

# One Thing Needed at Work and at Play

## Luke 10:38-42

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-11-09

### Introduction

#### *A. Sacred/Secular dichotomy*

1Corinthians 10:31 says “**whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**” That implies that everything in life can glorify God – everything – buying a Mac, changing a diaper (which by the way are not the same thing), emptying the trash, taking a shower – it can all glorify God. Every job should be seen as service to the Lord. A carpenter serves the Lord just as really as a minister does. How can I say that? Well, the first 30 years of Jesus’ life were spent serving the Lord, but He did it with carpentry. Why would God have Jesus be a carpenter for thirty years if He did not consider carpentry to be a sacred calling? Jesus experienced what it meant to be a child because childhood is important to God. God had Jesus experience what it was like to lose an earthly father, and to have to provide for his mother and his brothers and sisters after Joseph died. He learned what it was like to be the head of a household. What God was doing was elevating all of these things to a spiritual status.

Now that is foreign thinking to many evangelicals who have adopted a secular/sacred dichotomy. They see devotions, worship, and witnessing as being sacred, and they think of plumbing, washing dishes, and gardening as being secular. Yet what was the first commandment that God gave to mankind after He made them? It was to be fruitful and multiply. What was the second, third, and fourth commands? It was to fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over everything. This is why I find it so distressing to read books that say that the way you serve God on the job is by witnessing on the job, or praying on the job. What does that imply? It implies that witnessing is spiritual and praying is spiritual, but the rest of the job is irrelevant to God’s purposes. Let me tell you something - your job doesn’t become spiritual because a prayer is said, or because you witness on your coffee break, or because you use some of the money for church and missions. Each of those actions needs to glorify God in their own right, but *work as work also needs to glorify God*. Colossians 3:22-25 said that even the menial labor of slaves was spiritual work directly being done for Jesus. When Christians strive to be the best accountants, janitors, plumbers, and

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nurserymen, God is pleased. He is just as pleased with that as he was with the carpentry of Jesus. The job *as a job* can be dominion service in its own right. I am laying this as groundwork because so many people have misinterpreted this passage as advocating a secular/sacred dichotomy. They will speak of secular Martha and separated Mary. And they will point to this passage to prove it.

What I hope to show this morning is that this passage gives us what needs to be in place if we are to work to God's glory, rest to God's glory, worship to His glory, and do all to His glory. It nails on the head *the one difference* (the *sole* difference) between those who are serving God in their jobs and those who are serving their jobs in their jobs. I think it is found in that phrase, **one thing is needed** (v. 42). Now obviously not everybody interprets this as I do, so I want to take the remainder of this introduction to look at the wide variety of interpretations I have read.

### ***B. History of Interpretations***

Two early Greek fathers thought that Christ was teaching against gluttony, and that only one dish of food was necessary and that was what Mary had chosen. One thing is needed – they interpret that as one dish of food. She had decided it was more important to learn from Christ than to be encouraging gluttony and eating two bowls. Surprisingly, there are even a couple of modern interpreters who hold to that viewpoint. I obviously disagree with it.

Another variation is that Mary has the right to eat the good piece of food. Just reading it on the surface shows that that does not fly.

Roman Catholic scholars have frequently cited this verse to try to prove that the secluded, contemplative life of the monastery and convent is more spiritual and much to be preferred to the secular work that married life brings. And when Christ said, "**only one thing is needed**," they interpret that as the meditative life of separation from the world. They say, "It's OK to be a secular Martha, but it is more spiritual to be a separated Mary." That's a very common interpretation. But I believe it is also wrong.

Now on the other hand, some feminists argue that Christ wanted to liberate women from the shackles of the home and to break down the traditional division of labor, not so that they could go to a convent, but so that they could do the things that men have traditionally done. So Mary was the liberated feminist for them. One woman taught that this passage liberates women from the shackles of the kitchen into the pursuit of a

career.<sup>1</sup> They treat this as the ultimate feminist passage. Again, that is eisegesis, not exegesis.

Before we look at the conflict that occurred, let me give you a hint as to where we are heading. First, this passage does not say that Mary was liberated from the kitchen. She was liberated from serving her job to serving the Lord. And that her job involved managing the house is hinted at in verse 39. Verse 39 says that Mary “*also sat at Jesus feet*,” implying with that word “also” that she did two things: hospitality *and* learning. And what Jesus did in this passage is to show how to be a steward of both the job and the devotions, and what causes us to be distracted from the purpose of both. That’s the essence of my thesis. He is giving perspective on both rest and work; busyness and devotions. If you have this one needed thing, you will glorify God in everything you do.

Let’s set the context a bit to understand why Martha had a temporary lapse. Martha and Mary were very different sisters. But we should not look down on either one. While Martha temporarily lost sight of her stewardship in this passage, it is clear that they both loved the Lord. In fact, in John 11 Martha gives the clearest testimony to Christ's person and work of anyone prior to His death, including Peter’s testimony. So don’t tell me that Martha didn’t study and understand theology. They were both devoted to the Lord, but each was a very unique Christian. And before we look at what went *wrong* in Martha’s flare-up (and there was something wrong there), I think it would be helpful to do a little study of their backgrounds and personalities.

## I. The Setting For Martha's Outburst

### A. *Different Personalities*

Almost everyone agrees that they did indeed have quite different personalities. Mary appears to be the aesthetic and emotionally sensitive person, whereas Martha was more practical, outgoing, managerial, not one to waste any time. She could very easily fall into the rat race syndrome of modern society where we are too busy with the hustle and bustle of work to smell the roses and enjoy fellowship. And almost every book that I have looked at would probably agree with the following description of her by Francis Vander Velde:

Martha was a good manager and hard worker and her home was always spotlessly clean and attractive. Martha was the kind of woman we would make chairman of

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Hendriks says she was taught as a child about this passage: “that kitchen work is bad, servile, lowly, and unspiritual.” (*A Woman For All Seasons*, p. 157).

an important committee or president of a ladies group. Not a project would fail, no committee would lag with managing Martha as chairman. No other banquets were held like the kind Martha supervised! All of Bethany knew how capable she was and when they needed advice or help with a supper or village project they called on her and she spared neither time nor energy, for she was a generous, able woman.<sup>2</sup>

And her reference to a village project is taken straight out of John 12 where Simon the former leper had her managing his massive banquet. So Martha had tremendous capabilities.

