he came and he died for us And we've got clear in our heads That he'll be  
with us in the future Because he's going to come And we can be with him forever But we  
feel as though Yeah but in the present He's just kind of left me To get on with serving him  
Without him What we're seeing here Is that the Christian life Is a relationship with Jesus  
So the shape of it Is organic dependence And Jesus calls us To choose a way of devotion  
A way of service That has at its very heart Listening to him Listening to his words And it's  
very striking That Luke puts this scene here Because we're in this section of Luke All  
about It's like a discipleship manual It's lessons along the way About how to be a disciple

In this section of Luke's gospel And in recent weeks What we've seen Since the end of  
chapter 9 Verse 60 Is that following Jesus Involves a lot of activity He said that He has  
announced and made clear That he is God's promised rescuing king Here to bring this  
good news Of a fresh start with God For anyone who'll trust him And when you become a  
follower of him When you trust that news You are called to be a herald To make that news  
known Because everyone needs to hear it And as you go about Making that news known  
We are called to love Everyone around us Even our enemies And at this point We might  
be thinking This is quite overwhelming I'm going to be busy And then right at that moment  
Luke tells us about this scene This event It's probably not what happened next It's here  
because It's what we need to hear next It's what we need to learn next

[ 10 : 44 ] That as a follower of Jesus As he says in verse 42 Few things are needed Or maybe only  
one Mary has chosen what's better Now Mary has Jesus physically with her But how do  
we choose what's best today?

How do I listen? Well we open up our Bibles And that might sound an anti-climax Quite  
underwhelming The minister's telling me to read my Bible again But as we open the Bible  
In prayerful dependence God speaks to us That's what the Bible claims for us And  
promises to us And today in Scotland We live in times of great opportunity And great  
danger Great privilege and opportunity Because we have the Bible So freely available to  
us In our own language Well just last Sunday night actually At church we were praying For  
Christians in parts of the world Where you go to prison For being a Christian And where  
they'll often not have a Bible They'll often not have the Bible In their own language They  
may just have a few verses They've heard From someone who shared the news And  
they've taken them to heart And they're locked up somewhere And they just have a few  
verses Of Jesus' words to recite And we live in a nation

Where we are freely able To access God's word As it's been delivered to us Great  
privilege But great danger Because we live in the age Of overwhelming information Do we  
not?

And where our phones We carry around with us Are full of apps And notifications That are designed By a very clever industry To distract us To grab our attention And to hold our attention That is what The tech giants Want to do It's what they've invested billions Doing so well Distracting us And holding our attention And it's affecting How we think It's affecting Our ability to concentrate And Jesus says To you and me today Will you choose the better And listen to me?

Now if you've not done that before We've got some copies In our bookstall today Of this little book Time with God It's a pound And it's a great way It's a great way to start Or to get back into it It's 28 days Where each day There's a Bible reading To read And some pointers To help you reflect on it And to talk to God About it And maybe you're someone Who needs to recalibrate Today Maybe you've drifted From listening to Jesus Or you've just never really Given that a go On your own Let's choose the blessing Of paying attention To Jesus' words When King Charles Was crowned He was wearing Priceless jewels And diamonds And gold But at the coronation The moderator Of the Church of Scotland Hands to him a Bible As has happened to Every previous monarch And said We present you With this book The most valuable thing

[ 14 : 07 ] That this world affords Here is wisdom This is the royal law These are the very lively Oracles of God And they're not just For a king We see here today In God's word Jesus says to you and me Will you listen to me?

Why would we do that? Well we've seen already In Luke's gospel Why we should do that That these are the words To build your life on Would you like to be secure In your life? Well Jesus said In Luke chapter 6 Anyone who hears my words And puts them into practice Is like a wise man Who builds his house On a rock And when the storm comes And principally We're talking about The storm of God's Future judgment Against sin The house stands firm Because the person Has listened obediently To Jesus' words Don't we want to be secure?

