

*What is this thing in life that persuades me to spend  
Time away from you?  
If you can answer this you can have the moon.  
This is the place to be,*

*. . .*

*Why are there always so many other things to do?  
Distractions, like butterflies are buzzing 'round my head,  
When I'm alone I think of you  
And the life we'd lead if we could only be free  
From these distractions.*

There is more to the gospel story today

than sibling rivalry.

And, as Lutheran professor Brian Peterson points out,

*We don't need to reject Martha in order  
to understand Luke's point about Mary.*

Martha is doing her duty as she was raised to do.

Like Abraham in the story of the three visitors,

Martha has the weighty cultural norm of hospitality

on her mind and in her hands.

We know from scripture that Jesus “loved Martha, her sister, and brother

Lazarus”

She is not unspiritual as we know

from the account of her going out to meet Jesus

when he comes to her home after her brother's death

and declares that she believes in the resurrection.

Martha, in this case of concentrating on one

good—hospitality

is drawn away from the “better” part

as Jesus characterizes quiet time with him.

Distracted—*periespato*

*pulled around.*

Distractions can be as lovely and productive

as butterflies...

and still not to our advantage.

They can pull us away from our priorities

and rearrange our lives by worry

instead of peace.

Mary and Martha represent the two sides of discipleship.

Love and service.

Both Mary and Martha love Jesus and his message.

Both want to do good.

Discernment is the way toward both.

To discern means to perceive and judge

by the senses – all six plus the spirit

in order to ascertain something's merits

and settle on a course of action.

Martha sizes up the situation of Jesus'

unexpected visit and goes into domestic mode.

As the headmistress of the household

she doesn't have to think about what is

required, she reacts.

Like Martha, we often react to situations

that actually require discernment not reaction.

It seems that Mary discerned that Jesus would

not always be around—she was soaking up his teaching.

Martha has not stopped to ponder that the human body

can live for up to forty days without food<sup>i</sup>

Something Jesus knows well.

But Martha in this moment is said to be *merimnáō*

pulled apart.

*(mérimna, "a part, as opposed to the whole")...  
drawn in opposite directions;  
"divided into parts" ...  
(figuratively) "to go to pieces"  
because pulled apart (in different directions),  
like the force exerted by ... anxiety (worry). . .  
(merimnaō ) is "an old verb for worry and anxiety –  
literally, to be divided, distracted" (WP, 2, 156).  
It is more commonly used in this negative sense in the NT.<sup>ii</sup>*

Fragmented as a person instead of whole:

*she has chosen a good part—to serve  
and neglected the better part—to be present to God.*

In the kingdom of God,

more often than not, Jesus calls us to discern the better part

from the good part

which is usually spiritual practices over

culturally acceptable or convenient practices.

According to fastcompany.com,

with the internet's increasing use in business over the decades,

*Distraction Syndrome*

has become more and more

prominent and problematic in workplaces—

causing workers who ordinarily are sharp

disciplined, and capable

to feel overwhelmed

tempted to shut down.

which reduces productivity.<sup>iii</sup>

*Distraction Syndrome* in a secular setting

is overcome in the same way as it is in the spiritual realm:

By choosing the better part:

Develop awareness that you're distracted  
from prayer, worship, and daily spiritual devotion.

Pinpoint your primary distractions:  
what do you find more appealing than  
praying, worshipping, and spiritual devotion—  
ask yourself why is that so.

Choose one spiritual area to develop more appreciation  
for the “better part of life.”

Perhaps the *Serenity Prayer* or the *Prayer of St. Francis*  
would help you to focus —

Perhaps simply saying,  
“*Speak, Lord, I long to listen to your voice.*”  
would be a good place to start.

Clear your exterior world of distractions—

a quiet, calm place is a good beginning  
*not the kitchen or workshop—or even your desk.*

Set a timer—no kidding  
As a study skills teacher and time management consultant,  
I can attest to the efficacy of setting a timer.  
No one, from middle schoolers to seniors,  
wants to feel trapped in an activity.

Relax  
Let yourself enjoy the break from routine and busyness.

*The better part* is always found when we interrupt  
our cycles of worry and activity to  
be quiet and know God.

Take a tip from Jesus,

Physically we can survive for forty days without food,

but not without

*every word that proceeds from the  
mouth of God.*

*Amen.*

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- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-long-can-a-person-survive-without-food/>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/3309.htm>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/3028411/the-cure-for-distraction-syndrome>