She also had no problem speaking her mind and shooting straight from the hip. We see that here; we see that in John 11 where she reproaches Christ for not having come sooner. Later she is quick to stop Christ when he wants to move the stone from the tomb of Lazarus. She knows what a stink there will be and she is not the type to let Christ find out for himself. So she has the strength of being transparent, and telling you exactly what she thinks, but also the weakness of being too blunt and controlling sometimes. This would be a weakness that she would need to work on.

So there were differences of personality that we need to factor in. In my opinion, Christ was not saying that Martha needed to change her personality. She did need to sanctify her personality, but not deny it. She did need to submit her personality to the leading and controlling of the Spirit. I'm sure there were some rough edges that she could have refined, and her personality lent itself to this problem, but that was not the issue. We'll be looking at the issue later. But we need to recognize that God uses all sorts of different personalities and doesn't make us all fit into the same mould. We need to avoid a cookie cutter Christianity where we expect all Christians to fit into the same mould. Each Christian is uniquely crafted and used by the Lord.

### ***B. Different Resources***

They also had different resources. It was after all, Martha's house, and that in itself might give rise to differences of opinion on hospitality. And Martha had skills and gifts that Mary may not have had. So they had different resources to draw on.

### ***C. Differing Views On Responsibility***

They also had differing views of responsibility. And I want to emphasize as strongly as I can here that both Martha and Mary could look to Scripture to justify what they were doing. Nowhere does Christ condemn

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<sup>2</sup> Frances Vander Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 167.

her for being involved in hospitality (and too many people have missed that point). It was her attitude that He addresses. It was her being distracted, worried, and troubled that was her problem. She was becoming too emotional. In fact, hospitality is commanded by Scripture. Let's look at that so that we can be clear about what Christ is *not* doing here.

### 1. Martha was fulfilling the law

To fail to extend hospitality would have been Biblically unthinkable, and so it is not just Martha who serves. In verse 39 it implies that Mary had been serving as well. It uses the word “**also**.” Martha gave hospitality. Mary also sat at His feet. She did what Martha did and *also* did something in addition that Martha should have done, but was distracted from. It is a total misconception to say that housework or managing the house was not her thing. We can see that Mary serves Jesus in John 12. Don't think Mary is not involved in hospitality. Hospitality is part and parcel of the Christian life.

The Old Testament law commanded hospitality several times. Hebrews 13:2 says, “**Do not forget to extend hospitality.**” - and He is talking to everyone when He says that - even the singles in our midst. Mary is not an exception. In Luke 14 Christ told the crowds not just to extend hospitality to friends and relatives, but also to extend hospitality to those who may never be able to invite them back. So Christ expected hospitality as a part of Christianity. Titus 1:8 indicates that an elders wife should love hospitality. Why? She is to be a model to other women. 1 Peter. 4:9 tells all Christians, “**Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.**” Romans 12:13 includes the phrase “**given to hospitality**” as one of the characteristics of every believer. So Martha was fulfilling the law when she was hospitable. And Mary would not have been praised for laziness or breaking the law. So the hospitality of both was very Biblical. Don't neglect that word “**also**.”

### 2. Mary was also fulfilling the law

What about sitting at Jesus feet? It's true that many Jews of Christ's day would have been shocked by Mary's action. Their attitude very literally would have been, “Why isn't she in the kitchen where she belongs? Women are to be seen and not heard.” And though I don't know if this was a minority or a majority view, let me read you some quotes from noted figures of this period that may indicate that Christ was bucking tradition in what He said here.

Philo said, “all public life with its discussions and deeds . . . (is) proper for men. It is [only] suitable for women to live indoors and to live in retirement.”<sup>3</sup> He was a fairly famous and fairly popular writer, and He would have disapproved of Mary sitting here and partaking in these discussions. He would have probably been quicker than Martha was to complain. Rabbi Jose ben Johanan 150 years before Christ said, “talk not much with women.” He would have disapproved of *Christ*. The Mishna (which was the oral teachings of the Pharisees of Christ’s day) said this: “He that talks much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law.” (mAb. 1.5) So he would have said that Christ was doing wrong. Rabbi Eliezer said, “If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery” (mSot. 4.3). Now I find that a remarkably chauvinistic attitude: teaching a woman the bible is equivalent to lechery!?! In another place he said “It is better that the words of the Law should be burned than that they should be given to a woman” (jSot. 3.4). James Hurley in his book on women claims that this was a common prevalent view in those times and that Christ was bucking against tradition. And that is possible. Here is how Rabbi Azariah viewed their role in church: “the men came [to synagogue] to learn, the women came to hear.”

And so Christ had a remarkably different attitude than the Pharisees and other rabbis had. They thought that women were to be in the kitchen, not with the teachers. Though Martha had no doubt been taught differently by Christ, I see a little carry over of this prevailing attitude in Martha’s comment. But what did the Old Testament say? It justified Mary. Deuteronomy 31:12 says, “**Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law.**” Over and over the Old Testament speaks of women being instructed, and in turn instructing their children and servants. The woman of Proverbs 31 was not only a capable Martha. She was that. But she was also a Mary who studied God’s word and was able to open her mouth with wisdom and teach her children and servants the law of God. So both Mary and Martha were doing things prescribed by the law of God for women; for mothers. The question was, how and when should these things have been done. Balance. Let’s look at one last difference.

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<sup>3</sup>Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, 169.

### *D. Differing Expressions of Devotion To Christ.*

Martha and Mary also had differing views on devotion to Christ. Another way of saying this is that they majored on different languages of love. Some people feel loved the most when they are served, and they tend to express their love the most that way. Other languages of love are physical affection, talking, gift giving, etc. And I think we should all seek to communicate in all the languages of love, but there is a natural tendency to emphasize one over the other. And we see those differences in Mary and Martha. In John 12 it speaks of Martha's devotion to Christ by saying that she served at the banquet. That was an expression of devotion and Matthew 25 says that when we serve food to believers and to our own children we are serving Christ and expressing devotion and love to Him. And we'll get to that. Mary on the other hand expresses her devotion by pouring perfume on Christ's feet and wiping His feet with her hair. Now Mary didn't spend the whole banquet doing that. She no doubt served food too (and that's probably implied in the plural "they" in verse 2), but it shows graphically the different approach the sisters had. Martha appears to be more practical, and Mary more emotional and aesthetic in her devotion.

Actually, I want to give one last difference. Mary seems to be much more aware of Christ's coming death than Martha; much more aware of how little time she had and I think that factors into why sitting at His feet was so important.

