

# Soul Reset: It's Not All on You



When I was in seminary, I had an advisor that I didn't really care all that

much for. I may have taken a few extra classes one semester while he was on sabbatical so that I didn't have to take a whole semester class from him. But during our very first meeting, he did give me a bit of advice that I've kept with me. One of the things my advisor did before he came to the seminary was serving as a missionary in Africa. So, he asked me to think of the pictures you see in National Geographic of persons carrying large loads on their heads. What you might not see is that a lot of the individuals carrying those loads on their heads have a little head pad underneath to help stabilize and ease the strain of carrying heavy loads. So, after my advisor told me that it's a parable for how God was going to take care of me during seminary. "When you're going through something tough, look for the head-pad." And there were some tough times during seminary: hard classes, competing priorities, and some awfully late nights in the Augustana Library. But every time, there was a head pad there reminding me that God was with me in the midst of everything. Even though it felt like everything was on my shoulders (or head), I had an amazing wife putting up with me, a best friend in the trenches with me, and most importantly a great God behind me. "When you're going through something tough, look for the head-pad."



The reality is that I need a head-pad just as much now as I did back in

seminary. I need the reminder now just as I did then. And I'm sure that many of you can relate. Life is busy, work is busy, family schedules are busy, school calendars are busy; it is so easy to be overwhelmed by the busy and to just operate out of that mindset. And don't get me wrong: working hard and doing good work is important. Teddy Roosevelt once said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is a chance

to work hard at work worth doing.” And we all know that we engage in work worth doing every single day. And we should. It is important and sometimes things feel like they’re hard because they’re hard.

But the challenge is that being too busy for too long can slip us into the feeling that the world is on our shoulders, that it’s all on us, and that our default tendency to just bear down and tick things off the to-do list is the way that things will always be and maybe even should always be. Especially in our upper-midwestern culture, taking things on ourselves and putting our heads down and barreling through is just second nature. But the good news of a life looking to Jesus is that there’s a head-pad there for us to make the load easier to bear. “When you’re going through something tough, look for the head-pad.”



In our scripture today, Jesus and his disciples are traveling and come to

the village where a woman named Martha invites them to come to her home to rest from the road and be fed. Martha has a sister named Mary, and they live their lives quite differently. After welcoming Jesus and the disciples into their home and entertaining them, two pictures start to develop: Martha who is busy and tackling her to-do list and Mary who is aware of what needs to be done but cannot leave the side of Jesus. Martha sees this and gets frustrated because she’s working so hard and it seems like Mary is doing nothing. So, Martha pleads with Jesus to rebuke Mary, and Jesus doesn’t end up rebuking anyone but rather grasping what we call “the teachable moment.” Jesus says to Martha that Mary isn’t doing nothing but what she is doing is the most important thing: Mary is soaking in the presence of the Son of God. Mary is

resetting her soul at the feet of Jesus and ensuring that she is spiritually ready for the good and worthwhile work she has to do.



**What this story highlights is the importance of priorities. Like I**

mentioned before, we're all busy. We all have to-do lists that bleed over from one day to the next and it's not hard to find something to work on when we get done working on what we're working on. But we have to set some boundaries and establish some priorities. (And that's just your pastor talking to himself, in case you're curious.)

In our scripture, Mary puts a priority on spending time with Jesus. And amid all the things that compete for our attention, this should be our priority, too. No matter what our lives look like or what we do for our profession, our number one job, our number one priority is to stay close to Jesus and then work from that place. It's amazing to me that I could have a hundred things on my to-do list, but when I neglect to have a quiet time with God, I never feel as accomplished. Centering time with God puts everything else into focus. I don't know if you get more things done, but you do get more-important things done.



**What helps us stay close to Jesus is learning the unforced rhythm of**

grace, and the one that helps us find the head-pad is called fasting, which I admit can be difficult to understand and practice. It gets misconstrued and confused with dieting, and that's not what it's about. Fasting is about self-denial and saying yes to God by saying no to other things. Fasting is taking the Mary approach when our whole world clamors for us to take the Martha approach. Fasting isn't just about food. Fasting is making an intentional decision to lay aside something for a time and use the time

you'd spend doing that activity for something that will help us grow in faith. Think of the things in your life that distract us from spending time with God: social media, Facebook, television, sports, anything. What would it look like to deny yourself? What would it look like to spend a day or two using all the time we usually spend mindlessly scrolling through Facebook to mindfully read Paul's letter to the Romans? What would it look like to download a sermon podcast and listen to it on the way to a basketball game rather than listening to Magic 93? What would it look like to say no to something in order to say yes to God?

Mary would have loved to help Martha attend to all the things that she was doing; Mary knew that Martha needed help, but this was more important. Mary said no so that she could say yes to spending time in the literal presence of Jesus. It was, for her, a head-pad that helps her carry the load. It's the same with us, too. Jesus' presence is our head-pad that helped me survive seminary and helps me navigate ministry every day. Jesus' presence is what helps you deal with the loads you carry. Jesus' presence is what helps us live less hurried, less worried, and more whole. Clear away the clutter and distraction and spend time with him.