

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Priorities: How to Decide What's Important

Unedited Transcript

Luke 4:42-44, Luke 7:44-48, Luke 17:7-10

Good morning, men! We are in the series The Man in the Mirror, and in each of these messages I'm trying to give you a blend of both what's in the book and then also some information that might not be in the book. Let's go ahead and begin today with a couple of shout outs. The first one goes to Men's Bible Study Group of Crossbridge Community Church in Helena, AL. 15 men who have been meeting for 3 years at 6:30 pm on Wednesday nights using the Video Bible Study. Led by Bruce Squires and we are looking for an Area Director for the Helena, AL region. I want to welcome you men!

Then, the second shout out today goes to the ECC – MENistry of Evergreen Christian Center in Hillsboro, OR. 15 men who have been meeting at the church on Tuesday nights for a year using the Video Bible Study. Led by Eric Sitton and we are looking for an Area Director for the Hillsboro, OR region. So I wonder if you would join me in giving a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to these two groups? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're so glad to have you with us!

The title of today's message is Priorities: How to Decide What's Important. Last week we talked about decision making, and the Big Idea was the goal is to bring our will into alignment with God's will. Priorities are a way to sort of present a filter or grid through which we can make those decisions to bring our will into alignment with God's will. I want to talk today about how we can do that on a day to day basis.

What is the problem that setting priorities solves?

First up, let's talk about what is the problem that setting priorities solves? There is a tension. You have more demands on your time than you have time to give them. All kinds of pressures! Money pressures, work pressures, marriage pressures, parenting pressures, health pressures, all kinds of pressures that mount up on us and we have more to do than we have time to do the things that we want to do. On the other hand, you have all the time God wants to give you to do everything that God wants you to do. You're feeling under pressure like you don't have enough time, but God has given us each all the time we need to do everything that he wants us to do. So how do we bring those two things into further alignment?

Bill Walton, who has been to this Bible Study, was one of the two cofounders of Holiday Inns. We had him speak at an executive dinner one night, and then he came here and joined us at the Bible Study. He sat with me after the message at the first timers table. We had that morning about 8 young men, 30-45 years of age, and Mr. Walton was sitting about where you are. Each of these 8 men took two or three minutes to share where he was on his spiritual journey in life. I was watching Mr. Walton. As each

successive man told his story, Bill Walton was getting more and more fidgety, more and more animated, more and more tense jawed. Finally, it was his turn to speak, and with a big bass booming voice, he said it's true that I built one of America's great corporations, but in order to do that I left my home every morning and was at the office by 7:00 am and I very rarely got home before 10:00 pm at night. Then he sort of softened and his brow furrowed, and he said even though I have four children, I've never seen a Little League Baseball game. Then his shoulders slumped and he took a deep sigh and he gathered himself one more time, and he roared I exhort you young men! Live your lives by Biblical priorities! Don't make the mistakes that I have made!

Biblical priorities are the solution for getting these things out of kilter. What is a priority? Webster's dictionary says that a priority is something to which we give a degree of urgency or importance. I look at them as pre-decisions. In other words, priorities are deciding in advance what's important to you based on your values and then setting up this grid through which you can screen or filter the decisions as they come to you based on whether or not they match up with your priorities. In other words, a priority is a tie breaker. When you have too much to do and not enough time, it's a tie breaker between whether or not you go to the left or to the right.

Let's take a look at the scriptures, because Jesus was very familiar with pressures. Luke 4:42, and this is at the beginning, but he's already quite well known. At verse 42 it says after he had done all kinds of healings and so forth, after coming out of the synagogue in Capernaum, he went over to Simon's home and people lined up at the door. All night long, apparently, he was healing. 42:

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving.

Point number one, if you're really good at what you do, people are going to ask you to do more. They're going to put more pressure on you to do. I got an email yesterday, somebody wanted me to endorse a book. Who has time on top of everything else to do something for somebody else's book? But I'll probably go ahead and do it anyway, verse 43. Well, I read the first chapter, and it's a good book. Most men's books I don't endorse because they're all trying to get you to do behavior modification and perform to make God happy. I hate those! I really don't like Christian men's books because of this, but this one happens to be... the first chapter was all about how Christianity isn't about performance to make God happy. I said oh my gosh, a grace based book! So maybe it has a chance. Anyway, that's a story for another day. Verse 43:

But Jesus said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

The second thing we see here is that Jesus understood his purpose. He was able to set his priorities because he understood his purpose. We did purpose in an earlier message in this series, and the Big Idea during that was a man will feel most alive, most useful, and most significant when he's doing what God created him to do. So Jesus understood what God had sent him to do, what his purpose was, and that was to do what? To seek and to save the lost. There's a lot of different ways you could say that, but he came to provide a plan of redemption, to shed his blood, to die on a cross for the remission of sins, our sins. He knew his purpose. Then, in verse 44 it says:

