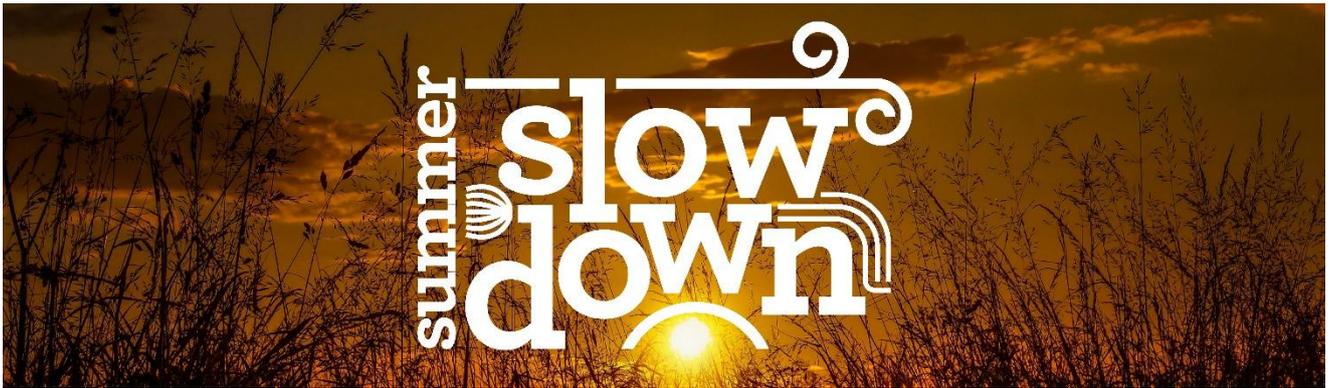


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## **Slowing Our Outer Lives:**

**Luke 10:38–42**

### **The Conveyer Belt of Life**

When I was a student I worked part-time in the warehouse at an online retailer. It was a busy time and orders flooded into the growing business. Being an entry level “picker” involved getting a list of items to collect from around the huge warehouse, we had these scooter trolley things you could fly around on to collect your order as fast as possible.

Sounds fun right? But we weren’t just goofing around, everything was tracked for efficiency and there were KPIs for everything. As a casual employee working one day a week I never got fast enough to hit my numbers consistently. I lived in constant fear of being pulled up for slow picking, or worse be publicly shamed for a “mis-pick” - where you returned the wrong item and the packaging team sent it back! Then you’d have to go return it, get the correct item, and that would put you even further behind on your numbers!

If you performed well you could work your way up to being a packager. That was the dream. You got a desk, could keep your drinks by you, listen to music, and have yarns with the other packagers. But there were still KPIs. The only job that didn’t have KPIs was flattening cardboard boxes! When things were really quiet the manager would give a couple of us Stanley knives and we’d be free from the rush.

But the role I seemed to end up on most, the one that no-one wanted, was what we called being “on-the-line”.

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This is where all the conveyer belts led. All 6 packaging lanes fed into “the line”. It was like a river fed by 6 different streams, flowing down with packed boxes filled with DVDs, supplements, books, and bobble head figures. All these fed down to you on the line. Your job was to put the sealed air into the box to protect the purchases and send it through the tape machine to seal the package for distribution.

When it was quiet it was actually a great job. Super satisfying. When things built up but you could manage the flow, it was even better. You were crushing it. But, at peak times the flow down the line surged like a river ready to flood.

Sealed air. Ready. Tape machine. Sealed air. Ready. Tape machine. Grab, shove, right. Grab, shove, right. Quick check of the shoulder to see how the line was looking. Grab shove right. More boxes. Traffic building. No space to breathe. One fumble. Pick the box up. Items fell out. Boxes now pressing in on the tape machine. Arghhhhhh!!

Now at this point you can chose. You can let some boxes fall to floor, try to catch up and wait for a break. Or you hit the dreaded stop button, bring all the belts to an abrupt halt, and prepare from the shouts from the packers, who wanna know why the line just stopped! As the boxes keep coming, flooding over the sides, contents spilling out, I start to wonder, is my casual job really worth this much stress?!

For many of us, our lives often feel like that conveyer belt, overwhelming us with too much, too fast. We push things out, I’ll get to that tomorrow, next week, next year. And our relationships, commitments, and emails spill over the edges of our calendars and into places we wanted to protect.

In short, many of us are struggling to keep up with the pace of life.

But there’s a key difference between us and my story. We are not warehouses. Productivity is not our primary measure. You are not an efficiency machine. You are a human being.

