

Mary: Making The Right Choices

There are major choices in life that all of us make and will make, and there are vocational choices, sometimes there are relational choices, there are sometimes health or medical choices, and of course spiritual choices that we make.

And you have a lot of say over these particular kinds of choices in your life,

But on the other hand, there are some things that you have no choice in.

Think about it.

You have no choice in where you were born.

You had no choice in how you were designed.

That is like your abilities and your personality.

Those things are given to you by God at birth.

And you had no choice in what family or what parents that you are born into.

You have no choice in what you're born as, by the way, male or female.

That's determined by God and not by choice as parents.

Our progressive culture wants us to believe.

And you had no choice in being born for a particular purpose.

All of us are here on purpose, with purpose.

Jeremiah 1.5 says, "...before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you."

That is, I designed you with a purpose.

"...and I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations."

That would be true of the prophet Jeremiah.

It would be true of all of us that God was intricately involved in our design before we ever got here.

God has plans for us, and those plans are His choice, and you and I are to respond to that.

They're predetermined.

Andy Andrews writes and says, why have you been created different and unique from everyone else?

And then he says, you have been made different so that you might make a difference.

And in some way, every choice that you make and action that you take matters.

Likewise, every choice you do not make, every action you do not take matters as well.

And then, of course, there are many of us facing circumstances that we had no choice in.

You have faced something like that.

You are sometimes a victim of somebody else's choices.

And

then there are just circumstances in a broken world where you face, there are crazy things that happen in life that you can't control and that you did not choose.

But what you can control, I bet you already know, is how you respond to those kinds of circumstances.

And it's important to understand the things that you had no choice in if you're going to live your life as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

And there are some things you have to do.

In fact, why don't you jot these down?

It's not on your outline, but there are some things you have to do.

And first, you have to accept God's design if you're going to respond properly to the things that you have no choice in.

You have to accept God's design.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

God made you the way you are.

Don't

Don't fuss at God for the way you are.

Instead, accept the way you are so God can use you as He has designed you.

And second, you must not only accept God's design, you must reflect God's design.

Do you know the Bible says that you're created in the imago Dei?

That is the image of God.

You and I are created in the image of God.

It didn't say we are God.

We are reflections of God.

And so not only must you accept God's design, you must reflect God's design.

You and I are to reflect who God is through our life.

And then third, you must select your response to God's design.

And that's a life-changing choice that you and I get to make.

Now, it can change your life for good or it can change your life for bad.

And that's why you have control of your response today.

to these things.

It has been said that all of us are where we are because of the choices that we have made.

And in a way, our choices have made us what we are today.

When Allison and I, when we, I've told this story probably a couple of times over the years, but when we, I remember our daughter who's been in town with us and is now 36, she, when we dropped her off for college, I remember taking her over and moving her into the dorm and all that goes with that.

And as I got ready to leave, Allison was going to stay with her and help her set up a house and shop for a couple of days.

And as I got ready to leave, she said, Daddy, I'll go with you to the car.

And so we walked.

I had parked a ways away, and we walked there.

And we sat down in the car, and I said, I just want to remind you of a few things before I go, sweetheart.

I said, your choices make a difference.

And first, I want you to remember this.

I want you to remember who you are.

And then I want you to remember whose you are.

You belong to him.

I want you to remember who you are, where you came from,

But I also want you to remember whose you are.

You are his.

You belong to him.

We gave him and dedicated you to him, just like these little ones were dedicated this morning.

Remember first who you are and whose you are.

And then second, I told her this.

I said, you're about to enter a new kind of freedom that you've never really known because we've been able to put protective boundaries around you.

But you're about to enter a new kind of freedom that you've never understood before.

And your choices are going to make all the difference in that new freedom.

And then I said this to her.

I said, I want you to remember this if you forget everything else.

Remember that one dumb choice can change your life forever.

One dumb choice can change your life forever.

I want you to know that's still true.

that our choices make a difference.

They matter.

That's true for all of us, and that's why understanding what I just said about accepting and reflecting who God is and your response, that's why that is important.

And that's what I want to talk to you about for the next few minutes from our passage this morning.

