

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

November 2, 2025 "Fighting Distractions. What distracts you?"

I Intro.

Can you believe it's already November? Advent begins soon. Stay connected to our social media to keep up with everything that's happening. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Sunday.

We're beginning a new series on fighting the distractions in our lives. This is the work we want to do as we prepare for Advent. The coming of The Christ. We want to clear out the clutter that often distracts us, pulls us away from the person of Jesus. And that's what this series is about.

So, let's begin with an easy question; **What distracts you?**

A weird answer, but one of my distractions is having to pay attention over a long period of time. I work off two monitors. One for messages and other docs. One for sources and searches. And honestly, I have other stuff open also. We all have things that draw our attention away. Hold onto the distraction thing. Now this, I love finding wisdom in the most obscure, out of the way places.

"The essential thing 'in heaven and earth' is that there should be a long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living," -Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche was not a good guy. He was a philosopher, who was repelled by Christians practice of caring and compassion for the poor, the downtrodden. Those who struggled. Because it took away from the strong who could make it if they didn't have to help others. He was basically a Darwinian survivalist. Everyone should just fend for themselves. Only the strong and smart survive. And those who don't survive...well we're all better off because they dragged everyone down. Super quality guy huh? This quote was Nietzsche saying; true change comes from picking yourself up and doing your own work. Nose to the grindstone, be responsible for yourself. If you fail or fall, it's all your fault. We can be tricked into agreeing with this partially, without honestly critiquing the heart of it.

This quote was discovered by a Christian pastor, Eugene Peterson, who also is responsible for The Message version of the Bible. Obviously he didn't agree with Nietzsche's heartless approach to people. Peterson liked the underlying premise for this quote. Changes only happen when you make a long term commitment to a process. So he wrote a book about it. The book is entitled; *"A Long Obedience in the Same Direction"*. Peterson added one thing to this idea that Nietzsche was missing. Which is the real purpose for; *"a long obedience in the same direction"*. And the church answer fits here; it's Jesus. The nature of this quote completely changed. It's not about committing to a process to fix yourself. It's about surrendering to Jesus...continually, to allow yourself to be transformed.

We're not going through this book. But we are talking about how to live a long life pointed in the same direction. By discovering and discussing what keeps us from living that way. We're doing a series about living a focused and intentional life. Dealing with things that could distract us, as we move towards the season of Advent. And we're asking a different question each Sunday, to help us do some specific work about living this focused and intentional life.

Warning.

Have you ever been to the doctor or dentist and they said; “Just want to let you know this MIGHT sting a little.”? And then whatever it is they did hurt A LOT! It was more than “a little sting”. Okay...this might sting a little.

Our scripture passage for this will help us identify, and name what distracts us. We have to be careful identifying ourselves as only one person in this story. Walt Whitman was correct in **“Song of Myself”**. **“Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)”** Be okay with being honest. This is a safe place. We all have multitudes within us.

Story of Mary and Martha. Begin to think about what your specific distractions might be.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.” But the Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.” Do you lean more towards being a Martha or a Mary? I'm sorry, but I have to show Martha some love. Stuff has to get done. The meal wasn't going to take care of itself! Martha was the one working, getting things done, taking care of everyone. If Martha wasn't on it, they'd be ordering 'fishes and loaves' from Bethany Uber Eats. So, if you have some Martha tendencies, we cut you some slack.

But...Jesus did address her 'concerns'. So, let's see where and how Martha allowed herself to be distracted. The Message says; **“But Martha was ‘pulled away’ by all she had to do.”** I think being “pulled away” is a valid description of Martha's struggle. And we have to connect that thought with how this can shed some light on our own distractions. This is more than just losing focus, perspective. This is when we're torn by competing good things, things we love. And in being stretched thin, we're drawn out of the presence of God. **Have you ever experienced this?**

So, we're going to talk about living a life of a long obedience in the same direction. By addressing our distractions, those things that can “pull us away”.

How was Martha distracted? We can pull these directly from this story.

1. Distraction often comes from doing good things in the wrong way. Martha was honestly and seriously devoted to doing good. Doing service, practicing hospitality. She wasn't doing anything wrong or bad. Martha didn't wander away from God. **What happened then?**

Martha allowed herself to be pulled out of alignment of doing good things but not in a good way. Martha simply allowed herself to make the small things into big things. We live in a culture and system where our worth is based on our productivity. And nothing distracts us like being busy. And those things are often the small things. Our ability to perform, produce, measure up. Churches are

notorious for missing God in religion and busyness. Martha wasn't doing bad. She was doing good. She just was distracted from God in her doing good...in the wrong way.

Ask yourself: Are my practices, even good ones, keeping me from God's presence?

2. When we're consumed by control, we can miss the sacred. This understanding is when we're trying to hold everything together...our way. It's that one person, in charge of something, and you quickly learn to not try to add any input. You just do what they say and get out of the way.

"Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

'Real talk' here. We all want what we want, and just like we want it. And...we want everyone else to want what we want like we want it. **How does that one hit? Am I wrong?** All of us who have some amount of Martha in us have to know this about ourselves.

How many of you at times feel stretched because you want things to be a 'certain way'?

And by "a certain way" we know we mean; *"THE RIGHT WAY"*. Desire for control makes people into either a help, or a hindrance to what we're trying to do. People become tools to get done what we want to get done. **This one all sorts of stings doesn't it?** The desire, need, to control, turn people into tools, is a huge distraction. It also fractures us internally trying to do so many things at once.

Ask yourself: **Are there times I lose sight of God by my desire to control?**

3. We miss peace when we're not present. We're there in body. But our minds, attention, energy, spirit, are not there. Martha was with Jesus, but she wasn't WITH Jesus. Mary was with Jesus, AND she was WITH Jesus. Mary wasn't being passive, lazy. She was learning to be fully present. There are moments we can be so busy for Jesus, we miss Jesus.

Are there things that we see as; 'have' to do, rather than 'get' to do?

Jesus said; ***"There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it."***

What is my one thing? To honor God and be Christlike. I am residing in his peace by being present to him, no matter what I'm doing. Jesus reorients Martha towards his presence so she could experience his peace.

Ask yourself: Are there times I miss Jesus because I'm not aware of his presence?

4. Jesus was calling Martha back, inviting her to wholeness. Jesus wasn't scolding or rebuking (church word) Martha. It's not a binary choice between service and contemplation. Martha was not only being "pulled away", but she was being 'pulled apart'. **Have you ever experienced that?**

We've said "yes" to so many things. We're being pulled in too many directions. Our default when we're not feeling whole, integrated, at peace, is to try to do more. The right devotional book, worship music 24-7, longer prayers, take more responsibilities on. And I know what you're feeling right now; *"But those are all good things."* **Isn't that what this conversation is about?** It's about trying to do the good things, isn't it. Jesus' invitation is back towards wholeness. Not being divided, or pulled apart. This invitation is solely about returning back to the wholeness Jesus is offering to us. In him...The *"better thing"*. And that better thing has been right in front of you the entire time.

Ask yourself: Are there times I know I am being called, invited, back into an anchored sacredness, wholeness?

At this point we did a guided Meditation. You can either watch it online or go through these questions yourself.

Where in your life are you being “pulled away”, pulled apart, right now?

Work, relationships, responsibilities, finances, busyness. Name those things specifically.

Say those things to yourself; ***“Lord, I feel “pulled away”, distracted by _____”***

What is the effect on your spirit of being pulled in so many directions?

How are you experiencing those distractions? Stress, anxiety, worry, feeling overwhelmed, ruminating, fighting for control, maybe even angry, etc.

Do you at times feel like God is distant?

I want you to hear the voice of Jesus.

Not scolding or condemning. Just lovingly calling you back...to wholeness.

“My dear child, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about.

Picture yourself in his presence. Ask Jesus to pull you back into a full awareness of his presence.

In your world you’re going to face all sorts of distractions. Things wanting to “pull you away” ...apart. You’re going to have to be aware of your own desire for control. To get consumed by good things. But sometimes not in a good way. Hear Jesus calling you back to him. And you can experience being undivided wherever you find yourself. That’s the life Jesus is offering us. Wholeness.

III Challenge.

This is about **integration**. A modern psychological term for peace, wholeness. Disintegration is being divided, split, not united, “pulled away”, pulled apart. Martha was “pulled away”, torn, between what felt like competing loves. Some of our busyness is often about good, necessary, useful things. Until they’re not. When they pull us away from that one good thing. Our desire and prayer should continually be to not let those competing loves fight against each other. But to serve and strengthen each other through unity. Being undistracted. Not “pulled away”. But pulled towards Jesus. Read what this life looks like.

Psalm 86:11. Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

Fear simply means “*honor*”. Remembering who God is. Our understanding and relationship with God comes from an undivided heart. This is living an integrated, undistracted, focused on the “*better thing*”, not “*pulled away*” life. A long obedience in the same direction. Let my devotion, my desire be to live this life you’ve called me into, not pull me apart. And that better thing has been right in front of you the entire time. Our actions, devotion, our attention, naturally grows out of a deep awareness rather than anxious striving.

The ability to do this well is where thriving comes from. Living life to its fullest. Not by getting or doing everything we want to do. But by not allowing distractions, even to good things, “*pull us away*” from God. By an unburdened, light yoke, abundant life Jesus promised us. This specific work will be important as we approach Advent at the end of this month.

Where can you begin to name and reframe some of your distractions to not let them “pull you away”?