

THE COMPASS

Desperate Housewives of the Bible, Part 6

The Gospel According to Frank

Doug Brendel

Hey, I have good news. At the end of this video we're all going over to my friends Patrick and Lisa Harvey's house — big meal, lots of fun, and we're all going to do a sleepover. Spend the night there.

They have a very nice place; you'll see that Lisa keeps a very proper home.

Lisa has been preparing; she's made homemade bread from scratch — for all of us! That's a lot of bread!

She went to one of those ethnic markets and actually bought a live pig, had it slaughtered, lugged it home, carved it up, and she's been roasting it for something like two days; it's going to be fabulous.

And did you know that all the linens at their house, Lisa made by hand?

On top of which, if any of us have any buttons missing or any mending we need done while we're over there at their place, Lisa will handle that for you herself.

One little problem: the water's totally off at their place. But Lisa is going to handle that.

She's going to go get water for drinking, for cooking, for washing, for bathing, and for laundry; so we won't miss a beat.

She does the dishes by hand, anyway. And the laundry too.

And she's always done this, even while she was raising her two sons.

No, I'm kidding. We're not going over to the Harveys' after the video. And none of the stuff I just told you about Lisa is true — except that they have a very nice place.

But the situation I just described is almost exactly the situation that Martha found herself in, in the days when Jesus was living and working on earth as a man.

Martha lived with her brother Lazarus and her sister Mary — this is not Mary the mother of Jesus, and it's not Mary Magdalene; this is the woman we often refer to as "Mary of Bethany," because these three siblings lived in Bethany.

Bethany was really just an overgrown village, not a real city, about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho.

It must have been pretty. It was situated on the slope of the Mount of Olives, and there were olive groves all over the place, and pastures where farmers grazed flocks of sheep.

With Jerusalem as the focal point of the entire region, and Jewish people coming to Jerusalem all the time for special feast days, it was handy to camp out in Bethany.

So when Jesus made friends with Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and they opened their home to him, he took advantage of it.

He and his disciples stayed there often when they came through the area.

But it was a lot of work!

It was like the way I described our sleepover at Patrick and Lisa's place.

It would be complicated enough if we were actually going to do a sleepover with all the modern conveniences that Lisa could use to get ready for us.

But typically the women of the house in those days were making their own bread, shopping for meat on a daily basis since there was little or no refrigeration, making and mending clothing by hand (forget about running to Costco for a new pair of slacks), drawing water every day, washing everything by hand.

And in that culture, your workload was much more strictly defined by your position in the family.

Women had certain work, men had certain work. The boys and girls of the family had certain chores, based on their gender.

But Martha was into it. She ran the household.

Luke 10:38 says when Jesus came to town, it was *Martha* who **opened her home to him**.

Here's what the Scriptures tell us:

Luke 10:

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

40 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!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,

42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

We live in a culture that values *doing* more than it values *being*.

We say "Whatcha doin'?" We never say "Whatcha bein'?"

When we say to a child, "What are you going to be when you grow up?", what we really mean is "What are you going to DO when you grow up?"

Wouldn't you be surprised if you asked a young person, "What are you going to be when you grow up?", and they answered, "Wise"?

I was at an event one time with a large number of people in a big room, people who didn't know each other — and the host made an interesting rule:

You had to get through the entire event without asking anyone what they did for a living. If someone asked you, you weren't allowed to tell.

And it was maddening.

You meet someone new, and just about the first thing you ask is, *What do you do?*

What kind of work do you do? What do you do FOR A LIVING?

Our language is even skewed to accommodate this concept. We equate what we DO — our WORK — with LIVING.

You do not have to know me very long before you discover that I am *way* oriented to

task, and not very naturally oriented to *relationship*.

I have to work at getting some balance on this.

Years ago, my friend Sari Lewis made me a hat to help me.

It was a baseball cap, but it had two bills, one in the front and another in the back.

On one side of the cap it said TASK, on the other it said RELATIONSHIP.

This was her way of giving me a loving little reminder about my particular imbalance.

(I'm not sure, but I think I may have lost that hat. I think I may have accidentally stomped on it, torn it to shreds, burned it, and scattered the ashes on the freeway.)

Shakespeare wrote, in Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be." He was talking about life, about living, about existing.

But the question of how much *being* is really about doing has been around a long time.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said *to do is to be*.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant said *to be is to do*.

Miss Connie on *Romper Room* said, "Do be a do-bee!"

Frank Sinatra said, "Do be do be do."

Fred Flintstone said, "Yabba-dabba-doo!"

Who are we going to believe?

To tell you the truth, I live my life more by the Gospel of Frank Sinatra than any of these others.

[Can we actually get a Frank Sinatra clip where he sings "Do-be-do-be-do"? I understand it's the ending of his classic "Strangers in the Night"]

I instinctively think of life as a cycle of *do, be, do, be, and do again*.

First I *do*. I act. I accomplish some behavior, some task.

By this act, I *am*. I *become* something. The way I can *be* is by *doing*.

You do, then you be. You do something else, you be someone else.

I am what I do.

It seems logical to me.

I'm certainly not what someone else does!

I can't be what I *don't* do.

And I can't do *nothing*. How do you do nothing? You're always doing something, aren't you?

I don't need Miss Connie on *Romper Room* to tell me to be a do-bee.

I'm living in the World According to Frank Sinatra: Do, be. Do, be.

Do-be-do-be-do!

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This is how we tend to see our relationship with God too.

What does it mean to be a "Christian"?

Well, where to you go to church?

What religious activities do you engage in?

How many pages of Bible study a week?