And our next hero that I think exhibits what it means to make right choices is Mary.

Now, there are a lot of Marys in the Bible, aren't there?

There's Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene.

And this is Mary, the sister of Martha.

They were sisters and they were close friends of Jesus.

If you're physically able to do so, why don't you stand with me?

As we read our passage this morning, if you're watching on television or live stream and you have a copy of God's Word nearby, why don't you set your Krispy Kreme down on the table and stand up and join us as we honor the reading of God's Word.

Verse 38, now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching.

But Martha was distracted with much serving.

And she went up to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her then to help me.

But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.

But one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.

Father, help us to learn from this hero of the faith, Mary, Martha too, Lord, both of these who loved you, served you.

But Father, help us to learn how to know what the right choice is and how to make those choices.

We do thank you for the freedom we have in choices, but we also, Father, take serious our responsibility to choose wisely.

and to choose rightly.

So, Father, would you speak now from your word?

We're listening to you, and we want to hear, Father, what you would say.

Take every word that I speak now, Father.

I surrender it to you under the cross.

Use it now, Father, for our good and for the good of the kingdom.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Thank you.

You can be seated.

Now, a lot of you know this story.

It's one of the more famous stories in the New Testament.

Two friends of Jesus, Martha and Mary,

and from them we learn that there are the importance of our choices.

There are two choices made in this passage.

Now, neither choice made was malicious.

Neither choice was ill-will.

Both were well-intentioned.

But simply put, one was a right choice and one was a wrong choice given the moment they were in.

Now remember that statement I just made, given the moment that they were in.

The moment can make the difference in the choice that you need to make.

And the presence of Jesus was there with them, and they had the opportunity to hear from him.

Now it's important to understand that Martha was a wonderful lady.

So don't misunderstand what I'm saying in this message.

This is not a message to beat up Martha.

Martha was a wonderful woman.

She loved Jesus, and both she and her sister, both of them wanted to please Jesus.

The problem was that in the moment, she was distracted by the wrong things, and that resulted in her own frustration and anxiety.

It caused her to make the wrong choice, while Mary rightly chose to take advantage of the moment and sit listening and learning from Jesus.

Now, I bet, if we're honest, most of us probably identify more with Martha than we do with Mary.

You know, most likely we have made the wrong choices when we've had good intentions, right intentions.

And so this morning, let's examine Mary's response.

Let's learn from Mary about what it means to make right choices and what that looks like.

The first thing that I want you to note this morning is found in verse 39, and that is Mary's concentration on the message.

Her concentration on the message, she sat at the Lord's feet and underlined the word listen because the idea here is that she gave Jesus her undivided attention.

Mary was willing to slow down and shut down what she had been doing in order to hear what Jesus was saying.

Don't miss that.

She had to slow down and she had to shut down.

I suspect she had been helping her sister, but when Jesus arrived, she slowed down and she shut down what she was doing so that she could sit at Jesus' feet and hear what he was saying.

And if you want to make the right choices, you have to learn to slow down.

You have to learn to slow down long enough to hear what Jesus is really saying.

That means concentrating on His message, concentrating on the message of Christ.

And it requires some things of us.

First of all, if you're going to hear the message of Christ, you're going to have to eliminate distractions in your life.

There's the elimination of certain things in your life.

What Martha was doing was not bad.

But listen, class, it was a distraction to the better things.

There are times when we have to eliminate the distractions in our life.

I heard about a man...

who was wearing a t-shirt, it had on the front of it, Jesus is coming, look busy.

Well, look, we should be busy for Jesus.

I agree.

But we must also know when to slow down and when to wait before the Lord Jesus so that we can hear what he has to say.

The goal isn't just to look busy for Jesus.

The goal is to know what Jesus wants, and to know what Jesus wants, you're going to have to sit down, slow down, maybe shut down some things in order to hear what He has to say.

There may be some things that you need to stop doing, some things that you need to eliminate in order to concentrate on the Word of God.

So each Tuesday, I do some teaching time with our staff, and

And we'll be in staff retreat for the next two days.

