

# Deeper Study and Reflection: Luke 10:38–42

“At the Feet of Jesus” – Walking with Jesus, Week 1

## 1. Context in Luke’s Narrative

Luke often pairs stories to provide **complementary theological insights**. Immediately before this episode is the **Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37)**, which ends with Jesus saying, “Go and do likewise.” The Mary and Martha narrative offers a necessary **balancing word**: **Discipleship includes not only action but also stillness and attentiveness to Jesus.**

N.T. Wright notes:

“In a culture addicted to activism, Luke gives us a story to remind us that listening and learning must come first. Without that, even good service can become self-righteous or anxious.”

(*Luke for Everyone*, p. 132)

Luke’s Gospel regularly emphasizes **reversal** (the lowly exalted, women given honor, the outsider welcomed). In a culture where **women were rarely allowed to be formal disciples**, Mary’s posture at Jesus’ feet is a radical image of inclusion and elevation.

## 2. Key Linguistic and Theological Observations

v. 39 – “She sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what He was saying.”

- The phrase “**sat at His feet**” (**παρακαθισθεῖσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας**) is a formal idiom for discipleship. It evokes Paul’s phrase in Acts 22:3: “*I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel.*”
- Mary is not “just hanging out.” She is intentionally taking the posture of a **student of a rabbi**—radical, as she is a woman in a culture that often excluded women from formal theological instruction.

Nijay Gupta comments:

“Luke’s inclusion of Mary here as a true disciple is not accidental. Jesus welcomes women into discipleship not just as helpers, but as learners and leaders.”

(*Tell Her Story*, p. 95)

v. 40 – “But Martha was distracted by all the preparations...”

- “**Distracted**” (**περιεσπᾶτο**) – from *perispaō*, meaning “to be dragged around, pulled in many directions.”
  - It implies **inner fragmentation**, not just external busyness.

- Martha's distraction isn't just activity—it is anxiety born of comparison, resentment, and internal turmoil.

#### v. 41 – “You are worried and upset about many things...”

- “**Worried**” (μεριμνᾶς) – from *merimnaō*, meaning “to be anxious, divided in mind.”
- “**Upset/troubled**” (θορυβάζη) – from *thorybazō*, meaning “to be noisy, disturbed, thrown into confusion.”
  - The sense here is **emotional noise**, not just physical busyness.
- Jesus doesn't scold Martha for working—He invites her out of fragmentation into **wholeness**.

**Michael Gorman** might describe this moment as an invitation to a **cruciform rhythm** of discipleship:

“The shape of Christian life is not simply obedience or service, but participation in Christ's own presence, character, and peace.”  
(*Cruciformity*, p. 20)

#### v. 42 – “Only one thing is necessary.”

- Some manuscripts add “*a few things are needed—or indeed only one*”—a textual variant reflecting interpretive questions.
- What is the “one thing”? The text doesn't name it directly, but Luke makes clear that it is **being with Jesus**, listening, learning, being present.

**Christopher J.H. Wright** connects this to biblical wisdom traditions:

“The ‘one thing’ language echoes Psalm 27:4: ‘One thing I ask from the Lord... to dwell in the house of the Lord.’ Mary is embodying the wisdom tradition's longing for God's presence.”  
(*Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 308)

### 3. Canonical and Theological Echoes

- **Psalm 27:4** – “One thing I ask... to dwell in the house of the Lord... to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.”
- **Ecclesiastes 1–2** – Much activity is meaningless without eternal perspective.
- **Mark 4:18–19** – The “worries of this life” choke the Word and make it unfruitful.
- **Philippians 4:6–7** – “Do not be anxious (*merimnaō*) about anything...”
- **John 15:5** – “Apart from me you can do nothing.” Being *with Jesus* precedes doing *for Jesus*.

### 4. Theological Reflection: Discipleship as Presence before Performance

This story does not negate the call to action (as seen in the Good Samaritan), but rather reminds us that **true action must flow from intimacy**. The life of the disciple is one of **rhythmic balance**—of Word and deed, sitting and serving, stillness and action.

**“Discipleship is first about being with Jesus so we can become like Jesus and do what Jesus did.”**

*– Paraphrase of Dallas Willard, echoed in Comer’s *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry**

## **5. Suggested Further Reading for Study**

- **N.T. Wright** – *Luke for Everyone*, especially on Luke 10
- **Michael Gorman** – *Cruciformity* (esp. ch. 1–3 on participatory discipleship)
- **Nijay Gupta** – *Tell Her Story* (on Mary as a disciple)
- **Christopher J.H. Wright** – *Old Testament Ethics* (on wisdom and presence)
- **John Mark Comer** – *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (on spiritual practices that resist distraction and cultivate presence)