But you can see how these differences could easily set them up for conflict if they were not careful. This sermon is just as much about avoiding conflict by being sensitive to God-given differences, as it is about devotion to Christ. And I want to take a look at the minor conflict that they had in this passage because it beautifully shows the tension that many of you experience in your work and rest. This highlights the difference between serving Jesus with your jobs, chores and pleasures, and serving the jobs, chores and pleasures as an end in themselves. And if you don't learn how to hear from Christ through the Scriptures, this is just going to be a theoretical message.

## **II. Scripture's Analysis of Martha's Outburst (v. 40)**

Look at verse 40: **"But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me!'"**

I want you to notice three words. In fact, you might want to circle those three words. First, notice the word **"but"** at the beginning of verse 40.

That is setting up an intentional contrast. Verse 39 says that Mary “**sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word, but Martha was distracted with much serving.**” The word “but” indicates that Martha should have been sitting at His feet too.

There is a second word that I want you to notice. It is the word “**distracted.**” For some reason Martha was *distracted while she extended hospitality*. The dictionary gives the definition for that word distracted “to be pulled or dragged away.” What was she dragged away from? She was dragged away from Christ's presence. And the implication of the use of that word is that Christ had wanted and had expected Martha to be doing what Mary was doing here. He wasn't expecting Martha to do the dishes by herself. He was saying, “Martha, whatever you are fussing with, it can wait. Take time to sit with Me like Mary is. You're not going to have much more time with Me.” But she's feeling dragged away. I've got to get this work done!

The third word is “much.” Her distraction was because she was caught up in “**much serving.**” She was intent on putting on a big production, and so her focus of attention became more and more the act of ministering and less and less the one to whom she was ministering. Martha was so hard at work that she was distracted from the very one she was working for.

And you know what? That can happen to every one of us on our jobs, and chores and pleasures. We can get so caught up in our work that we lose touch with the one who gives the work and who guides us and sustains us in our work. We can get so caught up in our pleasures that we forget to include the Giver of these good gifts. How many of us serve our jobs as an end in itself rather than serving the Savior with our job? Remember that Satan loves to bring even ministry cases into our lives that God has not sent. Satan wants us to be so distracted with *much* work that we are not doing what God wants us to do at that particular moment. And you might say, “But there is so much work to do.” And my answer is, “Yes. And there will always be far more work available than you will ever get done anyway.” So don't worry about getting all the work done. Get done what you believe is God's priority within your limited time and resources. And you might respond, “Yes, but people will criticize me if I don't have it all done.” But you know what? Galatians 1:10 says, “**For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.**” If Jesus is patting a seat and encouraging you to sit down, and you are anxiously wanting to work because of the expectations of others, who are you pleasing? Remember that God doesn't need your work anyway. He doesn't need your money, your



prayers or anything else. He has no needs. Instead, He is allowing you to have opportunities to grow; He is bringing integrity checks into your life, testings for character; opportunities to learn to serve Him with pleasure; growth in your relationship with Him; growth in holiness. Everything you do should serve God's purpose laid out in Romans 8:28-29: being conformed to the image of His Son.

And I have to learn the wisdom of not getting distracted from the Lord by my ministry. There is always more work for a pastor to do than there are hours in a day to handle. Christ had the same problem, and some ministry opportunities He turned down, and others He accepted even though He was exhausted. Why did He turn down some ministries? Because God did not want Him doing them. The lame guy that Peter healed in Acts had been at this very gate for his whole life, so it is clear that Jesus would have seen him on a number of occasions. Yet Jesus chose to not heal the man. It was God's purpose for Peter to do that. Now if that was true of Jesus while on earth, how much more so of you? You are not the answer to every problem or need that comes along. And some of us need to learn how to relax a little bit more and let others do some of the service. That's hard for some of us.

Satan loves to bring ministry cases into our lives that God has not sent. It may be someone needing counseling. It may be a conflict resolution. Or it may simply be the extra work that the boss is dumping onto your schedule that you know you can't take and still be a pastor of your family. It's a wisdom issue based upon the Word and His guidance as to when to work and when to rest, when to quit a job and when to tighten the belt and make sacrifices on the job. How you spend your time is an economic decision. And if I do not sit at Jesus feet to receive guidance from Him, I lack the discernment to make those judgment calls. And you as mothers will lack the discernment to know which of the many things that are tugging at your apron strings that you should handle first without communion with Jesus. You are going to have the tyranny of the urgent if you don't teach your children to wait. They will always think that their needs are urgent. But we saw a couple weeks ago that just as God teaches us submission by sometimes saying "No" and sometimes saying, "Wait," we need to teach our children the same lesson.

My point is, just as there is a need for me to sit at Jesus feet in order to maintain balance in the Christian life, there is a need for you to do so as well. Satan will tempt you to think that you don't have time to sit at His feet. Christ is saying, "You don't have time *not* to sit at My feet. You are so busy at home and at work that you are falling for Satan's rat race syndrome. You must make time, or you will suffer, your ministry will suffer and those

whom you are ministering to will suffer. When we neglect Christ, we will begin to neglect those who are united to Christ. When we are too busy for Christ we will end up being too busy for others. Let me give some examples: We will be so busy serving our kids that we never spend time with them. We will be so busy earning money for our wife that we never spend time at home to talk with the wife. Martha's personality made it easier for her to get distracted by the rat race, but any of us can fall into this trap, and none of us can excuse it on the basis of personality.

Now I'd like to make an application to hospitality itself because I have seen the Martha syndrome all too frequently, and you probably have as well. Have you ever been invited as a guest to a home only to find that you never have any time to visit because the hostess is so preoccupied with making sure that you are entertained properly? I have a close friend in Canada who used to be that way. She always felt like she needed to put on a major production when she was extending hospitality and she got frustrated and emotionally excited when her exotic dishes didn't turn out exactly right and she got worn to a frazzle. She had a hard time enjoying her company because her concentration was not so much on the people, as on whether or not the meal was going OK. I believe that Christ wanted Martha not to worry about being a perfectionist in the kitchen so much and to spend a little time talking with Him. I have on several occasions come away from a place feeling like I had a fantastic feast, no question about it, but I really didn't get to know the person because they were so busy.