If you build your life On these words You have nothing to fear Or would you like To be fruitful In your life? Well in Luke chapter 8 Verse 15 He said That if you receive His words With an obedient heart And you retain them There will be fruit In your life His words will change you And people will be able To see that As you're changed From the inside out And he says You'll be loved In chapter 8 Verse 21 He says Those who listen Obediently to his words Are his family Loved by God And I find these promises So striking Because Could you not Do you not think So much of people's Busyness And relentless activity In their lives Is to try and get These things To try and be secure To try and be loved And to try and be fruitful And Jesus says You can have all of that If you listen to me Listen attentively

To my words Obediently to my words And then we think Ah but if you really Put Jesus' words Into practice It's going to spoil Your fun And then in In the next chapter Verse 28 He says If you listen Obediently to his words Chapter 11 Verse 28 It will bless you It doesn't spoil your life It blesses your life And here in verse 42 He says to He says to Martha Mary has chosen What's better And it will not Be taken away From her So this is the thing You can do That will last In your life That's our first point Choose the blessing Of devoted listening And in any healthy relationship We need to listen And we also talk To the other person Don't we So the rest of our section Is about prayer Our second point Join in With the pattern Of faithful prayer Notice this block Of faithful asking Join in with the pattern

Of faithful asking Notice this block Of teaching Emerges with a question The disciples Have noticed That Jesus Is a man Of great prayer And so one of his disciples Says Lord Teach us to pray And it shows us That even though Prayer is something That we can try Anytime Anywhere Whatever age we are It's also something We can grow in We can learn We can be instructed And get better And Jesus gives us This model Disciples prayer Now if it looks A bit different To you From the one We pray Sunday by Sunday Here That we prayed This morning already It's because Lots of us Will know Slightly better The version In Matthew's gospel Matthew recorded Jesus teaching This model Disciples prayer Evidently On a different Occasion And it's slightly Different But the principles Are the same Notice the privilege Jesus extends To us Of addressing God As our Father He says Verse 2 When you pray

[18:01] Say Father We come To God Who is So powerful The universe Was made By him To display His grandeur But we come As a child To our Heavenly Father And the story Was famously Told in Roman Times Of an emperor Who returned To Rome After some Months away And as was Custom Waited outside The city For the streets To be lined And everything To be prepared By the crowds And his wife The empress Was waiting On a platform Somewhere in Rome With their son And as he came in Paraded in Returning to Rome The son got off The platform And made his way Through the crowds To be right On the roadside And as the emperor Came by He made to run Into the road And a Roman soldier Grabbed him And said You can't go Now The emperor Is coming And the boy Turned to the guard And said

He's your emperor But he's my father And Jesus says to us When we trust him That's the privilege He shares with us With the living God And that's wonderful Whatever experience You've had Of your own father Whether you're Someone who can say I've actually had A really good dad And it's brilliant Because it's shown me The qualities of a dad That I know Will be perfect In my heavenly father Or whether you're Someone who has to say Well actually My dad disappointed me Or I never knew my dad But my consolation is Knowing that everything You'd want From the ideal dad Is fulfilled now In God As my father And Jesus has brought me Into that family So that my father In heaven is strong And he's protective And he's kind And he's generous And he's wise And he's good And he's just And he's concerned for me And he's ambitious for me And he's rooting for me

And he's courageous And he's merciful So we run to him in prayer And we say Father And knowing what he's like We get this Copernican revolution For our prayer life Through this model prayer Copernicus Was the guy who Everyone thought That the sun went Round the world And that the earth Was at the centre Of the universe And Copernicus realised No we are going Round the sun And when we come To pray Naturally We tend to come With our concerns At the forefront Of our mind But Jesus wants To turn that around And say We're not the centre Of the universe So that Knowing how good God is And having had a glimpse Of his glory And having felt The warmth Of his goodness When we come to pray We start with His cause And then we turn To our cares It's his purposes And then It's our provision So first The next petition In verse 2 The first petition is

