



Dr. Adamson Co (right) with his wife Wensley Go Kiao, a BSOP alumna, and their four children came from California for vacation from June 1 to 24. They visited BSOP where Dr. Co gave a series of talks on "Discipleship" on June 3-7, 2013. This article is an edited excerpt of the second session.

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Discipleship through Union with Christ

Sometimes in the modern church, we get the impression that becoming a Christian means one must serve the Lord. Service has become the hallmark of Christian spirituality. We cannot deny that service to the Lord is very important in the life of a local church. There are many things in the work of the Lord that will not get done if believers don't serve. But it is not the chief quality of the Christian life. It is not even the most important thing in the eyes of the Lord.

This may sound provocative to some. I want to show from Luke 10:38-42 that inasmuch as it is important, service is not the chief quality of the Christian life. Jesus Christ wants His followers to be disciples/learners, first and foremost, while not neglecting their service to Him. Reading this account brings a conviction to one's heart right away, doesn't it? Who couldn't relate to the sincere, the good hearted, the hospitable, the servant-like Martha? Somehow inside of us, there's a Martha that desires to give our all for the Lord. Like Martha, we too want to serve the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly.

Hence, it really hurts to hear the Lord say to the "Martha inside of us": "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part." But is the Lord looking down on Martha? Is He under-appreciating the service of Martha? Is the Lord playing favorites, favoring Mary over Martha?

Luke included this account in his Gospel in order to show us how the Lord Jesus wants His followers to conduct themselves.

Through this incident, Jesus wants us to be like Mary who was listening to the Lord's word, seated at His feet. Being a disciple/learner should be the posture of the way we serve Him.

Let me give you **three reasons** implicit in the text but explicitly taught in the entire Scripture that point to the importance of a discipleship based on union with Christ.

It Honors Him

When the God of the universe became incarnate and took upon Himself the form of a man, He didn't come as a politician, soldier, athlete or businessman – He came as a teacher or Rabbi. Sometimes our picture of Christ is quite incomplete: we see Him as the Savior, Lord, Healer or Creator, but we forget that He is also our Rabbi.

Heb. 1:1-2 and John 1:18 show that God has spoken to us in His Son and it is Christ who has explained God to us. Jesus chose the profession of a rabbi in order to remind us of His mission, that of being the sole revealer of God to all mankind. Through His teachings we know who God really is and how to relate to Him. It is, therefore, fitting and honoring to Jesus that we treat Him as the teacher that He is. We honor Him as our only Rabbi when we, like Mary, sit at His feet to listen to Him teach us about God and His wonders.

But how do we do this today? We do this by spending time in His Word, the Bible, by having quiet moments reading the Bible and allowing Him to speak to us from there. What honors the Teacher most is not the service we render to Him but the attention

and the desire we have to learn from Him. It pleases Him more when we, like Mary, sit at His feet and learn from Him before we go on to serve Him.

It Deepens Our Relationship with Him

There's a second reason why Jesus would have us to be disciples or learners first and foremost, and it is this: it deepens our relationship with Him.

At the core of the Christian faith is not a set of creeds or doctrine or activity or ceremony. No, the core of the Christian faith is a relationship with Jesus Christ. The more we know Jesus Christ, the more we will understand what Christianity is all about. The deeper we go into that relationship with Him, the greater spiritual depth we will have as a Chris-

tian man or woman. The trouble sometimes with service without growth in our relationship with Christ is that it leads to legalism, to a kind of Christianity that's mechanical. It leads to a Christian faith that's cold and passionless.

If we look at the story of Martha and Mary, who of the two was showing attention to Jesus? Who of the two was trying to get to know Jesus better? I say both of them are doing good deeds. But only one of them is getting to know Jesus on a deeper level. That's Mary. And that's what the Lord would have us to be like. He wants us to develop a deeper relationship with Him. That's why when Martha told Jesus to have her sister stop listening to Him and come over and help her in the kitchen, Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the

good part. And it will not be taken away from her." The danger of service without affection, without a true growing love relationship with the Lord is a real one.

The early church has shown us how and has shown us its importance in the Christian life. In describing the early church, the Apostle Peter said this in I Peter 1:8, "... and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

We can deepen our relationship with Christ by reading and bringing to mind the Words of Jesus. We spend time mulling over His promises, words of comfort, commands to us and love for us. When we spend time doing

that, our love relationship with Him will deepen. He will be as real to us as if He were standing right in front of us. Through the eyes of faith nourished by Scripture, we can deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ today.

It Strengthens Our Spiritual Life for Useful Service to Him

The third reason Jesus would have us to be disciples/learners first and foremost is that it strengthens our spiritual life for useful service to Him.

In the Mary and Martha account, which of the two do you think will end up serving



the Lord longer and serving the Lord more effectively? On the surface, it may seem that Martha is the most productive of the two. But in the long run, Martha will run out of steam. Ultimately, though, I submit that it is Mary who will be the more effective servant for Christ because she sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words.

The person who serves the Lord without taking time to receive spiritual nourishment from the Lord is like a man who goes on a long distance drive but makes no provision for his car to get refilled with gas. Sooner or later, that person

will become empty in his spiritual tank. That person will get burnt out. But Jesus never said that we're to serve Him that way. Remember what He said in Matthew 10:8, "Freely you have received, freely give." That's the way we serve Him. We can't serve the Lord unless we have first received from Him and are constantly receiving from Him.

How do we receive from the Lord? We receive from the Lord by coming to His Word. The Word of God is the source from which the Lord feeds our hungry souls with the Manna from above. The Lord promises that if we come to Him and to His Word, He will feed us. But we must take the time to get fed. We must want to get fed. We must pause and stop from our busy activities to get fed.

One of the greatest servants of the Lord that ever lived was a man by the name of George Mueller. He lived in the 1800s in Bristol, England. The Lord gave him a ministry of taking care of orphans and preaching the gospel to them. In his biography, he shared his "secret" for an effective life of service to

God. He said: "The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how much I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished."¹

To further quote him: "As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food . . . Now what is the food for the inner man . . . but the *Word of God*."²

Let us first and foremost be disciples and focus on the spiritual nourishment of God's Word, then our service to Him will flow naturally and powerfully.

^{1,2} George Mueller, *Soul Nourishment First* (Portland, OR: Gospel Tract Distributors, n.d.), 1, 2.