That is one of the things that I like about Mrs. Edith Shaffer. She emphasizes the simple. The pastor's wife at our church in Vancouver was that way. She didn't worry about her house being messy if you popped in on her. You saw her as she was. In fact, she didn't have a problem asking you to do the dishes with her after the 2nd time you were over, and you fellowshiped over the dishes. She didn't frantically change her schedule of cleaning just because you dropped in. Now that's hard to do if you've got pride at stake and you have a reputation to ruin. Dinners at her house were good, but were not a big production. You felt at home. And you could just relax and enjoy the fellowship because they were extending hospitality rather than entertaining. And there is a world of difference between hospitality and entertaining. So I would encourage you not to get distracted from the main purpose of hospitality - the *person*, by getting side tracked by a complicated menu, or an unrealistic cleaning project. Much better to extend hospitality every week with a very plain, simple menu, than to put on big splashes that it takes you three months to recuperate from.

Now there was another problem at work here. Martha was a take-charge type of a person. That was one of her real strengths, and was a plus for her type of ministry. We need people with skills like that. But you know, Satan often attacks us at our strong points simply because we do not see ourselves as vulnerable there. We let down our guard. And so ironically, some of our strong points can actually be the weak chinks in our armor. And Martha allowed her “take-charge” personality not only to determine what was best for Mary, but also what was best for Christ. She rebuked Christ: “**Do you not care...?**” she asked. She was in effect saying that neither of them had their priorities straight when in reality it was that her priorities were being imposed on others. There is a real danger when Christians insist that everyone must do things their way. It will make for resentment on the part of the take charge people if the others do not conform, and it will make for resentment on the part of the people being molded if they feel forced into going along.

Some of you parents are frazzled with the amount of work that you have to do because you have allowed some Marthas to tell you what you need to be doing. And when you run out of hours in a day to do all the things that 20 Marthas and the pastor have been asking you to do, you feel guilty, frustrated, perhaps resentful, and stressed out. If you do not start the day by sitting at Jesus feet and finding out what His priorities are for the day, your whole day will be a rat race. Now I’m going to still ask you guys to do things, but you are going to have to evaluate before the Lord whether that is what God is calling you to do. I recommend a PEP time: Prayer, Evaluation and Planning every morning for five minutes. PEP. Pray for God’s wisdom, evaluate how you did on the previous day, and plan out your present day.

Balance is the hardest thing to maintain because you are always being called to stop one righteous thing in order to do another righteous thing. There are crunch times when everything else needs to be put on the back burner while you do something that can’t wait. You can catch up on the other things later. Mary temporarily stopped one righteous deed (serving dinner and cleaning) in order to do another righteous deed (spend time with Jesus).

There is one last factor in this passage that I would like to pull out, and I am addressing it because I have tendencies to be a workaholic. I don't know if Martha was a workaholic, but she obviously thought Mary needed to serve rather than to be *ministered to* by Christ. Some people have an awful hard time *being served*. There was a mother who impressed upon her son the importance of being unselfish, and she said, “Son, we are in this world to

serve others.” He thought for a moment and then asked, “Then what are the others here for?” The boy had grasped the fact that if we are here to serve, that means that there will be times when others (who are here to serve as well) will need to serve us. That seemed only logical. But some people are so wrapped up in service that it never dawns on them that they need to be ministered to as well. Did you realize that Jesus needed ministry? Matthew 4:11 speaks of angels ministering to His needs. Mark 15:41 speaks of some women who ministered to His needs. Luke 8:3 speaks of many women who provided for Jesus. Jesus took vacations, Christ went to homes to refresh Himself and to be ministered to. Though He was God, He was also fully man and had the needs of pain, sorrow, and hunger and tiredness. And Mary ministered to His emotions in John 12, Martha and Mary and others ministered to His body.

But think of this: if Christ needed to be ministered to, how much more so do we? I believe Martha was refusing to be ministered to. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter when Peter was too proud to have Jesus wash his feet? Peter said, “**You shall never wash my feet!**” **Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”** (John 13:8). If you are one of Jesus followers, He insists that you receive ministry on occasion. And if you refuse to be ministered to by the saints, you are refusing to be ministered to by Jesus. That’s exactly what Matthew 25 says. **Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me.** Martha, be willing to accept the ministry of others on your behalf. Don’t be like Peter who said to Christ, “You will never wash my feet.”

I want to end by re-emphasizing the answer to the question, “What is the one thing needful to give balance to our jobs?”

### III. How We Maintain Balance.

Verse 42 says, **But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.** And this is the phrase that has aroused so much difference of opinion. What was the “one thing” that was needed? It was not one bowl of food. It was not the best piece of food. It was not studying God's word or Christ would not have been a carpenter for 30 years. If someone listened to God's word 24 hours a day every day of the week he would actually be missing out on this one thing. There is only one thing that is needed in all of life 24 hours a day. And you can call it different things. You can call it living coram deo (living

consciously before the face of God). You can call it devotion to God in all that you do. You can call it having a steward's heart and an eye that is always looking to what Jesus wants in a given situation. Or you can call it discipleship. In fact, the phrase in verse 39, "**sat at Jesus' feet**" was a technical phrase for a disciple. The one thing needed was to have Jesus be your all in all, having His priorities as your priorities, His concerns as your concerns. And when He wants you to work, you will work, when He wants you to listen, you will listen rather than being dragged away by your priorities. And there may be times in your life when you will of necessity spend long periods in devotions to sustain you and there may be other times when your service will be long and hard. But only Christ will give you the balance that you need and I urge you to sit at Jesus feet – to see everything you do as stewardship; to be Christ-centered; to live your life coram deo. When you do that, your labor will be in the Lord. Your rest will be in the Lord. Even your recreation will be in the Lord. If you want all of the exercises that I give for learning how to hear from Jesus and how to develop more spiritual intimacy, I can send those to you by email.<sup>4</sup>

### **Conclusion**

My admonition to you is to daily sit at Jesus' feet. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Quite a few people requested the exercises, so they will be attached after the outline on the next page:

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## Exercises for Developing Close Intimacy with God

By Phillip G. Kayser

People tend to go to extremes on the subject of developing intimacy with God. The first extreme can be seen in modern mystics who do not anchor everything they do in the Bible, and consequently think they “hear” from God in ways that contradict the Bible. Furthermore, these mystics frequently look down on Scriptural devotions as mundane and unexciting, and are always searching for extra-Scriptural experiences. This has become so serious in the modern church that it is a major cause of immaturity and even heresy. The god they “commune” with is really the god of their own imaginations. The modern movement of Bridal Mysticism is a dangerous manifestation of such approaches. See Appendix C for a Biblical critique of bridal mysticism by Dr. Robert Fugate. Notice in Appendix A how John Piper sees God speaking through the Scriptures as a powerful and moving manifestation of God’s presence in our lives. The Scriptures must be our foundation.