We do that twice a year.

And a lot of that will be playing.

A lot of it will be praying.

And a lot of it will be planning.

And one of the things that we'll do is spend a lot of time in a book that I asked them to read.

It's about our own personal spiritual growth.

A lot of our staff are busy.

You know, Sunday's a huge day for staff.

And you heard Jennifer kind of tongue-in-cheek say it's good to be in big church.

because she's running around with those little ones, taking care of those little ones.

And some years ago, the Lord put on my heart, feed your staff, feed your staff, not just the flock, feed the staff, so that their souls can be sturdy and strong.

And so at any rate, we do that in our weekly staff meeting.

I take a chunk of that meeting, and it's just teaching time and study time, and we talk and interact scripturally from God's Word.

But one of the things that I talked to him about this week is I said I came across a book that I read recently.

Well, some time ago actually, not recently.

It says every once in a while we need to create a stop doing list.

We have to-do lists.

But I thought what a novel idea, a stop doing list.

Here are some things I need to stop doing.

I need to stop these things because they're distractions to the better things that I could be doing.

So you might have to look at your life and say there's some elimination that needs to take place.

Secondly, if you're going to concentrate on the message of Jesus, there needs to be determination to settle down in the presence of Jesus.

I'm going to settle down in the presence of Jesus.

The Bible says in Psalm 46:10, be still and know that I am God.

The picture is of somebody running frantically around and God saying to them, whoa, whoa, whoa, just stop.

Settle down.

Settle down a bit so you can hear from me.

You need to eliminate some things, but you need to be determined to settle down as well.

An archaeologist once hired some Inca tribesmen to lead him to an archaeological site that was deep in the mountains.

And after they'd been moving for some time, these tribesmen suddenly stopped and insisted that they would go no further in this journey.

The archaeologists grew impatient and then angry.

But no matter how much he railed at them and cajoled at them to get up and to carry on, the tribesmen would not go any further.

And then all of a sudden, after a while and his exasperation with them, they picked up their gear and they set off once more.

When they finally came to a point of stop for the day, the bewildered archaeologist asked the lead tribesmen, why did you guys stop and refuse to move?

And this is the answer he got.

We'd been moving too fast, and we had to wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies.

I like that.

But sometimes we're just moving too fast.

And sometimes we need to settle down in the presence of Jesus.

Perhaps today you need to determine that you're going to stop in the presence of Jesus so you can listen to what he has to say to you.

And did you notice something as I was studying?

I've preached this passage through the years, I don't know, several times.

But I noticed something I never thought about when I was preparing this message, and that is that Jesus didn't tell Martha to settle down.

He didn't tell her to stop what she was doing.

Have you ever thought about that?

Mary is sitting there listening to him.

Martha is busy about her task, and he doesn't say, hey, Martha, come on in here.

You sit down too and listen.

He just let her keep doing her thing.

He didn't tell her, you need to settle down, Martha.

He didn't tell her, you stop what you're doing.

In fact, Jesus didn't say anything to her about her busyness until she spoke to him about what Mary was not doing.

Now, listen, you say, what's the point of that?

The point is this.

Jesus is not going to force you to concentrate on his message.

He's not going to force you to slow down.

He'll just let you run about and wear yourself out and then get frustrated and angered that I'm the only one doing anything.

Nobody else is doing anything.

Nobody else is helping.

All of that kind.

Jesus didn't.

He waited until she came.

And then he addressed it.

But he didn't say, hey, you need to stop too.

You need to settle down too.

Jesus is not going to force you to do that.

You get it?

Now, I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

Let me emphasize that.

I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

But most likely there are people sitting here this morning and you're already wondering when I'm going to finish this message.

Because you have other things that are distracting and clamoring for your attention and your energy.

I'm not trying to hurt your feelings, but most likely that's true.

How long is he going to go this week?

Am I right?

Don't answer that.

You'll hurt my feelings.

So the first thing that we learn from Mary about making right choices is that we have to slow down and get before Jesus in order to hear what he has to say.

Y'all got it?

Say you got it now.

All right.

So I can go on to point number two.