So how do we regain control of our lives?

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That's what we're going to be exploring this summer. Today we start a five-week meander through a series called the **Summer Slowdown**.

Every season has its gift, and summer, especially a Kiwi summer, is one of slowness, ease, and joy. This series is an invitation to follow the natural rhythm of life in Aotearoa and embrace the opportunity to take a real rest. To slow your mind and body, settle into stillness, and listen to the voice of Jesus. This series has been framed by the folks at **Practicing the Way** who create free resources to equip the church to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did.

Along with weekly sermons there are a variety of ways you may choose to slowdown this summer. We have provided a range of resources on our website, including prayer times, further readings, and even a community cookbook which can help you coordinate the perfect potluck with your life group!

So as we ease into the year, and our series today, our passage comes from Luke's gospel, chapter 10, verses 38-42.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

### **This Woman Can**

If you've been around church for a while there's a good chance you've heard a lot about this story. Although only Luke records it, it preaches well and gets a lot of airtime.

It genuinely is one of my favourite teaching moments of Jesus.

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But what I'd never noticed, or celebrated, until preparing to teach today, was the dramatic way this story empowers women. New Testament Scholar Tom Wright points out that at the heart of this story, is not the comparison of a busy sister and a contemplative sister, but a sister complying with the expected gender roles and a sister unashamedly flaunting them.

**Mary is behaving like a man.**

And not just any man. To sit at the feet of Jesus was not just to adore him, but to apprentice under Him. It was what you did if you wanted to be a Rabbi yourself! In Wright's words:

*"Mary has quietly taken her place as a would-be teacher and preacher of the kingdom of God."*

So here she is sitting at the feet of Jesus when everyone, apart from Jesus, expected her to be in the kitchen. And Jesus praises her for it. This woman can. And no one will take it away from her.

Our theme today is slowing our outer lives. Maybe in order to do that *equitably*, we still need to make space for women to rest. From the expectations of society to raise a family, while rising the career ladder, and staying fit, and being Nadia Lim in the kitchen, and catering for the next church event.

As men, and as a society, what expectations are we placing on women which prevent them from slowing down to be with Jesus?

And perhaps I could also ask the women, what expectations are you placing on yourself, which prevent you from slowing down to be with Jesus?

Of course, guys, including myself, need to do this too, and our summer series is an encouragement for all of us to slow down. But in order to be faithful to the text, we need to hear this point first.

Now we can continue with a more gender-neutral message.

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## **Doing and Being**

Pete Scazzero learned a life changing lesson when his wife Geri said she would no longer attend the New York church he pastored. He had almost destroyed his marriage, and himself, by this point, in his service of the church. This turning point led Pete and Geri to completely rethink ministry and discipleship and develop *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, a ministry which seeks to help believers and churches live and lead from a deep inner life with Jesus.

One of their principles is that our **doing for** Jesus, must flow from our **being with** Jesus.

Pete Scazzero notes that we often equate the two. As though doing for God was the same as being with God. But they are not. In his words: *“I can do things for a person without a relationship with them.”*

In our passage Martha completely focused on **doing for** Jesus. Prepping the meal. Tidying the house. Straightening the cushions. Choosing the right music. Setting the right vibe. All these things distract her from actually being with the person she’s preparing for!

Mary on the other hand recognizes an opportunity to **be with** Jesus. To sit at his feet. To hang on his every word. To be fully present to Him.

Of course, Christian life involves doing good. Serving God and others. 100%! This is not about hiding away forever in your personal bliss with Jesus. It’s about our doing for God, **flowing from our being with God.**

If our rhythms of being with God cannot sustain our doing for him, we’ll end up in trouble. We’ll end up on a church version of the mighty ape conveyer belt. This summer presents you an opportunity to reflect on how you balance **being** and **doing**.

And maybe it’s also an opportunity to cut down your screen time...

## **Distracted from Devotion**

When was the last time you checked your screen time? A metric I’ve been challenged to look at recently is my **“pickups”**. iPhone pickups refer to how many times you physically lift or activate

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your phone, counting actions like tapping, raising to wake, or pressing buttons, even without unlocking, to show usage patterns and help manage digital well-being.

Over the last three weeks my average pickups per day was 68.

That's 68 separate times I check my phone. Sometimes to respond to something. But often to just look for notifications. Or open Instagram to scroll. To deliberately distract myself. It's become for many of us an unconscious action, we do it without even thinking about it anymore. I felt a bit better about my 68 pick ups when I looked at studies which report numbers from 40-144, with many users picking up their phone over 100 times a day.