How many hours of prayer?

Or, to be more realistic: how many *syllables* of Bible reading — per *year*?

Now we're talking reality!

How many minutes of prayer — since, say, the Clinton Administration?
 You're a Christian? You say you love God? You call yourself a Christ-follower?
 How many good deeds are you doing?
 You *do* good deeds in order to *be* a good Christian ... right?

But this is how we think. This is not how God thinks.
 God is more interested in our being in relationship with him than he is in our serving him.

When the young man came to Jesus wanting to know what he could *do* to find favor with God, Jesus answered with what we call the Two Things: love God, and love people.

Then, as if to make sure we get it, he goes on to say, "**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments**" (Matthew 22:40).

Look at what is mysteriously missing from his answer: obedience.

The "Two Things" say *nothing* about obedience!

Why? Because obedience is the wrong thing to focus on.

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Look at the kind of peremptory response that Jesus gives to Martha.

He cuts her off.

Luke 10:

**41 "Martha, Martha ... you are worried and upset about many things,
 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

Sad to say, Martha has made some Doug Brendel type mistakes.

Martha is spending her energies on something that is temporary.

Investment in the temporary is not God's ideal design for my life.

She is doing a good thing, but it's here and now.

That wonderful meal is a passing fancy.

That beautiful home is not what life is all about.

And this is the heart of Jesus' response to Martha.

What life is all about — the "**one thing**" that is "**needed**" — the "**better**" thing — is not an action at all.

It is not about "doing." It is about "being."

In my life with God, the point is not "obeying." The point is love.

If I love, I will obey.

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Here, unfortunately, is my reality.

I can obey God without loving God.

In fact, I often do.

I go through the motions. I do the "doing," but I don't "be" the "being."

And this misses the point.

This perverts God's plan.

This is how we get grumpy Christians sitting in churches because we think we have to,

complaining about the budget because we *sure* don't feel grateful to be giving. Singing the songs because we've *always* worshiped that way, bad-mouthing the people we don't like because we *sure* don't see how God can be happy with the way they behave!

It's like we're still living in an Old Testament mentality.

Before Christ came — as we can see by reading the history of the Old Testament — people thought they should obey God in order to win God's love; they went through these motions in order to know that God loved them....to get God's blessing.

But Jesus turned the relationship between God and people on its head.

He said, Look, you're never going to get there. You can't do enough good deeds, you can't perform enough religious rituals, you can't stay perfect enough. There's always going to be this gap. This sense of failure. This deep-down dissatisfaction.

So, I tell ya what: I'll step in and fix this once and for all.

I'll do the one ultimate deed that will cover all of this ... and then you can exhale and relax and just spend your lives *being*. Spend your life in relationship with God. That's what he's really after anyway!

So Christ went to the cross — and ever since then, we don't obey in order to be loved. We are already loved — and we obey *because* of that.

If I love my wife, I do stuff as the byproduct of that love.

If I can teach my child to love, I won't have to teach my child to obey.

This is why Paul writes in **Romans 12:1**, **I urge you ... *in view of God's mercy*, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.**

God's mercy comes first. It's *in view of God's mercy* that we offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

We don't offer our bodies as sacrifices in order to *get* God's mercy.

Our overwhelming tendency is that we want to impress God. We want to earn his favor. We want to be able to do stuff so we can feel that we are OK with him.

But **Isaiah 64:6** puts that bogus idea to bed: **All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.**

God is very clear about this — and yet we keep believing the lie that somehow we *impress God with our works*, with what we do.

If I do certain things, I will get God's attention.

Actions get *our* attention — actions impress *people*. But that is not what God is concerned with.

The psalmist David figured this out. He told God,

Psalm 51:

16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

What God wants is my heart. He wants my attention. Something that, relatively

speaking, I hardly ever give him.

The heart is the important battleground.

Jesus observed in **Matthew 15:19** it's **out of the heart** [that] **come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander,** and other fun sins!

The heart is the point of origin. The heart is the launch pad for behavior.

God is not fixated on my obedience, because he knows — one he has my heart, everything else is just “details”!

The war has been won.

Once my heart is truly his — once I embrace the truth that he loves me and is caring for me — once I truly “believe” in him, *believe* in this reality — then what Jesus said in **John 7:38** applies to me:

John 7:38 Whoever believes in me ... streams of living water will flow from within him.

In other words, what comes out of me will be good, because it flows from my heart.

It begins with my embrace of God's love. With my gratitude that **God is investing in me because of what I am, not what I do.**

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Mary got it; it seems Martha didn't.

Martha was in Jesus' face at least two more times that we know of, still focused on the checklist. The calendar. The stopwatch.

But Mary had a handle on what was important in life, what was lasting, what was going to have the deepest, fullest meaning.

Months later, when Jesus was back in town but visiting one of the neighbors, Mary took **an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume** and anointed Jesus' head with it, as an expression of utter devotion to him.

Jesus called it **a beautiful thing**.

He was only days away from his own death, and he saw what Mary did as a prophetic act.

Matthew 26:12 “When she poured this perfume on my body,” he said, “she did it to prepare me for burial.”

In fact, he went on to say, **“wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

That's how important it was to him: the relationship of love — far more than the rituals of obedience.

Mary of Bethany was there at the important moments of Christ's life ... because she was pursuing his heart.

She was in love.

My prayer is *do* less Martha and *be* more Mary every day of my life.

To get off the endless treadmill of doing, of measuring my worth by what I do instead of what I *am*.

Because what Jesus sees I *am* is worth more than anything I could ever *do*.