

Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ: Rhythm and Balance

(Rev. Jonathan Murray - September 20, 2026)

Rev. Murray opened the message with the familiar story of **Martha and Mary** from Luke 10, highlighting Jesus' gentle correction: *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things... Mary has chosen the better thing."* This moment becomes the lens for exploring how disciples cultivate a life rooted in Christ through **rhythm and balance**, not constant activity or spiritual overextension.

The Pressure of Modern Life

Rev. Murray named the universal experience of being pulled in multiple directions -work, family, school, responsibilities, even good things like church involvement. He noted that many people live in a constant state of "quartering," dragged by competing demands until they are never fully present anywhere. As he put it, *"We often try to live every portion of life at the same time."*

Ecclesiastes: Seasons and Appointed Moments

Ecclesiastes 3 teaches that life unfolds in **seasons**, each with its own appointed time. Rev. Murray emphasized that balance does not mean giving every part of life equal attention but recognizing the season you are in and responding appropriately - work when it is time to work, rest when it is time to rest, speak when it is time to speak, listen when it is time to listen. Life becomes disordered when we try to live all seasons simultaneously.

Luke's Story: Presence Over Distraction

Martha's distraction is not condemned as sin; it is simply too much at once. The Greek word Luke uses conveys being "pulled or dragged in different directions." Mary chooses the "good portion" - not the only portion, but the one needed in that moment. Discipleship requires both action and contemplation, service and stillness.

Cultivation, Not Accumulation

Rev. Murray reminded the congregation that **discipleship is not adding more religious tasks to an already overloaded life**. It is learning the rhythm of Christ - when to move, when to pause, when to serve, when to be served. Like a gardener who waters, prunes, or rests depending on the plant's need, Christians must discern what needs attention and what needs pruning, including their calendars.

Life Portions: Work, Learning, Retirement, Play, Service

He explored several life portions:

- **Work** provides purpose and uses God-given gifts but must stop at times so other portions can flourish.
- **Learning** matters, but students are more than their grades.
- **Retirement** is not emptiness but a new rhythm of calling.
- **Play** is essential - joy is not a distraction from discipleship.
- **Service** must be paired with Sabbath, or it becomes exhausting rather than life-giving.

Your Calendar as a Theological Document

Rev. Murray challenged listeners to examine the past week: Where were you most alive? Where were you distracted? Where was Jesus - and were you aware? Our calendars reveal what we truly believe matters.

The Invitation

We are not asked to choose permanently between Martha and Mary. We need both. The call is to **cultivate a life rooted in Christ**, trusting that God is growing something beneath the surface even when unseen. Rhythm and balance allow Christ to be present in every season.

Rev. Murray closed with a simple, memorable encouragement drawn from Johnny Cash's old song: **Get rhythm**. Because Christ is present in the rhythm of our living, and Christ is present in every season.

Transcript

Listen now for the reading of the gospel. While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town. A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house. Martha had a sister named Mary who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him teach. But Martha was busy with all the work to be done. She went in and said, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work. Tell her to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing and it will never be taken away from her. This is the word of the Lord. God is still speaking. Please be seated. There's a lot of advice out there today about how to live a better life. There are self-help books. There's podcasts that can teach you anything from how to clean your house in stages to learning a new language. There's seminars on ways to manage your time to be more productive and to get more done. Habits to adopt that help you sleep better or use the time that you have to exercise. because there is pressure to be more successful at work, finding ways to be a better parent, spouse, student, friend, volunteer, employee, retiree. And somewhere in the middle of all of that advice is a nagging question. When do we actually get to live? I suspect you've experienced from the chuckles that I heard I've experienced, you've encountered that question and even that frustration. You finish one thing only to discover there's three more waiting. You respond to an e-mail, ding, there's another one. You get home from work and there are responsibilities waiting for you. Students, you finish school and you immediately move to sports or homework or activities or jobs or social applications. Parents, we finally get our kids to bed only to discover that the house, the laundry, the bills, the vehicle maintenance are still waiting. You who are retired discovered something surprising. Retirement doesn't necessarily mean having nothing to do. Oh, true. Yep. See, there's an amen right there. It's okay to amen. But then there's also church. you've got to add in Bible study and worship and service and communities and mission and volunteering and committee meetings. Don't laugh. Even good things can become one more thing on your to-do list. Well, today we begin a new sermon series called Cultivating a Life in Christ. or cultivate for short. You don't cultivate something by rushing it. You don't plant a seed on Monday and expect to reap that harvest on Tuesday. Cultivation requires a rhythm and a balance. And that's where our two scriptures meet us today. Ecclesiastes, you've heard these words before, I'm sure. For everything there is a season and every time, time for every matter under heaven. The Hebrew word used repeatedly in that a time for is et. And it literally means a time or a season, an appointed moment. And the wisdom of Ecclesiastes is that life is not one long, uninterrupted activity, but life has seasons. And what do seasons do? Change. There is that time for work, but there's also a time for rest. There's time for learning and there's time for playing. There's times for serving and there's times for receiving. There's times for being