And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

These people wanted him to stay. I'm sure there were lots of other needs there that he could have met. They wanted him to stay, they put pressure on him to stay, he probably felt the pressure on them to stay, but he understood his purpose and therefore he set his priorities based on his purpose, and what did he do? He went to the other towns as well. In other words, Jesus learned to make his decisions based on his priorities, not his pressures, and that's the Big Idea for this day: **Priorities help me manage the pressures that would otherwise manage me.** Setting priorities, Biblical priorities, will help you and me to manage the pressures, those pressures that would otherwise be managing us, because we didn't know how to make the decision, we didn't have the right filter, because we didn't have the priorities set. That's the Big Idea.

5 Priorities to Guide a Biblical Christian

Next, I want to talk to you about five priorities that can guide a Biblical Christian, and these are also in the book.

To love God

The first one, the first priority, is to love God. Why is to love God the first priority? Because God said to love God is the first priority! Matthew 22:37-38 or something like that, there's a lawyer, he comes to test Jesus, and those of you, and we have a number of lawyers here. I don't tell this joke anymore because I had a lawyer take me to task on it, but I'm going to tell it again. I haven't told it in twenty years, but you know a lawyer is trained to never ask a question unless he already knows the answer, because he doesn't want to get surprised. Jesus has a lawyer ask him the question what is the greatest commandment? Jesus knew that the lawyer already knew the answer, otherwise he wouldn't have asked the question in the first place. But I just want to say a word of apology to all the lawyers in the room for picking on you like this. You have to say that or they'll sue you later! But anyway, Jesus answered him, he said the first and the greatest, the largest commandment is to love God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind, and with all of your strength. With the totality of your being, with every ounce of your energy, with the sum of your strength, you're to bring all of that to the loving of God.

I love talking about Jeremiah, who one day was out doing what the prophets would do, he was calling down burning sulfur and hellfire on all the sinners. The pastors, they don't like the prophets too much because the pastors are shepherds, so the pastors are trying to calm the sheep down. It's very disrupting when the prophet comes in and is making a ruckus. One of the pastors had the prophet Jeremiah arrested and put in stocks, and that morning let him out, then Jeremiah proceeded to cast a pox on the household of the pastor and everything like that. Then he turns his attention to God in chapter 20 verse 9 of Jeremiah, and he's saying God I don't understand you! All day long I what do I do? I do exactly what you tell me to do, and what do I get out of it? These people hate me! I get insulted! I suffer reproach! I'm persecuted! Then verse 9, apparently he writes in his own private journal. He says but, if I say I will not mention him, or speak anymore in his name, his word is in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones! I'm weary of holding it in! Indeed, I cannot! I mean wow! Wouldn't you like to have that kind of passion for God? Oh my gosh!

Job, after all of the losses that struck his family and his fortune, he said naked I came into the world and naked I will leave. Blessed be the name of the Lord! The Lord gives and the Lord takes away! Blessed be the name of the Lord! That's what it means to love God! Now, how can you do that? You can't do that! No man can love God like that, not even Jeremiah or Job all the time! We love God because he first

loved us, so we bring ourselves into the presence of the almighty and we acknowledge God, I can't love you the way that you want to be loved, but I know that Christ in me can empower me. The Gospel of Jesus in me can empower me to love you the way that you want to be loved, so Lord Jesus come into my life, I surrender my life to you. You're the Lord of my life! Help me to love you the way that you want to be loved. We love him because he first loved us.

I haven't told this story in a few years, but I had a kidney stone, actually I had two. I had never had one, the pain was excruciating! How many of you had a kidney stone? How many of you had two? Most of you had two. After the first one, they tell you drink lots of water, and you don't do it. Then you get another one and what do you do? You drink lots of water! So I drink twelve glasses of water now, every day. But at the time, I didn't know what was going on, and it was terrible! In fact, it was right before the Bible Study, and we had Wally Armstrong speak. I called him up at 5:00 am and said you've got to speak, I'm dying! Patsy, who has the gift of mercy, said okay come on. I'll take you over to the emergency room. So I was lying down in the back seat of the car writhing in pain. We get to the emergency room and of course it's 5:00 am so nobody's there. We walk in and a couple people were milling around, and I said help me! Help! Help! I'm dying! They came over and thought that I was too energetic to be dying. But I said the pain! It's killing me! You've got to give me something for the pain! So they gave me a shot of morphine. Praise God! They had figured out that I had a kidney stone, but they wanted to make sure, so they sent me down into the bowels of the hospital. The orderly pushed me down on a gurney, and when we got there, there were already five or six or seven already down there at that hour of the morning, so he pushed me against the wall and left. My wife had followed down. I started to feel a little chatty, and I said oh Patsy! I feel a love for God right now like I've never felt before! I feel the presence of Jesus! I feel the Holy Spirit coursing through my veins! She said shut up, you dummy! That's the morphine! Well, we all want to love God like that don't we? That's the first priority of a Biblical Christian that everything else will come under loving God.

