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## Perfume Sermon Series 1

### "Knowing"

The many fragrances that are sold through cosmetic companies often have very interesting and revelatory names. In the first sermon of **this series, the perfume we'll** be considering is "Knowing" by Estée Lauder. The word knowing comes from the Latin **word for 'conscious,' and simply** means being awake, alert, aware.

One danger in life is losing a sense of this "knowing" in our internal lives. That is, unintentionally losing our consciousness of life while we're in the midst of it. We stop paying attention to the needs of our soul. We can find that we neglect taking responsibility for the way our life is going. **We aren't aware that we are unwillingly** sacrificing for others and then wondering where we got lost in the process.

When we find that we are not fully enjoying our lives or feeling fulfilled by the possibility of life, it may very well be that we have become unconscious to life - and are no longer awake and alert. We may have lost our sense of internal "knowing."

I believe this was the case for Martha in the Gospel story from Luke 10. The story is familiar. Poor Martha has been berated for centuries for her lack of hospitality and her crabby attitude, while Mary is applauded for making the choice to sit at the feet of Jesus in adoration and contemplation.

At first glance, it seems like Martha is just overly concerned with herself and all the work she must do. She is acting like real pain in the 'you-know- what' and wants Jesus to tell Mary that she should help with all the work. I'm not so sure that Martha was overly concerned with herself. Rather, she was overly concerned with her role and what was expected of her. She had lost touch with her 'self' - her soul. She had forgotten who she was. She had let go of her own life, and become disconnected not only from others in her life, but from her own soul. She had slipped away from internal "knowing."

Think about Mary for a moment. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the best part, and it would not be taken from her. We usually think the best part Mary chose was sitting at

the feet of Jesus. In other words, putting prayer and holiness first in her life. She wasn't concerned about earthly things like preparing food and doing the dishes. She was spiritual! Yet, the best part Mary chose wasn't sidling away from kitchen duties at just the right moment to sit at Jesus' feet. It was claiming her soul's space, claiming her path, claiming her life.

She had not disassociated from herself just because others had a different agenda for her. She paid attention to her soul. She took responsibility for the way her life was going. She didn't unwillingly take care of someone else and then wonder where she got lost in the process. She was aware of her inner consciousness. She had an inner "knowing" that gave her the courage to claim who she was and what she needed to be happy.

The question that comes immediately to the surface, of course, is "How do I figure out if I have left that "knowing" place? And, if I have, what can I do about it?"

It all begins with self-diagnosis. Here are three tell-tale questions to ask yourself. Your answers are likely to reveal if you've lost your life while you're in the midst of living it.

The first question is this: Are you regularly complaining- verbally or non-verbally?

Complaining is not usually about another person or situation. It is the spewing out of our own unhappiness, and it shows our own inability to be at peace within. The word 'complain' has an interesting derivation - it means *plague*. **Doesn't that really describe complaining?!?!** When we complain we are a plague to ourselves and others!

Rabi'a, the 8th century Sufi mystic, used to tell her disciples, "Stop complaining. Just stop complaining." In other words, just stop being a plague in your world! To stop complaining, you have to claim your life. Claim your soul. Do what you need to do to find happiness, contentment, and inner peace.

The second question is this: Do you feel undervalued or disheartened when others take advantage of you or don't notice your struggle?

When we don't claim our life or our soul we become increasingly unhappy. We begin to feel that our efforts aren't worthwhile - aren't being noticed by others. When we're no longer in the "knowing place" we can find ourselves disheartened -- by marketers, the government, our work, our friend, our spouse, our family member, or in Martha's case, her Teacher.

Martha said, "Jesus, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?" She's really saying to Jesus, "Look at my situation and how awful it is! Please pay attention to my misery. Can't you see all that I'm doing and affirm me for it?"

We may feel that if we just receive some affirmation or someone sees how hard things are for us, things will somehow get better. But, what happens when we think our efforts aren't valued or there is no acknowledgment of the struggle that feels so overwhelming to us, is that our hurt and anger go deeper in and become even more stealthy.

The third question is this: Am I overly critical?

This is implied in Martha's words - "My sister has left me to do all the work!" Underneath these seemingly right and truthful words, (Mary should be offering to help shoulder the **responsibilities, after all!**) **Martha was trying to elicit Jesus's agreement that Mary was** thoughtless, indulgent, spoiled, and perhaps, downright lazy. She was critical of her sister, not because Mary had really done anything wrong, but because she, Martha, had not claimed her own life and what she felt her own soul needed to be happy.

Martha could have said, "I really need to listen to Jesus, so let's just get Chinese take-out!" Or, in her culture, "Let's just have some bread and fruit and olives." Or, "Since we all want to listen to Jesus, why don't we all pitch in and get some food together to eat while we listen?" Instead, she criticized rather than claiming what she knew she needed - time to sit at the feet of Jesus, just like Mary.

When we find ourselves criticizing someone, we think we will feel better when we are able to show how wrong the other person is, but rarely does that happen. What happens instead is that we move farther away from wholeness and "knowing". We become less content, happy, and peaceful within.

So, if we've become a little too much like Martha - if we've moved away from the place of inner "knowing" what can we do? Just as I suggested three questions to consider for self-diagnosis, I offer three spiritual prescriptions to help resolve the problem.

The first Rx is this: Overcome complaining by practicing gratitude.

**Imagine how Martha's attitude might have changed if**, instead of complaining to Jesus, she had been grateful for the times when Mary had shown her love, or cared for her, or given her something, or had made a sacrifice for her. When we practice gratitude rather than complaint for a slow grocery clerk, a politician we don't like, a friend who has hurt **us, for example, we will return to a place of "knowing"** – a place of consciousness and awareness. When we return to that place, we can make a decision to claim our life, our happiness, our soul.

The second Rx is this: Overcome feeling undervalued or alone in your misery by practicing kindness.

Imagine how Martha would have felt about herself if she could simply have provided love and kindness to Mary, sensing that for some reason it was imperative for Mary to

sit and listen to Jesus. What if she had just brought Mary a glass of water? What if she had offered her a chair? What if she had just sent a silent blessing? Kindness is holiness. Holiness is wholeness. Wholeness is internal "knowing." Internal "knowing" makes it possible to claim our life, our happiness, our soul.

The third Rx is this: Overcome criticizing, by practicing solidarity.

Instead of thinking the worst about Mary, or assuming that Mary was acting spoiled or lazy, Martha could have asked herself what was going on in Mary's life that made her willing to violate the Middle Eastern hospitality code or even go without dinner herself. What was making Mary want to be with Jesus more than anything else?

Such a moment of solidarity would have led Martha to a moment of compassion that, in turn, would have returned her to a place of internal "knowing." And, when we return to internal "knowing" **it's possible to claim our life, our happiness, our soul.**

We don't know from the text if Martha **'came to herself' as a result of what Jesus said to her.** Yet, the usual response of those who encountered Jesus was transformation of some kind. It may be that Martha later thought about what Jesus had said to her. On further reflection, she may also have returned to that place of "knowing." She might even have begun the process to re-claim her life, her happiness, her soul. The same might be true for you and for me.

*It's a perfume made by Lauder  
Its name means consciousness.  
Found within the word of 'Knowing'  
Is the key to happiness.  
When we claim our life, our soul,  
Through what the Master said,  
Life will show us it's true beauty,  
Our soul will feel no dread.*

Amen.

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