Hallowed be your name That is that Our desire is That God's name Would be renowned And set apart And honoured In our world Today That we're distressed That he is overlooked And not known And ignored And I think In the backdrop Here Of this petition In the Lord's Prayer Is a promise In the Old Testament That the prophet Ezekiel Spoke words From God About how When the people Of God In the Old Testament Had rejected God And turned from him God judged them But it kind of It brought Shame on the name Of God That his people Were in distress Because they were Under judgment And God promises In Ezekiel 36 That he will never Do that again Because of his name The importance of His name being hallowed He says I'm going to send My spirit And I'm going to Rescue people And I'm going to Transform them And that will mean That the world

Will know That I'm the Lord And so when we pray To God Hallowed be your name One of the key ways He's going to do that Is through the next Petition that we pray Your kingdom come That we ask that God will do His saving work And expand Jesus' saving reign As people The way God's Kingdom comes Is people As individuals Accept that Jesus is their king He's their saving king And God's kingdom Grows And with Both these prayers We're also We have our mind On God's promises For the future That the risen Jesus Is going to come back And establish God's righteous rule Forever in our world And then his name Will be hallowed Forever So Jesus' prayer Moves our gaze Upwards From our own concerns To the big things God's doing Across the world In rescuing people To know him And at the same time God is concerned For us

[ 23 : 05 ] And so then We turn to pray And we pray For our provision Give us each day Our daily bread We turn to God And we ask him To provide For our simple needs And then we pray For our pardon What an encouragement It is to us today To know that Jesus Knows what we're like Enough to know That every day We will need to say To God Forgive us our sins And then for our protection Spiritually Lead us not into temptation Is that a prayer That you pray Day by day To God Lord Don't let me Be left alone With that person Lord Help me to avoid Having access To online pornography Lord Protect me From ways That I could Become greedy And be seduced By money Lord Please guard me From opportunities To sin That might draw My heart Away from you It's a prayer That knows our weakness Isn't it Knows that we depend On him

To keep going These are the things To ask for As a child of God And then Jesus Gives us two parables That help us see How we are to ask So that's our third point To take up the privilege Of audacious prayer The first parable Is about a potential Social embarrassment In that culture In the Middle East In Jesus' time You would You would Go and buy Or you would bake The bread That you needed For that day And if you'd done it right At the end of the day You had no bread left And if A friend visits You would be Socially obliged And expected To take them in And look after them So that's how Jesus sets this up He's saying Imagine your friend Arrives at midnight You've got no bread Left for them There's no 24 hour Supermarket Your only hope Is to wake up Your next door neighbour You're going to

Wake his whole family Because the houses Are not big But there's no other option You're in need So you go And you knock And he says Verse 7 Don't bother me The door's already locked I'm in bed My kids are in bed I can't get up And give you anything We can't do this But Says Jesus But Verse 8 He says Even though he'll not get up And give you the bread Because of friendship Yet because of your Shameless audacity He will surely get up And give you as much As you need So it's an illustration Of the phrase If you don't ask You don't get You might even do that With a neighbour Who isn't your friend In the middle of the night You're in need You've got nowhere else to turn You might go If you don't ask You don't get How much more then Your heavenly father For whom There's never going to be

A bad time To hear from you He is never going to Hear us praying And say Are you really asking me About that now Have you not seen The news Have you not seen What I'm having to deal with In Venezuela And Iran No Go to him Be audacious Ask Don't let yourself Be someone Who does not have Because you didn't ask And you can see Why I think that's The point Jesus is making Because look at verse 9 The very next thing he says So I say to you Ask Ask And it will be given to you He says Seek and you will find Knock And the door will be opened to you Now maybe there's a word here as well For you If you're a visitor today And you're looking in Because you might have come today Looking at the Christian faith Thinking I want to see more evidence About Jesus And we can talk about evidence On the life course This would be a great place To ask questions

You have about evidence But when we come to look At the claims of Jesus What takes a bit of humility From us Is to accept That he says Ultimately You can't find God On your own And if you just look back Over the page At chapter 10 Verse 22 In fact If you just look up At chapter 10 Verse 21 There Previous page Jesus prays to God Full of joy He says I praise you Father Lord of heaven and earth Because you've hidden These things From the wise and learned And revealed them To little children Yes Father For this is what You were pleased to do All things have been Committed to me By my Father No one knows Who the Son is Except the Father And no one knows Who the Father is Except the Son And those to whom The Son chooses To reveal him And if Jesus Had stopped there We may as well all give up And go home There is no way To find God

[ 28 : 08 ] These things are Hidden from us And no one knows The Father Except the Son And those to whom The Son chooses To reveal him So what do we do?