And that does lead us to point number two in the thing that I want to say to you and that is Mary's location to the Master mattered.

All right?

Her location was important to the Master.

It says that she went and she sat at the Master's feet.

Now, why did she sit at the Master's feet?

So she could concentrate on the message, as we just talked about.

And the image here is of Mary sitting as close to Jesus as possible.

And here's the deal.

If you get close enough to Jesus...

there will be no ambiguity about His message for you.

You got it?

If you get close enough to Jesus, there's not going to be any ambiguity.

What did He say?

What's He saying?

There won't be any of that.

Listen, making the right choice is definitely affected by your proximity to Jesus.

Now, I know that I've mentioned that several times in this series, this proximity thing.

Staff will tell you, I mention it to them all the time, proximity, proximity to Jesus.

I mentioned it last week in the message.

We had a whole point almost on proximity to Jesus, but it makes a difference.

And I know I've mentioned that.

Listen, don't get tired of it.

Because I'm going to keep talking about that.

It's so important.

I'm going to keep reminding you.

Your proximity to Jesus makes a difference.

And this model, this hero of the faith, Mary, demonstrates that when she sits at the feet of Jesus.

In fact, all of the heroes of the faith that we have talked about and will talk about have this in common.

You will find that the heroes of the faith are

You get that?

They all understand you've got to get close to God to hear God and to hear from God.

Let that sink in.

That's the commonality that they all have.

They were all close enough to God that God could speak to them.

You cannot drift away from God and expect to hear a distinct and clear voice from God.

In real estate, there's a saying regarding the three most important factors that determine property value.

You know what they are?

Location, location, location.

You've heard it, haven't you?

They say in real estate that that's primary.

Location, location, location.

I want to tell you something.

When it comes to your spiritual life, the depth of your spiritual life is affected by location, location, location.

proximity, where you are in relation to Jesus.

And Mary's location had a threefold meaning.

Let me give it to you.

First of all, her location was a humbling location.

She was at his feet.

This is about lordship.

It was about who he was.

And listen, it was about who he was to her.

She sat at his feet.

He didn't say, come, Mary, and sit at my feet.

It was a humbling location.

It was a representation of who he was to her.

Jesus said in Luke 14, 11, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

That's not a good path to humility.

And everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

Mary humbled herself.

It was a humbling position that she took.

And everyone who humbles himself will be exalted because

That means honor to whom honor is due.

Well, it's true, isn't it?

Here we are 2,000 years later talking about Mary who humbled herself before Jesus.

It was a humbling location.

Second, it was a hungering location.

She was hungry for the bread of life.

Martha was worried about physical bread.

In John 4, the disciples were worried about physical bread.

But Jesus talked about the bread of life.

Jesus talked about bread from heaven.

And when he talks about that, he means blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the truth, the bread of life.

It was a humbling location, but it was also a hungering location.

So I ask you this morning,

Do you have a hunger for the truth of God in your life?

Personally, do you want to know, what does God say?

I'm willing to get close enough so that I can hear.

You know, I believe there are some people that are running from God.

They don't want to get close to God.

They know they ought to get close to God, but they don't want to get close to God, and they're running from God.

They're running from God because they know if they get close to God, God's going to say, here's some things I want to tell you.

I think of Jonah.

You remember Jonah?

Jonah.

Jonah ran from God.

Why?

Because he didn't want to hear what God had to say.

He didn't want to do what God had designed him to do.

And so he ran from God.

And I think it's interesting.

He got on the ship and he about killed everybody on the ship.

And finally, you...

You remember in that story what Jonah says to the rest?

God causes a great storm to come, and Jonah realizes that he knows what the real culprit is, and he says, look, the problem is me.

I think it's interesting, after he recognized that, he said, I'll tell you what you do.

Y'all throw me into the ocean, and then you'll be saved.

I've always thought I'd like to ask Jonah, if you knew it was you, why didn't you just throw yourself in the ocean?

I don't know.

But we know how that story turns out.

And finally, you know, God gets his attention, and God does want your attention.

But I'll tell you this, that there are people who are running from God because they don't want to hear what God has to say.