But the second extreme is to overreact to such mystics and to opt for a purely academic knowledge about God, rather than a personal relationship with God. B. B. Warfield is an example of such overreaction. I have been encouraging people to see the devotional life of the Puritans (and especially such men as John Owen and Richard Sibbes) as a Biblically balanced way of developing closeness to God. Read /John Owen’s masterful book, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, In Love, Grace, and Consolation; or The Saints Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*. Or read Richard Sibbes books, *A Fountain Sealed* and *The Fountain Opened*. These books will open up a whole new world of what fellowship with God consists of.

J.I. Packer complains,

...communion with God was a great thing [to the Puritans], to evangelicals today it is a comparatively small thing. The Puritans were concerned about communion with God in a way that we are not. The measure of our unconcern is the little that we say about it. When Christians meet, they talk to each other about their Christian work and Christian interests, their Christian acquaintances, the state of the churches, and the problems of theology – but rarely of their daily experience of God”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 216.

Many have asked me to show them how to develop an “Abba” relationship with God in a Biblically grounded way. It usually takes many weeks of practice before these people have found the glories of fellowship with God beginning to open up to them. Here are a few of the “exercises” that I recommend people pursue. I have not taken the time to amplify the illustrations that I use in each point. You will have to read between the lines and take these for what they are: rough notes that outline some of my teaching.



*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.  
 And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father,  
 and I will love him **and manifest Myself to him...**  
 If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word;  
 and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our home with him.**”*  
 (John 14:21,23)

1. There are times when Jesus calls us to shut the door and get into a private place (Matt 6:6). This passage says that the Father is already in the secret place. It is our calling to find Him there. This takes shutting out the noise of distractions. But when we shut the door, we are in the secret place. The reason we have not learned how to hear from God is that we have failed to go to one of the places God says He will always be present: in the secret place.
2. Learning to listen. Matthew 13:9. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” implies two things: 1) not everyone has spiritual ears, 2) even those who have spiritual ears do not always listen. One of my biggest mistakes was to spend so much time talking to God in prayer that I failed to stop to listen. Verse 16 says God blessed us with hearing (Rev. 2:29; 13:9). We have the capacity to hear, but our flesh hinders our sensitivity to hearing. Heb. 5:11 – dull of hearing. We should not be discouraged if we do not immediately hear from God, or even if there are several devotional times we have not heard from Him. He is sovereign and we cannot dictate when He speaks. Our duty is to have listening ears.
3. The Bible is God’s means of blessing. Rev. 1:3 – blessed by reading. Psalm 119:105. Josh. 1:8 – blessed by meditation. Illustration: cow chewing the cud. John 17:17 – Your Word is truth. It is the only infallible measure of everything that we hear. Heb. 4:12 – powerful, living. Hide the word in the heart. See John Piper’s testimony of hearing God through the Scripture in Appendix A:
4. When you pray, learn to pray the Scriptures. Read the prayers of Nehemiah, Daniel and other saints who knew the heart of God and you will see that they prayed the Scripture. Give example of how. Exercise: Take some time right now to pray Psalm 1 phrase by phrase, using each phrase to spend some minutes praying about the subject that it raises. These prayers can be adoration, confession, asking for insight, or intercession.
5. Write down your insights so that you do not forget what God has already given (Ps. 119:16 – I will not forget”; Mark 4:25 – God gives more to those who hear and use what God has given. He takes away from those who don’t. Matt 13:12 – He gives abundance to those who already have). This principle doesn’t at first seem fair. But think of it this way: If you had \$1000 to invest, who would you rather invest that money for you: a beggar or a millionaire investment expert? Those who make good use of God’s spiritual gifts get more invested in them because they are good stewards.
6. Recognize God in all areas of life. See the book, *Practicing the Presence*, by Brother Lawrence. Romans 8:28 should be our theme song as we look at all of life. Illustration of running down mountain and skinning my knee; then fog lifting to reveal cliff that I almost ran over. The more we recognize God’s Providential hand in all that we do, the more we will be in tune with what He is doing in us, for us, and through us. We want the reality of His presence to be powerfully real to us, but that is impossible if we do not see God’s hand in the ordinary events of life.
7. Get dressed spiritually to resist Satan’s accusations. Explain Zech. 3:1-5. This clothing is the same as the armor of Ephesians 6:11-18. Heb 12 does call us to have reverence for God. Read Heb. 12:28-29. Talk about Bee Suit and boldness in the presence of bees. How can we enjoy God and fear him at the same time? Acts 9:31 The fear of the

Lord is a critical step in developing closeness with God. “the secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (Psalm. 25:14).

8. Realize that you are the temple and the Spirit is already within you. 1 Cor. 6:19 – each individual is the temple. Rev. 3:20 the church as a whole is the temple. Luke 17:21 – the kingdom of God is within you. Illustration of loud train, but ability to have intimacy. Not dependent on building, circumstances, quiet. “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” (John 14:21,23). This speaks of a constant abiding and familiarity with Father, Son, and Spirit such as John Owen experienced.
9. Pursue Him with all your heart; don’t be half-hearted. Jer. 29:13 – you will find me if you search for me with all your heart. Diligence and perseverance in our devotions and in our crying to God.
10. Express full orb love to God. John 14:21,23 says that this is a key to having God manifest Himself to us. Express your love to Him verbally. Obey Him with all your heart (John 14:21,24) as the obedience of love makes us men and women after God’s own heart. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother.” John Owen said, “Friendship is most maintained and kept up by visits; and these, the more free and less occasioned by urgent business.”<sup>6</sup>
11. Principles of sowing (Gal. 7:7-9). Expand on seven principles of sowing and harvest as they apply to intimacy. You cannot reap intimacy if you are not sowing intimacy.
12. Eagerness to follow (Psalm 32:8-9 – Don’t be like the horse or mule.) Be willing to sign a blank check every day and give it to God; be willing to follow before you know where He will lead. Such expressions of trust draw near to God, and God says that when we draw near to Him He will draw near to us (James 4:8).
13. God calls us to watch. This Greek word involves two sides: 1) being on guard, and 2) looking with anticipation. Mark 13:32-37 and 14:37-38 are key passages. They call us to guard against anything that pulls us away. They also call us to look for signs of His presence. See 14:37-38 where the disciples slept because the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.
14. Don’t stoically hold back the tears. Psalm 39:12 – Do not be silent at my tears. 42:3. Tears were a sign that the woman loved much (Luke 7:36-38 – she washed his feet with her tears.) Shedding tears is an aspect of vulnerability that God blesses.
15. Give enough time – don’t sow sparingly (2 Cor. 9:6) This should not be an issue of guilt. Guilt will only snuff out whatever flames the Spirit has already placed there. Instead, see it as an investment that will pay dividends. Initially Christians have a hard time getting quiet before God. Gradually work your way up in spending time. But do this secure in your relationship with God, not seeking to earn God’s relationship.
16. Take occasional retreats by yourself like Jesus did where you can spend a day or more with God. Very difficult. Look at Christ’s difficult and busy schedule, yet He went aside by Himself. John Owen points out that communion with God cannot be rushed. It is an opening of God’s heart to us and an opening of our hearts to Him.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Works, vol. 7, p. 197.

