

Priorities

We often set our priorities under pressure. Have you ever heard the expression: “We need to be proactive not reactive”? Many times in life our priorities change as a result of stress, distress, life events and so on.

I have witnessed that it is easier to serve God when everything is going well, that when we suffer from distractions that take our thoughts, hearts and minds away from where God would want them to be.

When stressed we tend to react instead of think. Have you ever heard the old expression STOP – Stop, Think, Organize and Plan? Perhaps the old expression Stop, Drop and Roll for when you are on fire.

This morning, if you were on fire, what would be your first priority?

Distracted Pilot

U.S. News & World Report, June 26, 1995, p. 29

On paper, Michael Hillis was a sound enough pilot. When things went wrong, though, the 29-year-old captain tensed up. For that reason, Hillis had been asked to leave Cincinnati-based Comair, but he caught on quickly with American Eagle, and was at the controls of Flight 3379 as it descended toward the airport in Raleigh, N.C. At exactly 30 seconds after 6:33 p.m., two minutes and 4 miles from the airport, a panel light in the cockpit lit up. Hillis and his copilot, Matthew Sailor, had been trained to recognize the light as a signal that an engine had quit. Quickly, they set about determining which one. In doing so, however, they forgot about flying the plane. At 1,400 feet, the Jetstream 32 began to drop fast. Hillis and Sailor reacted immediately. It was too late. The plane smashed into the woods, and 15 of the 20 people aboard died, including Hillis and Sailor. Investigators pawing through the rubble came to a surprising conclusion: Neither of the plane's engines had failed at all. Most likely, the light was faulty.

So he saw an indicator that said that things were disastrous and so lost focus on what was the most important thing.

Where are we investing our time? Are we investing in the eternal or just in this world? What will make a lasting difference? When my life is over, will it leave a sweet fragrance that glorifies God or will it simply be a gust in the wind?

Faithful Servant

John Underhill, Spokane, WA

Milt Rood worked for years and years in Spokane as a **car salesman**. He was also very active with the Union Gospel Mission work with juvenile delinquents. Week by week he'd

patiently teach the Word and pray with young boys in trouble. One week Milt went into the Hospital for exploratory surgery. The doctors found he was full of cancer. They sewed him up again and sent him home. He died within a week. After the funeral, Ron Kinley remarked, "It's interesting that at the funeral no one ever asked how many cars he had sold!"

What was the testimony that Milt's passing said to Ron?

Ron's point about the priority of Selling Cars or of helping some young boys develop spiritually is very valid... Now maybe Milt was a great salesman, he could have been completely consumed with trying to build wealth and spent his time at sales seminars and other career building activities. Who knows? Maybe he did do these activities... But somehow Milt found a way to make the spiritual life of these young boys a priority.

Everyone is busy these days. Most families have multiple "bread-winners" for the household. There is a plethora of things that can consume our time. It can be hobbies, career, recreation, TV, Social media etc...

Ask yourself a question this morning, and be honest with yourself... "Is God a priority in my life?"

Next ask yourself, what do I prioritize above my relationship with God?

If you answered anything other than "Nothing" to the two questions; what has taken your heart and moved into position ahead of your relationship with God?

When we consider Mark 12:30 which says:

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment.

This is A commandment! This is the First Commandment!

What are we prioritizing in our lives today? Let's look at an illustration where career is the highest priority in a man's life:

Football Coach

Source unknown

In recent years a head coach divorced his wife of 26 years when he left coaching a college team to become head coach in the National Football League. He said he needed a wife while coaching on the college level for social functions and to show families that he would be looking out for their sons. In pro football, however, she was an unnecessary accouterment and a distraction to winning. He said winning football was his number one priority and his two sons second. How tragic!

This does not mean we can't excel at what we do. It does not mean that we cannot be a success. Consider this other example from the Dallas cowboys:

Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas cowboys said, "The thrill of knowing Jesus is the greatest thing that ever happened to me ... I think God has put me in a very special place, and He expects me to use it to His glory in everything I do ... whether coaching football or talking to the press, I'm always a Christian ... Christ is first, family second and football third."

The truth is that we can do all things through him who strengthens us. We can lead a happy and abundant life. What it really comes down to is a choice to prioritize God.

Consider George Mueller who read the Bible 100 Times

George Mueller Read The Bible 100 Times

Counter Attack, Jay Carty, Multnomah Press, 1988, pp. 155ff

Is reading the Bible a necessary part of your day or does it have a low priority in your life? George Mueller, after having read the Bible through one hundred times with increasing delight, made this statement: "I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God. Friends often say, I have so much to do, so many people to see, I cannot find time for Scripture study.' Perhaps there are not many who have more to do than I.