You know family and friends and people around you, and they can speak about God or they can confess God, but they don't want to get close enough to God where God can say, here's what I've designed you for.

or here's what I want to say to you.

Or because they already know they've got some garbage in their life, and if they get close enough to Jesus, He's going to say, let's deal with the garbage.

It was a humbling location.

It was a hungering location.

She wanted to know, what do you have to say?

What can I learn from you?

And then third, it was an honoring location.

To sit at the feet of someone in Mary's day was to recognize that person's authority.

It was an act of exaltation.

It was her honoring Jesus for who he was.

It was her recognizing that he has authority.

And that's true because Jesus himself said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mary sits at his feet because she honors his authority.

Paul said in Philippians 2, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

When you bend your knee or you kneel before Christ, you are exalting and honoring who he is and who he is to you.

And by the way, that's why I never hesitate to say on Sunday mornings, you need to take something to God, come down and kneel before Him.

One day every knee will bow.

But come down and kneel before him.

Mary knelt before him.

Come and kneel.

God, Father, here it is.

I'm praying for someone.

I'm praying about something.

There's something in my life.

There's something, God, you want to do.

God, I'm praying for salvation.

Whatever it is, come and bend a knee because when you bend a knee, what you are doing is you are acknowledging who he is and that all authority to answer prayer has been given to him.

All authority on heaven and...

In heaven and on earth, it's been given to him.

That's why we say, come and bend the knee.

If you want to make right choices, stay close to Jesus and stay humble.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 25 and verse 9, he, that is God, leads the humble in what is right.

And he teaches the humble his way.

All right?

Okay.

Last point.

If you want to make right choices, notice Mary's consideration of the moment.

Now, I told you when I read the text, remember the moment thing, in the moment.

And Jesus said at that moment, Mary had made the right choice.

She had chosen the good portion or the right portion or the right thing is what it means there.

It's about priorities, right?

I ran across an old recipe for rabbit stew.

And the first instruction on this recipe said this.

First, catch the rabbit.

Well, I think that's...

Putting first things first, isn't it?

You want to have rabbit stew?

Catch the rabbit, right?

First, I think that's what it means to have priorities.

We put the first things in the right order, in the right place.

This occasion that Mary and Martha are in with Jesus is a priority moment.

And one of the simple lessons from our passage and from this hero of the faith is always choose Jesus first.

Whatever the moment is, always prioritize Jesus.

Both women in this moment revealed their priorities.

Martha wasn't doing bad stuff, right?

We all agree.

She wasn't doing bad stuff.

But in the moment, her priorities were not right.

If your priorities are not right, you will not make right choices.

You've heard the expression, timing is everything.

Well, it certainly applies here.

And in the moment, Mary made the right choice.

Her choice was Jesus.

Now, Jesus does not scold Martha for being a good host.

She was.

Both of these ladies wanted to please Jesus.

And Jesus loves our service.

But he scolds Martha because of her complaint in light of the moment and the opportunity that she had.

And he lovingly scolds her.

He didn't say, Mary.

He says, I mean, Martha.

He says, Martha, Martha.

There's so many things that you're distracted by.

He didn't scold her with vitriol.

He lovingly scolded her because she made the wrong choice in the moment.

The great missionary to India, William Carey,

he became deeply concerned about the attitude of his son Felix.

His son was a professing Christian, and in fact, Felix had even committed his life to the mission field.

He believed God wanted him to go and be a missionary.

But he rejected that call in time because he was offered an appointment to be the ambassador to Burma.

And so he turned on his call to the mission field to

to be an ambassador to Burma.

I'm not arguing that that couldn't have been a good thing.

I don't know.

But upon hearing this, his father was not pleased.

And William Carey sent out a memo requesting prayer for his son.

And this is what the prayer request said.

Please pray for Felix.

He has degenerated into an ambassador of the British government when he should be serving the King of Kings.

That story...

caused me to think about a choice that I had to make when I was a young pastor in my mid-30s.