<sup>7</sup> John Owen writes: “Christ reveals his secrets, his mind, unto his saints, and enables them to reveal the secrets of their hearts to him; an evident demonstration of great delight... It is only a bosom friend unto whom we will unbosom ourselves. Neither is there, possibly, a greater evidence of delight in close communion than this, that one will reveal his heart unto him whom he takes into society...” Owen, volume 3, p. 119.

17. Cry out for help when you are bored. Even the disciples fell asleep (Matt 26:40-45). Jesus said it was because the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Rom. 8:26 says that the Spirit helps us in our weakness in prayer. Call on the Helper. When I fall asleep, I don't let Satan accuse me. Just think of yourself as a child who has fallen asleep on his Father's lap. Continue where you left off. Persevere. Don't let Satan make you feel like a hypocrite. All saints have had times of boredom, but the times when He meets with us make it all worth while. Even John Owen once told John Eliot of New England, "I do acknowledge unto you that I have a dry and barren spirit, and I do heartily beg your prayers that the Holy One would, notwithstanding all my sinful provocations, water me from above."<sup>8</sup> Psalm 84:10 – because a day in God's courts are better than 1000 elsewhere, it makes us long for those times like David did in verses 1-2.
18. When Satan discourages, learn to acknowledge the fact that you are justified, beautiful in Christ, and attractive to God because of Christ's righteousness. When Satan focuses your attention on your ugliness, look ever to the beauty of the Lord that He creates. Psalm 45:11 says that Jesus greatly desires our beauty. The only beauty He can see is His righteousness in us. 2 Cor. 3:18 – the Spirit is transforming us from glory to glory. 1 Pet 3:4 – the beauty of the hidden person of the heart. God is in the temple within and he sees it adorned with the beauty of holiness (Ps. 110:3).
19. Rest. Too often we are busy and have a hard time resting. In the Old Testament God forced people to rest once a week on the Sabbath day, and to rest on the seven festivals. Hebrews 4:10-11 – Strive to enter that rest. This may seem like a contradiction, but it takes effort for some of us to rest. Ex. 31:13 – weekly Sabbath was a sign that they were set apart to God. The Sabbath was to the week what the secret place is to the day. If God blessed them with rest under the law, we should be even more willing to get rest under grace.
20. Do exercises with your whole family that can teach them how to approach God's throne in more than a cursory way. Once a week spend a whole hour in nothing but praise, or on another week spend a whole hour with the family going through the Lord's prayer one phrase at a time. Appendix B has some suggested exercises along this line by a friend of mine, Malcolm Webber.

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<sup>8</sup> *Works*, vol. 14, p. 311.

**Appendix A**  
**Testimony of Hearing God from Scripture**  
**By John Piper**

March 21, 2007

Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, a little after six o'clock. God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness. The words were in English, but they had about them an absolutely self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.

I couldn't sleep for some reason. I was at Shalom House in northern Minnesota on a staff couples' retreat. It was about five thirty in the morning. I lay there wondering if I should get up or wait till I got sleepy again. In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. It was mostly dark, but I managed to find my clothing, got dressed, grabbed my briefcase, and slipped out of the room without waking up Noël. In the main room below, it was totally quiet. No one else seemed to be up. So I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray.

As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, "*Come and see what I have done.*" There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. When God draws near, hurry ceases. Time slows down.

I wondered what he meant by "come and see." Would he take me somewhere, like he did Paul into heaven to see what can't be spoken? Did "see" mean that I would have a vision of some great deed of God that no one has seen? I am not sure how much time elapsed between God's initial word, "Come and see what I have done," and his next words. It doesn't matter. I was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. The God of the universe was speaking to me.

Then he said, as clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, "*I am awesome in my deeds toward the children of man.*" My heart leaped up, "Yes, Lord! You are awesome in your deeds. Yes, to all men whether they see it or not. Yes! Now what will you show me?"

The words came again. Just as clear as before, but increasingly specific: "*I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There*

*they rejoiced in me—who rules by my might forever.*” Suddenly I realized God was taking me back several thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds. This is what he meant by “come and see.” He was transporting me back by his words to those two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were the “awesome deeds” he referred to. God himself was narrating the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind.

There settled over me a wonderful reverence. A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice. As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river, he spoke again. *“I keep watch over the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.”*

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke. At least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said, with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, “Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me.”

I sat staring at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. *“I keep watch over the nations.”* He had said this to me. It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words that I am writing at this moment are in my head. They were heard as clearly as if at this moment I recalled that my wife said, “Come down for supper whenever you are ready.” I know those are the words of my wife. And I know these are the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations, like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites—this God still speaks in the twenty-first century. I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me.

What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God’s reality. It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in our time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me. Why else would he come and tell me these things?

It has increased my love for the Bible as God’s very word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words, and through the Bible I

have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind—and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us; none can compare with him! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told (Psalm 40:5).

And best of all, they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read Psalm 66:5-7. That is where I heard them. O how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. In it God speaks in the twenty-first century. This is the very voice of God. By this voice, he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice, he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice, he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts. No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.

This is why I found the article in this month's *Christianity Today*, "My Conversation with God," so sad. Written by an anonymous professor at a "well-known Christian University," it tells of his experience of hearing God. What God said was that he must give all his royalties from a new book toward the tuition of a needy student. What makes me sad about the article is not that it isn't true or didn't happen. What's sad is that it really does give the impression that extra-biblical communication with God is surpassingly wonderful and faith-deepening. All the while, the supremely-glorious communication of the living God which personally and powerfully and transformingly explodes in the receptive heart through the Bible everyday is passed over in silence.