Well he revealed These things to Mary When she sat at his feet And then We're urged To ask Ask And it will be given To you Seek In other words Seek God And you will find Knock And the door Will be opened To you Could you do that?

If you're someone Who's still looking in Would you be willing To have the humility To ask That God Would make yourself Known Make himself Known To you So that's our First parable Ask boldly But in the Christian life We might find Ourselves thinking I'm not sure I can give this Problem to God Because How do I know I can trust him That what he gives me In answer to my prayers Is something I can handle So that's the point Of the next parable Jesus says From Verse 11 Imagine Your son Asked you For a fish A good thing And you said I've got it Close your eyes Put your hands out And he felt the scales In his hand And he opens them In anticipation And you've put A venomous snake In his hands

Who would do that Or imagine Your son Asks you For an egg A good thing And you say Yeah I've got one Close your eyes Put your hands out And he feels A hard shell In his hands And he opens his eyes And unrolling In his palm To his horror It's not an egg It's a scorpion What kind of a dad Would do that And then Jesus Knows us Look at The little aside Of what he calls us In verse 13 He says If you then Though you are evil It's quite striking Isn't it So he's saying You get a lot wrong In your life But even you Generally Try and give Good gifts To your kids Well then Verse 13 How much more Will your father In heaven Give the holy spirit To those who ask him In other words Trust him He's saying Trust him Let your prayers

Be expectant Because they are shaped By knowing God As a trustworthy father He cares more For our holiness Than our happiness He's more concerned For our character Than our comfort And sometimes We get answers To our prayers That we struggle To make sense of I know that But we can trust That he is good And he is wise And he's powerful And he is never Going to give us Something harmful He wouldn't do that He's a good father And let's notice Here as well That the example Jesus gives Of a good gift The father would give us If we ask Is the holy spirit Is he helping us See that Whatever situation We're facing What we do need Is God with us So that we might Be saying Well I prayed And I still Didn't get the job Or he still Didn't say yes Or the test results

[ 31 : 46 ] Still really Weren't what I wish They had been But I am Able to trust That I'm going Through this with God And that he wouldn't Put anything harmful In my hands So how do we know We can trust him Well for that We come right back To the start Of our reading Chapter 10 Verse 38 Where it says As Jesus and his disciples Were on their way And Luke just starts The scene there With this reminder That since the end Of chapter 9 Jesus has set out On a journey He set his face Resolutely For Jerusalem That's where he's going And today we see Mary at Jesus' feet Listening to him But we meet this same Mary Later in Jesus' life When the Apostle John Records that Just before Jesus Goes into Jerusalem Mary comes to him And does something Astonishing She breaks a jar

Of expensive perfume And she uses the perfume To anoint Jesus' head And his feet And when people Are outraged Jesus says She's anointing me For my burial Which is quite amazing When you think about it That Mary Was the one Who seemed to grasp Even before the Apostles Because she listened To Jesus That his rescue mission For us This fresh start With God He offers us Would only be possible If he died on the cross In our place For our sins So can we trust him Well he gives this Body of teaching Urging us To listen to him And to pray to him And do life with him And even as he Teaches this He is literally On his way To die for you Because that's What it's going to Cost him To give you This relationship With God Can you trust him He earned the right To be trusted At the cross

So let's pray Together Just a moment of quiet To reflect On God's word Heavenly Father Thank you that Jesus Calls us not to do things For you So much as to do life With you Depending on you May you give us More of your Holy Spirit That we might Take hold of The privileges Of the walk With you That you call us to That we would Each of us Wherever we stand Today Take steps forward In listening to Jesus And in prayer For our good And for your glory Amen Well do stand If you're able And teach To