I was pastoring in Florida, and I also wrote a local conservative op-ed newspaper column, and it had had some success in the Tampa Bay area, and it had even had some success outside of the state, and as far away as Iowa and some other places, it had had some success, and it had become a

a column that a number of our congressmen like to read, and one day I got a call.

It was from a congressman that I knew, and he said, Ray, he said, we want to come and talk with you.

We want to come.

We have a matter we want to come talk to you about, and so we set up an appointment, and they came.

They showed up at my office, and I said, what can I help you with?

They said, well,

the congressional district for this area is about to be vacated, and we want you to run and fill that position.

And I was stunned.

And they said, you don't need to worry.

You'll win.

Our party is the most dominant party, and this is the most densely populated county in the state of Florida, Pinellas County.

for our party, and you will win the position.

We have plenty of money to back your campaign, so that won't be an issue.

All you got to do is say that you'll run and be the nominee."

And I said, wow.

I said, I need to pray about that.

I said, could I have some time?

They said, could you let us know within a week?

And so I said, I'll do my best.

I said, but I do need to get before the Lord.

And so I did.

I got before the Lord and I prayed and I prayed and they called me back and they said, well, could we come talk to you now and let's follow up.

And so they did.

They came back.

This was almost two weeks later.

They came back and we sat in my office and

They said, well, what is your decision?

I said, well, first of all, I want you to know that I'm so very honored that you would ask me and consider me for that important role.

I said, there's a part of me that wants to say yes.

But I've spent time with the Lord, and I've come to the conclusion that I can't accept the offer.

Again, I'm honored and thank you, but I can't accept it.

And then I added this.

I appreciate all of those of you who serve in these positions and serve our nation.

But I said, I'm already serving another king.

And my first priority is to be an ambassador for him, to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ, to his church and to his people, and for me to pursue a congressional seat in

I believe would be for me a step down.

And so I cannot accept your offer.

And that was the right choice for me.

And I'm so glad that I did, that I made that choice.

I wouldn't be your pastor here today.

Some of you are saying, I wish you'd have made the choice.

And hear me say, I'm not suggesting that you can't serve Jesus as a politician.

I don't believe that at all.

You can, and I know a number of them who are and who are making a difference for Jesus in the political world, and we need more of them.

That's what I believe.

But I knew for me...

that it would be a step back.

I knew my calling was to another king.

And what I'm saying to you is this, Jesus must be first priority always.

Life is full of choices.

It's full of choices.

You'll make choices today.

Some we unconsciously make, but life is full of choices.

The question is, are you going to make the right ones in the right moment?

I know there are some choices that are no-brainers.

But in the right moment, are you going to make the right choice that always prioritizes Jesus first?

And to do that, Mary teaches us that we must concentrate on His message.

Mary teaches us that we have to stay near Him in order to hear Him.

And Mary teaches us

That we must make a right choice based on the moment with Jesus.

I don't know all the choices that some of you that are listening to this message by live stream or television, on radio or right here.

I don't know all the choices that you may be facing right now.

Let me close with this.

There is one choice that I do know that is right for every single person.

And it is the choice to put your trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord.

Listen, Jesus said, but to all who did receive him, John said, I should say, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God.

You've got a lot of choices.

Stay near Jesus so you can make the right choices.

But if you're listening to me today or in this live audience today, there's one choice all of us must make.

It is the choice that changes eternity.

And that is the choice to put your trust in Jesus Christ.

And whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

That is always the right choice.

In fact...

You'll never make the right choice without Christ in your life.

Jesus first.

Jesus will change the choice to the right choice.

Will you pray with me?

Father, we do thank you for the freedom we have in Christ.

Father, I also know that there are many who are running from Christ.

They don't want to make the right choice because they know that choice means change in their life.

They don't understand that the change is the best thing that could ever happen to them.

All of us in this place today, Father, know of people that are in that position.

They don't understand how much you love them and what a difference you make in their life.

Father, would you help them to see it, to stop running,

to turn their face back to you, to get close to you so they can hear your message.

And for those who have heard it today, live stream or television, wherever it is, Father, would you use it to transform their life?

And Father, before we go in this place, would you use it in our midst for those who need you?

In Jesus' name, amen.