I am sure this professor of theology did not mean it this way, but what he actually said was, "For years I've taught that God still speaks, *but I couldn't testify to it personally*. I can only do so now anonymously, for reasons I hope will be clear" (emphasis added). Surely he does not mean what he seems to imply—that only when one hears an extra-biblical voice like, "The money is not yours," can you testify *personally* that God still speaks. Surely he does not mean to belittle the voice of God in the Bible which speaks this very day with power and truth and wisdom and glory and joy and hope and wonder and helpfulness ten thousand times more decisively than *anything* we can hear outside the Bible.

I grieve at what is being communicated here. The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing his word personally and transformingly in Scripture. Something is incredibly wrong when the words we hear outside Scripture are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired word of God. Let us cry with the psalmist, “Incline my heart to your word” (Psalm 119:36). “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18). Grant that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know our hope and our inheritance and the love of Christ that passes knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 1:18; 3:19). O God, don’t let us be so deaf to your word and so unaffected with its ineffable, evidential excellency that we celebrate lesser things as more thrilling, and even consider this misplacement of amazement worthy of printing in a national magazine.

Still hearing his voice in the Bible, Pastor John

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## Appendix B

### Group Waiting on God: The Lord's Prayer, by Malcolm Webber

We have found the following simple method to be highly effective for groups, bringing spiritual nurture, focus and the Presence of God to a small group of people.

Every member of the group (anywhere from two to twelve or more people) prays the Lord's Prayer, thought by thought, one at a time, starting with a new person each time.

So, for example, the first person speaks out the first phrase: "OUR FATHER..." Then the next person prays around that theme: "God you are a Father to me. You have always protected me, provided for me, guided me... etc." Then the next person prays: "Father, you have always loved us unconditionally, fully giving yourself to us as a father loves his little children... etc." Each person in the group prays, one after the other. The prayers do not have to be long or eloquent; they may be a single thought or a lengthy reflection. Group member should pray directly to God, not to the other people around them. Their prayers can include worship, specific thanksgiving, praise, petition, reflection, meditation, etc. Prayers must not include preaching to others; they must all be spoken from the heart directly to God. As each person prays, the others listen, focusing on God, inwardly looking at Him, and affirm the words themselves directly to God.

The person who spoke out the phrase initially is the last one to pray about this theme. Then the next person in the group speaks out the next phrase: "Our Father IN HEAVEN..." One by one, all group members then pray around this theme. Again, the person who initiated this theme is the last one to pray about it, and the next person in the group initiates the next phrase. It continues this way until the whole prayer has been prayed by everyone. The prayer time can finish with a group recitation of the whole Lord's Prayer and then a time of spontaneous group praise and worship.

This is a very effective group method of waiting on God. While the Lord's Prayer is particularly suitable for this, many passages of Scripture can be prayed through in this way by a small group; for example:

- Any of Paul's prayers (e.g., Ephesians 1:17-23)
- Many of the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 23)
- The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)
- Passages from the Prophets (e.g., passages from Jeremiah on brokenness for the nations, passages from Isaiah on the hope of the coming glory of God)
- Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:15-53)
- The Servant Songs (e.g., Is. 52:13 – 53:12)
- Jesus' prayer of John 17
- Paul victorious statements in Romans 8
- Jesus' words to the churches in Revelation 2 – 3
- The Ten Commandments of Exodus 20:2-17 (these should be prayed toward God, for repentance, not legalism)

This method can be used for spiritual nurture in building emerging leaders, discipling new believers, small groups in churches, etc. For example, a team of emerging leaders could pray together this way each day with a new passage of Scripture. They could alternate a day of waiting on God this way with a day of praying for each other's specific needs, while once a week praying through the Lord's Prayer (which is quite comprehensive).



## Appendix C Bridal Mysticism: Its History and Ramifications

© 2005 by Dr. Robert Fugate

### A. *The history of bridal mysticism*

#### 1. Song of Solomon interpreted as allegory

Bridal mysticism had its patristic precursor in the commentary on the Song of Songs written by the heterodox Origen. Origen, being strongly influenced by Platonism, lived an austere, ascetic lifestyle, even castrating himself. His Greek philosophical mindset—and corresponding rejection of Hebrew thought—caused him to reject a literal interpretation of Song of Solomon, and turn the book into an allegory of Christ and the church. However, there are massive problems interpreting Song of Solomon as an allegory between Christ and the church:

- The book speaks of a historical episode in Solomon's life, toward the earlier part of his reign;
- No clue is given in the text that it is an allegory; it does not (like other allegories in Scripture) contain its exposition within itself;
- It is an impossibility to consistently allegorizing every physical detail into its corresponding spiritual counterpart; the almost limitless proposed allegorizations end up being *arbitrary and inconsistent, lacking any objective hermeneutical controls by which to decide between their conflicting viewpoints*;
- This view is contradicted by the fact that the Song is part of Israel's wisdom literature, not part of the prophets;<sup>i</sup>
- The Jewish allegory fails in that the Old Testament references to Israel being Yahweh's wife all describe her in her sin and unbelief, and as now divorced and not yet restored.

As mentioned above, we must understand the underlying philosophical foundation of the allegorical interpretation of Song of Solomon. Not just Origen, but much of the early church and the medieval church (as well as the synagogue) was infected with pagan Greek philosophy (e.g., Platonic dualism, stoicism, etc.). Consequently, they viewed the material world, including the human body, as evil; only spirit was good. In the church this fostered ascetic practices, such as harsh treatment of the body (e.g., severe fasting, whipping, exalting celibacy, sexual abstinence in marriage), vows of poverty, etc., culminating in the monastic movement. Given such philosophical presuppositions, a literal interpretation of the Song of Solomon was impossible throughout most of church history.<sup>ii</sup>

## 2. Medieval bridal mysticism

The twelfth century, medieval, celibate monk, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), introduced “bridal mysticism” into Western spirituality. In this teaching every individual Christian person, body and soul, came to be seen as the bride of Christ. As a logical outcome of this perspective, Bernard referred to himself as “a woman,” and he taught his monks to be mothers.<sup>iii</sup>

Bridal mysticism has held considerable influence in Roman Catholic spirituality ever since. Spirituality is depicted in solely feminine language (i.e., passive and receptive). Thus men who wish to grow spiritually must renounce their own masculinity and become, in a spiritual sense, a woman.<sup>iv</sup> In Roman Catholicism, feminized spirituality involves identifying with Mary.