with other people and there is, thank God, time to be alone. There's time for speaking, there's times for listening. But we often try to live every portion of life at the same time. We work when we should rest. We rest when we should be working. We're thinking about tomorrow and not living today. We think about vacation while we're at work, and then we end up thinking about work while we're on vacation. Ecclesiastes reminds us there is a time for everything and we're not to live everything at the same time. There is a rhythm. And that word rhythm gets me thinking about a very unlikely theological teacher, Johnny Cash. In 1956, he recorded a song called Get rhythm. And the story tells about a young shoeshine boy working on the streets. The work is repetitive. Work is hard. But instead of allowing the work simply to wear him down, he finds a rhythm in the work. And Cash's advice is simple. Get rhythm. Not because the work will suddenly become easy. Not because every problem will disappear. but because there is something about a rhythm that allows us, encourages us, helps us keep going. And I think there is good spiritual wisdom there because we know life has difficulties from people to work to overwhelming tasks to unexpected challenges. We cannot simply eliminate anything that's difficult. We can't simply stop the work, but we can find a different rhythm. And there is a rhythm to work and to rest. And discipleship is in part learning the rhythm of life with Christ. Now Luke, on the other hand, gives us a very different but connected story. So Jesus comes to the home of Martha and Mary. Martha welcomes Jesus into her home and then she gets to work. She is preparing that meal for Jesus. Luke says that Martha was distracted by her many tasks. Martha gets a bad rap. That word distracted though is important because the Greek word carries the sense of being pulled or dragged in different directions at the same time. Are you familiar with the torture of quartering? We do that to ourselves. Because that's a picture of modern life, being pulled in multiple directions at the same time. Work, family, school, bills, technology, church, other people's expectations, our own expectations. And sometimes we are so divided by all of the things pulling at us that we are never fully present anywhere. Martha is doing something good. She's preparing, she's serving, she's welcoming Jesus. But Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. Now Jesus doesn't say stop serving. She doesn't say work is bad. She doesn't say housework doesn't matter. She doesn't say, Mary's spiritual and you're not. Jesus simply says you're distracted by many things. many things, not necessarily bad things, just too many things demanding, and you are trying to do them all at the same time. I encourage you to try to read, play softball, and take a nap at the same time. Yeah, it's ridiculous, but we do this. Mary is sitting here at Jesus' feet and she's listening. The Greek word that Luke uses means to hear, to listen, to pay attention. So Mary isn't simply sitting there doing nothing. She is present. She's listening. Jesus says, Mary has chosen the better part. And that better part comes from a Greek word meaning good portion. And that's important. I think that's actually key because a portion implies that there are other portions. Life is made-up of different portions, yes?