But still, I reconnect with my digital world 68 separate times a day....How many times do I reconnect with God? I'm not sure I want to answer that question publicly! What I can say is it's not 68. And it's not a habit in the way I reach for my phone unconsciously.

If you're feeling the conviction I'm feeling right now, let us hear the words Jesus said so kindly, but directly, to Martha: ***“Martha, Martha, you are worried and anxious about many things”***

I doubt there are many people listening who couldn't insert their name directly into that sentence. “Aidan, Aidan, ***you are worried an anxious about many things***” – yep, you're not wrong!

But even for us anxious, distracted, and scattered souls on the conveyer belt of life, there is hope... And we have a choice to make.

### **What Will You Chose?**

Listen to what Jesus says to Martha: ***“Mary has chosen what is better”***.

- She has ***chosen*** to slow down her outer life.
- She has ***chosen*** to not conform to the way of the world around her.
- She has ***chosen*** to prioritise being with Jesus over doing for him.
- She has ***chosen*** to allow herself to be “unproductive”.

Friends, no one else will make that choice for you.

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I often act as though the my busyness and pace of life is not my choice. As though it has been imposed on me from the outside. But in reality, I have chosen my commitments. And the responsibility to steward my life and my energy and my spirituality lies with me.

Last year becoming both a full-time pastor and a father drastically changed my lifestyle and it definitely took some adjusting. My time with God, friends, and myself took a hit.

But by the end of the year I realised that although a lot had changed, I still had a choice about where to put my time.

- If I wanted to carve out time to go to the gym, I could.
- If I wanted to go out for a date night with my wife, I could.
- If I wanted to catch up with a friend for a beer, I could.
- Even if I wanted to getaway with God for a whole day, I could.

But those things weren't just going to happen. I had to choose them.

### **Mary chose what is better.**

This summer, and this year, ***what will you choose?***

Will you choose to continue to burn the candle at both ends? To find your value in your productivity? To equate doing for Jesus, with being with Him?

Or will you choose what is better? Will you choose time with Jesus instead of ticking off another item on your to-do list? Will you choose to invest time simply being with Jesus, and allow your doing for him to flow from that?

If you'd like to choose the later here are some suggestions for the month of January. These are designed to be practiced in community, with your life group, with your family, or the group you go to the campsite with!

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- Choose a phone free or streaming free day each week.
- You may like to tie this in with practicing a weekly Sabbath, or a day of rest.
- Test out the community recipe book inviting friends over for a potluck!
- When you head out on the road this summer, take your time, don't obsess over speed or overtaking every car going 1km per hour slower than you want to go (yes I'm talking to myself here!), slow to their pace and enjoy the ride!
- Read an actually book or the physical newspaper!
- Try a 2-minute daily breath prayer, such as, "be still – and know that I am God".
- Delete social media or email apps from your phone for the duration of your summer break.

These are just ideas. You can come up with your own. The point is slowing our lives isn't an ethereal thing; it's tangible and practical. And we can choose it.

Let's close with a prayer written by Practicing the Way for this first week of the series.

***Father help us not to busy ourselves***

***when it's time to rest, to pray, to admire,***

***and to abide in the beauty and wonder of your Son.***

***Teach us to be like Mary when it matters,***

***And to love you more than the work we do.***

**Amen.**

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### **Reflecting on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December 2025:**

Last week Caleb encouraged us to look back to look forward. Did you have an opportunity to create a timeline of your life? What did you learn through reflection and how does your past inform who you want to become this year and beyond?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. How do you think Martha may have reacted to Jesus' confronting statement about her busyness?
2. What are some of the small activities you find yourself obsessing over when you try to slow down or sabbath?
3. If Jesus said the same thing to your busyness today (that he did to Martha), how do you think you'd respond?
4. Which of the suggested practices (or another you can name) feels both challenging and life-giving for you right now?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at [care@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:care@windsorpark.org.nz); **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email [info@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:info@windsorpark.org.nz) and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. As we ease into our new series, the **Summer Slowdown** this summer, we invite you to explore resources from Practicing The Way designed to help you rest in Christ, live intentionally, and enjoy life in community.  
<https://www.windsorpark.org.nz/resources>
2. Aidan referenced the work of Pete and Geri Scazzero with **Emotionally Healthy Discipleship**, you can check out their resources here:  
<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/>
3. **Lectio365 is a prayer app** developed by 24/7 Prayer. Their reflective evening prayers could create a restful rhythm of connection with God this month:  
<https://lectio365.com/>