## 3. The Protestant Reformation vs. modern bridal mysticism

The Protestant Reformation presented a more masculine Christianity. “In its original European forms, all varieties of Protestantism emphasized the role of the father in the family. Luther and Calvin and the Anabaptists all agreed on the necessity of patriarchy. ... Christian patriarchalism has largely vanished from Protestantism except in such groups as the Amish, who anchor the identity of males in Christian fatherhood.”<sup>v</sup>

The medieval practice of applying passages from Scripture that refer to the church as the bride of Christ to the individual Christian was continued by some Puritans (e.g., Cotton Mather, Thomas Hooker). Bridal mysticism was a definite part of **Pietism**.<sup>vi</sup> Contemporary evangelical Protestantism, including Promise Keepers, use a measure of bridal mysticism.<sup>vii</sup> American revivals have temporarily increased the number of men in church. However, “over the long run, they do not stay.”<sup>viii</sup>

### *B. Ramifications of bridal mysticism*

A feminized Christianity is creating a **feminine God** (in her image), a feminine Trinity.<sup>ix</sup>

Pressing feminine attitudes and the immanence of God too far leads to **pantheism** and **universalism**.<sup>x</sup>

In focusing on Jesus as Lover and Spouse, Jesus as **Lord** (the dominate term used in the New Testament) is minimized. So is Jesus as elder brother. Women focusing on bridal mysticism are often “seeking a

God with whom they can be one, not [the God] to whom they must be subject.”<sup>xi</sup>

Jesus is viewed as soft and even effeminate.<sup>xii</sup> The truly **masculine humanity of Christ becomes irrelevant** as an example for Christians. Christ’s “anger at Satan, the wrath of God which is also the fire of his holy love, or his comradeship with those fighting against evil, both of which are prominent in the Gospels and are masculine emotions” are disregarded.<sup>xiii</sup> Women have “constructed an image of Jesus as they wished men were: sensitive, willing to reveal themselves in speech, always ready to talk about their relationship.”<sup>xiv</sup>

Emphasizing the unity of the human soul with God and viewing salvation as deification obliterate the **Creator-creature distinction**.

Depreciates and even **replaces marriage**. Historically, for several bridal mystics, “the bridal union of the soul and Christ is not simply higher than earthly marriage, it replaces it and takes on some of the physical eroticism of the missing sexual union.”<sup>xv</sup>

Bridal passivity and receptivity can lead to **Quietism** (which includes a psychical self-annihilation and a subsequent absorption of the human soul into the Divine Essence).<sup>xvi</sup>

“Bridal mysticism and the metaphors and attitudes to which it gave rise have placed a major **obstacle to men’s participation in the Church**.”<sup>xvii</sup> The men that bridal mysticism attracts are often not very masculine. The only group that is more feminine than the clergy (and artists) is that of passive male homosexuals.<sup>xviii</sup> “If men of normal or pronounced masculinity see that religion has somehow made its professional male representatives, the clergy, less masculine, they will feel a strong desire to stay away from the church.”<sup>xix</sup>

The medieval doctrine of **purgatory** was fostered by women. “Of all Catholic doctrines, none has been more deeply shaped by female piety than the notion of purgatory, which filled an overwhelming place in the visions, devotions, and works of charity undertaken by religious women.”<sup>xx</sup>

“The transfer of the role of bride from the community to the soul has helped bring about the pious **individualism** that has **dissolved ecclesiastical community** in the West.”<sup>xxi</sup>

One of the reasons **Christmas** greatly eclipsed Easter in significance is that women can relate maternally (and even erotically) to the Christ-child.<sup>xxii</sup>

Fundamentalism viewed **liberal churches** as effeminate “because they refused to acknowledge the conflict, the battle between good and evil in the world, and [they] tried to make Christianity a mild religion of progress and enlightenment. . . . [But they] shunned open conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

### 1. Summary

A feminized church emphasizes (feeling and relationally-oriented) love,<sup>xxiv</sup> unity, grace, reconciliation, introspection, and subjectivity—to the detriment of absolute objective truth and ethics, theology/doctrine, law and Biblical justice, Biblical antithesis, warfare against Satan and the world, the dominion mandate and Jesus’ lordship over the nations, God’s transcendence and holiness.<sup>xxv</sup>

“Feminism may be as much a challenge to Christianity as was Gnosticism (to which it bears strong resemblance).”<sup>xxvi</sup>

### Bridal Mysticism’s Prayer

(Satire)

My Lover, Who art in heaven,  
Passionate be Thy name.  
Thy marriage come,  
Thy loving encounters be done,  
On earth as they are in heaven.  
Give me this day my daily feelings of embrace.  
Lead me not into feelings of being unloved,  
And deliver me from feelings of abandonment.  
For Thine is the emotion, the loving feelings,  
And the passion, forever and ever. Amen.

#### IV. Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 574.
- <sup>ii</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 261. The Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.) condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia for (among other things) holding a literal interpretation of Song of Solomon (Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 335f; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, p. 119; cf. DCB, 4:940). Origen (who had castrated his own body) “combined the Platonic and Gnostic attitudes toward sexuality to denature the Canticle and transform it into a spiritual drama free from all carnality” (Pope, p. 115). Even the great early church exegete Jerome was guilty of expunging the physical from the “spiritual” message of Song of Solomon (Pope, p. 119). See Dennis F. Kinlaw, “Song of Songs,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:1205–1207.
- <sup>iii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 104.
- <sup>iv</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 115; cf. 104.
- <sup>v</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 153f.
- <sup>vi</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 116f.
- <sup>vii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 117, 162.
- <sup>viii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 163; cf. 154–156. Podles adds, “Nor will they ever stay as long as religious culture [church life] is geared to women and not also to men.”
- <sup>ix</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 135f.
- <sup>x</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 126, 129.
- <sup>xi</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 138. Podles adds, “Jesus’s atoning sacrifice vanishes and is replaced by ‘the vision that Jesus’ phantasy enkindled when he walked among us.’”
- <sup>xii</sup> “They have shown us a frail man, under-muscled, with a soft face—a woman’s face covered by beard—and a benign but baffled look, as though the problems of living were so grievous that death would be a welcome release” (Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 159).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 124.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 124. Podles adds, “Such men are irritating to other men and strike them as effeminate.”
- <sup>xv</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 106.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 126–128, 131.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 119. Podles adds, “What is lacking in the West is a language of intimacy that expresses the closeness that men feel with men.”
- <sup>xviii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 137.
- <sup>xix</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 136.
- <sup>xx</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 128.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 118.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 119.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 161.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Such love is often more self-realization than self-sacrificial (Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 138).
- <sup>xxv</sup> Cf. Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, pp. 133f, 161.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent*, p. 137.