

Managing Your Priorities

A big complaint today in the workplace is people feeling like everything is urgent. They have goals but not priorities. They say to me, "Paul the problem is that I don't know what to focus on; for my boss everything is urgent." Continuing in this state is usually ineffective and can cause so much anxiety. Prioritizing is important when it comes to getting things done because we want to make sure we are getting the right things done. It's one thing to be busy, it is another thing to be productive. You want to make sure you are busy in the right direction. Sadly, many people are active but in the wrong direction.

We need to place a premium on getting things done. Prioritising produces focus and focus will cause you to get the right things done. There are some things more important than others. When you don't realise this then the not so important things will drain, distract and misdirect you so you don't have energy for the more important things.

Some things must have our primary focus. Focus produces energy.

Definition of prioritise:

A. Designate or treat (something) as being very or most important.

"the department has failed to prioritise safety within the oil industry"

B. Determine the order for dealing with (a series of items or tasks) according to their relative importance.

"age affects the way people prioritise their goals"

Managing your priorities begins with knowing the relative importance of things in your life. Do you know the big rocks in your life?

If you need help with this process the Bible is clear that some things must be prioritised over others. We have limited resources of time and energy. In order to fully embrace the YES of your life you must be willing to say NO to some things. Sometimes it is not a straight "NO", but "not yet", or "not me".

Mt 6:24

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Mt 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Seek = Zeteo = require, demand, search for

First = Protos = first, before, principal, most important.

There are things you can seek and there are others that need to be just added by God. You can seek influence and impact for the Kingdom but it is God who adds things like fame. But be careful of seeking fame as an end in itself. Your true priorities are seen in what you seek after.

Luke 14:7

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable....

John 5:44

How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Luke 12:22-24

²²Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!"

There are some things that are more important than others. This passage highlights the power of understanding the relative importance of things. We are more important than birds; our bodies are more important than our clothes etc

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But 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, ⁴²but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Jesus was protective over Mary's priorities. Guarding people's priorities is something we can do. For example, I often do this at home for my wife when the kids start to cross boundaries. I challenge them to respect the space she needs because of the importance of the thing she has prioritised at that time. In this passage we see that:

You have to fight for what's important to you.

You must identify what is at war with the things you have chosen to prioritise. (e.g. gadgets and social media)

Often good things can be the enemy of the great.

When you are anxious it derails you from the most important things.

The most important things can be taken away from you if you don't fight for them.

When you are not clear about what is most important you get distracted.

Prioritising is a function of choice. "Mary has chosen what is better."

Acts 6:1-7

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews^[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." ⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷So the word of God spread. The number

of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

In this passage we see that:

- Failure to prioritise can result in neglecting your main purpose.
- What may be a priority for one person might not be for another.
- We are not all called to the same thing.
- There are people out there that are graced to do what is currently draining me.
- Managing our priorities helps us to maximize on our strengths
- Everyone is blessed, fruitful and more effective when we maximize on our priorities.
- What worked last year might not work this year; priorities can change.
- We all need a STOP TO DO LIST.
- We sometimes need the courage to re-prioritize.
- Changing our priorities might mean delegating to others as opposed to abdication of responsibility.

Many of us know our priorities, few of us manage them.

I can ask people what and who is most important to them and they will have answers. However, their challenge is that there is often incongruence between what they have just said and their use of time or budget allocation. Often we measure the importance of something based on the intensity of emotion we associate with that thing. However, we need to ask more than two questions deep in order to really see whether we are prioritising the right things.

1 Tim 3:4-5

⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

Based on this scripture to do with the qualifications of a church overseer, what is the priority? Your family is your primary ministry. When we apply this truth it affects our daily routine and weekly schedule.

Key questions to answer:

Who gets the best of me? Intellectually, emotionally, dress etc. Many people give their best at work whilst their loved ones get the left-overs.

Jesus prioritized certain people. He had a target market.

Matthew 15:24

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Mark 2:16-17

¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Ask yourself, "the people that need me the most, what do they need from me that only I can give them?" You are not called to everyone.

Peter was called to the Jews.

Gal 2:7-8

⁷On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. ⁸For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.

For a season, some years ago I made a decision that when I would accept invitations to other churches it would be to develop leaders. I was prioritising my primary calling and conserving my energy.

What are my priorities in my giving?

What are my priorities in my use of time?

What are some benefits of managing priorities?

Managing priorities produces clarity of focus. Jesus said to Martha “only one thing is needed”. This sounds minimalist. Howard Hendricks once said, “The secret to concentration is elimination.”

Managing priorities helps in decision-making. People often find themselves in a quandary when deciding because they are unclear about their priorities.

Managing priorities determines your sources of counsel. “My friend says this, but my wife says that.” “My family says this, but my pastors say that.” Are you clear who to prioritise when seeking counsel? Do you prioritise the Bible over human quotes?

When we manage our priorities we become more efficient. For example, Moses was an executor but was inefficient because he was unclear about how to prioritise his tasks.

Exodus 18:13-26

¹³The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. ¹⁴When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?” ¹⁵Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. ¹⁶Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.” ¹⁷Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ¹⁹Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. ²¹But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²²Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. ²³If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” ²⁴Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²⁶They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

For many believers with great potential today, there is a lot of guilt they experience when trying to focus. This shifts them from potential greatness as they get worn out. Sometimes we feel guilty that we are not serving enough. This is a powerful passage of scripture to meditate on.

Priorities can change in different seasons

Matthew 10:5-6

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

Acts 8:4-8; 14-17

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city..... ¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

There was a season where the focus was on the Children of Israel and then later it shifted. What is your season right now? Are you ready to launch out or do you still need mentorship and training?

Companies grow for different reasons in different seasons. Do you know what will grow your company in this season and how does this inform you with regards to current priorities?

1. Growth due to creativity
2. Growth due to Direction
3. Growth due to Co-ordination
4. Growth due to collaboration

As an individual do you know what growth phase you are in e.g. mentoring or launching out?

Practical Tool

As we discuss prioritising it is important to remember that we have general life priorities but also specific task related priorities for this week. A practical tool to assist you with weekly priorities is this:

Create a To-Do list and then categorise the tasks in this way:

A - Most important and also quite urgent

B - Important but not to the extent of A items

C - NICE to do's

D - Delegate

E - Eliminate

F - Flexibility required on your part