Each has its place. The goal isn't to eliminate every portion of your life except church. The goal is to receive the whole life that God has given us and find balance. But I want to be careful with that word balance. Because balance doesn't necessarily mean that every portion of our life gets exactly the same amount of attention. It doesn't get the same amount of energy. If you're a student, school will occupy more of your hours than volunteering. If you're raising children, family responsibilities will dominate for a particular season. If you're working full-time, your job takes significant portion of your week. If you're retired, your rhythm has changed altogether. Everything doesn't get 20% in order for it to be balanced. Balance is recognizing the season of life that you're in and giving the attention in the appropriate area. For example, in my own life, I have 5 primary tasks, portions. There's other smaller ones, but there's five primary. There's house and vehicle maintenance. There's play. There's prayer and personal reflection. There's work. And there's family, which mostly right now is taxi. My life would be out of balance if I spent more time playing and if I reduced work to 20%. Y'all would probably be a little upset too. A gardener doesn't care for every plant exactly the same way. A gardener pays attention. What needs water? What needs sunlight? What needs pruning? And sometimes in our own lives, what needs pruning is our calendar. Because discipleship isn't simply about adding more religious activities to an already overloaded life. Discipleship is about rhythm and balance. when the nominating committee comes up to you or when I come up to you or when you come up to Sharon or Jeannie about the community day, I don't want you to sign up and be burned out after two or 2 1/2 years. That's not good discipleship. Jesus isn't asking Martha or us to add one more portion that will feel like a burden. I don't want your life to say, I'm already exhausted, but I need to add Bible study and worship and prayer and service and mission and church. That's misunderstanding discipleship. The Greek word for discipleship is methetes. It means exactly what you think it does, a disciple, a learner, a student. We are to be students of the way of Jesus. And we cannot be a student of the way of Jesus if we're passing Jesus constantly. Sometimes discipleship means doing, but other times it means resting. Sometimes it means serving, other times it means being served. Sometimes it means speaking, and other times it means listening long enough to hear God's voice. Maybe that's part of what it means to get a rhythm in our life with Christ. Not simply moving faster, not simply accomplishing more, but learning a rhythm of when to move and when to pause. Think about the different portions of your life. There's work, there's learning, there's retirement, there's play, there's service. Work matters. Those of you who are retired are because you worked. Work provides that income. It provides that purpose. It allows you to use the gifts that God has given you in a particular Ave. And I'm convinced at the same time, that's why God created the 7th day. and rested. On that 7th day, God created a fourth dimension, time. And God modeled that rhythm of work and rest. So we have to ask ourselves, when does work need to stop so that I can be present to the other portions of my

life? School and learning, if there's students in here, that can feel like everything, especially when you're in the midst of it. There's grades and there's tests and there's activities and then there's sports and there's college applications. Some of you have jobs, there's friends, and there's that voice in the back of your mind. You know, if I don't get high enough grades, I'm not going to get into college that I want or I'm not going to get the job that I want and I won't make enough in life. Yeah, good grades are important. But you are more than your grades. Your worth doesn't come from your GPA. Your identity doesn't come from your accomplishments. Before you accomplish anything, before you get that next A, you are a beloved child of God. I've heard that retirement has its own spiritual challenge. For years, your life was dominated by work around a job, and then suddenly, what are you supposed to do now? Well, I've heard Retirement isn't a season of doing nothing. And you know that. But it can become a season of freedom, of choosing where you spend your time, whether it's learning or traveling or playing or mentoring or serving. But when you retire, the question that I have heard from other retirees, what might God be calling you to do now? The calling doesn't disappear, but the rhythm shifts, and very likely it will be a different rhythm. Then there's something the church doesn't talk enough about. Play. We need it. We need to laugh. We need to take a walk or go to a concert, enjoy a movie, play a game, play with your grandchildren, enjoy your children. Go somewhere beautiful. Do something that doesn't produce. Because not everything valuable has to be productive. God created this amazing and beautiful world. Saved the best for last with Colorado, right? Jesus calls us to live, and that's part of that rhythm, learning that joy isn't a distraction from discipleship. And their service, we know their service. Loving our neighbors, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, caring for the vulnerable, working for justice, serving our community. The church should be a people who move beyond ourselves. But even service requires rhythm because if you serve until you are resentful, exhausted, or empty, you're going to stop serving. We need a rhythm of service and Sabbath. Your calendar is a theological document. Have you thought about that? Your calendar says, my calendar says, what I actually believe matters. I can say family is important. I can say God is central. I can say rest matters. I can say serving our neighbors is central to being a disciple. But what does your calendar say about how you spent your time? What are you cultivating with the way you spend your time? When you get home, I want you to go and look at your calendar. I want you to look at the last seven days. Observe where you spent your time. Ask yourself, where were you most alive? Where were you distracted? Ask, where was Jesus? Because I assure you Jesus was there, but it's whether we were aware enough to notice. Jesus doesn't want us to choose permanently between Martha and Mary. We need both. There are times to prepare that meal and there are times to sit at the table. We need people who serve. We need people who receive. We need action and contemplation. There's a rhythm to the life that God has given us. We don't have to manufacture a life. We don't have to perfect a life. We have to cultivate a life in

Christ. A rhythm. and trust that God is cultivating something beneath the surface within us even when we can't see it. There is that rhythm. There is a time for everything and through every season Christ is present. So let us cultivate a rhythm where Christ grows something beautiful through us. Not because life will always be easy, not because the work will disappear, but if we can remember something simple. Get rhythm. Because Christ is present in the rhythm of our living, and Christ is present in every season. Amen.