For more than half a century I have never known one day when I had not more business than I could get through. For 4 years I have had annually about 30,000 letters, and most of these have passed through my own hands.

"Then, as pastor of a church with 1,200 believers, great has been my care. Besides, I have had charge of five immense orphanages; also, at my publishing depot, the printing and circulating of millions of tracts, books, and Bibles; but I have always made it a rule never to begin work until I have had a good season with God and His Word. The blessing I have received has been wonderful."

Putting God First is not a sacrifice. It is a commandment from him. If we are servants of God we cannot simply ignore what he has told us to do. Placing God first in our lives is abundantly filled with the blessings of God.

Other than loving God, honoring God, and so on, why is this so important to our lives?

Swan And A Crane

Source Unknown

There is an old legend of a swan and a crane. A beautiful swan alighted by the banks of the water in which a crane was wading about seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in stupid wonder and then inquired:

"Where do you come from?"

"I come from heaven!" replied the swan.

"And where is heaven?" asked the crane.

"Heaven!" said the swan, "Heaven! have you never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City. She told of streets of gold, and the gates and walls made of precious stones; of the river of life, pure as crystal, upon whose banks is the tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. In eloquent terms the swan sought to describe the hosts who live in the other world, but without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane.

Finally the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?"

"Snails!" repeated the swan; "No! Of course there are not."

"Then," said the crane, as it continued its search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

This fable has a deep truth underlying it. How many a young person to whom God has granted the advantages of a Christian home, has turned his back upon it and searched for snails! How many a man will sacrifice his wife, his family, his all, for the snails of sin! How many a girl has deliberately turned from the love of parents and home to learn too late that heaven has been forfeited for snails!

Moody's Anecdotes, pp. 125-126

This morning let us consider the words of William Carey about his son...

William Carey

Our Daily Bread, February 2

That great missionary to India, William Carey, became deeply concerned about the attitude of his son Felix. The young man, a professing Christian, had promised to become a missionary. But he broke his vow when he was appointed ambassador to Burma. Carey requested prayer for him: "Pray for Felix. He has degenerated into an ambassador of the British government when he should be serving the King of kings."

Friends, was William Carey against his son becoming the ambassador? I could be wrong, but I would suggest that he was not so much concerned about his Son's Job, as the things he Son had chosen to place in priority in his life.

Was he a Christian serving his country as an ambassador to the Glory of God or was he an Ambassador who would serve God in his leftover moments?

This morning as we consider our hearts, I am reminded of David Livingstone...

Where Is Your Heart?

Source unknown

The body of David Livingstone was buried in England where he was born, but his heart was buried in the Africa he loved. At the foot of a tall tree in a small African village the natives dug a hole and placed in it the heart of this man who they loved and respected.

If your heart were to be buried in the place you loved most during life, where would it be? In your pocketbook? In an appropriate space down at the office? Where is your heart?

We are all busy and we have to deal with a lot of issues, people, situations and so on.

God knows this!

Are we living our lives to honor God or to simply make ourselves happy?

The revelation this morning is these are not mutually exclusive things...

Let's look at some scripture this morning to see what God says about living for him:

Romans 12:2 - Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

Galatians 1:10 - I am not trying to please people. I want to please God. Do you think I am trying to please people? If I were doing that, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Matthew 22:37, 38 - Jesus answered:
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and most important commandment.

2 Corinthians 5:17, 18 - Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.

Matthew 6:33 - But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted. But God can be trusted not to let you be tempted too much, and he will show you how to escape from your temptations.

James 1:2-4 - My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested. But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything.

Romans 8:28-30 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Matthew 6:24 - You cannot be the slave of two masters! You will love one more than the other or be more loyal to one than the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Hebrews 13:5 - Don't fall in love with money. Be satisfied with what you have. The Lord has promised that he will not leave us or desert us.

Matthew 7:21-23 - Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!"

1 John 1:9,10 - But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his message isn't in our hearts.

1 Corinthians 6:19,20 - You surely know that your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you and is a gift from God. You are no longer your own. God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God.

Romans 14:8 - Whether we live or die, it must be for the Lord. Alive or dead, we still belong to the Lord.

John 8:31-32 - Jesus told the people who had faith in him, "If you keep on obeying what I have said, you truly are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Colossians 3:23,24 - Do your work willingly, as though you were serving the Lord himself, and not just your earthly master. In fact, the Lord Christ is the one you are really serving, and you know that he will reward you.

Exodus 20:3 - Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 - We are ruled by Christ's love for us. We are certain that if one person died for everyone else, then all of us have died. And Christ did die for all of us. He died so we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the one who died and was raised to life for us.

Let us resolve to place God first in our lives today and everyday.

Prayer