To love People

Second, to love people. In the next verse of Matthew 22, verse 39, Jesus says:

And the second is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

In John 13:35, all men will know you are my disciples if you do what? Perfect your theology, get your doctrine straight. Well... that's important, but that's not how people are going to know you're his disciples. They're going to know you're his disciples if you what? Love one another! This encompasses a whole array! I've said this before, you take out what the Bible speaks to about relationships and you cut 90% of it out. You cut the Bible and it bleeds neighbor love. Wives, children, parents, honoring your parents, mother and father, friends, employers, employees, enemies, all kinds of relationships.

To rest

Third priority is to rest. Oh my goodness! This is the blind spot in the Christian world, because why? You go to church and there's a lot of work to do! Most of the churches, not all of them, but a lot of churches once they find out that you'll work, will work you until you die. If I was a pastor, Matthew 11:28 would be my verse. I'm not a pastor because I think it's one of the hardest jobs in the world. People who don't know you feel like they have permission to tell you what to do for some reason, and also to critique you without any kindness, grace or mercy. Boy, it's a tough job! Encourage your pastors, men! It's not one of the priorities but maybe it ought to be! Matthew 11:28, Jesus starts:

“Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you more work to do...

Really, a lot of times, that’s the way it gets re-interpreted, but Jesus didn’t say that! He said:

“Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Rest! He wants us to have rest! So how do you do that? I was in a small group here in town with a man that ran Young Life, and I’m pretty sure he was a communist. Everybody’s stuff belonged to everybody, great guy, but a communist. Christian, but a communist. I learned so much from this guy, I did. One of the things that I learned is the concept of taking a mini vacation every day. I am utterly convinced after doing this for many years that every man needs to have a little time to himself every day. A couple of hours, if you can figure out how to carve it out, every day, to yourself. I’m not even necessarily talking about time to have Bible reading and prayer. In other words, don’t turn it into another spiritual job, but I’m talking about recreation, a holy recreation. It could be a walk around the block, it could be watching a TV show that you really like, it could be going to the gym; whatever it is! You need to rest!

There’s so many stories where they’ve taken things like donkeys and tested them by working them for seven days straight and how many miles they go. Then they turn it around and they rest them on the seventh day, a Sabbath of sorts, so they only work them six days, then the total number of miles they work in six days is more than in seven straight. You’ve heard things like this. You know that Chick-fil-A makes more money in six days than McDonald’s makes in seven. You know all of these things, but the point is make it a priority! Make rest an actual priority, and to negotiate the terms of this with your spouse if necessary.

To work

The next one, the fourth priority is to work. The Bible is dripping with the Holiness of vocation. Every vocation is Holy to God! There is no such thing as a secular job if you’re a Christian! It might be in the world, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not a ministry. And it’s not just your work as a platform to do ministry, your work is ministry. So if you’re waiting tables, every four top that sits down (that’s four people, I’m an old waiter, that’s one of the ways I put myself through college. The other was Bartending for Howard Dayton, the Christian magnate of financial principles. So we were all rough. You were rough, I was rough). Every time you have a four top sit down on your station, if you’re a waiter, that’s a divine appointment! God has orchestrated those people to sit in your section of the restaurant so that you can represent to them the character and the conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ! If you’re a salesman, every appointment that you get is a Holy appointment, and God knows that every sale is sacred, right? If you’re a manager, every time two of your employees are having a conflict and you have to bring them into your office, that is a divine appointment, an opportunity for you to show the reconciling power of the Gospel exhibited through your gentleness and your wisdom and your desire to see them figure out how to work it out and love one another. That’s to work, and not mention all the other things like providing for our families and the amount of significance we can find by doing our work and the fact that Genesis 2:15 tells us that work was established. It’s the first thing that God did for mankind was give him a job. What was the first occupation of man? Landscape maintenance guy!

To do good works

Fifth is to do good works. Jesus said this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my what? Disciples! If you want to be a disciple, this brings the Father much glory, and it shows that we're his disciples when we bear much fruit. Ephesians 2:10, for we are God's workmanship, his masterpiece! Created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Not the good works that save, but the good works because we have been saved, which he has prepared for us in advance, before you ever yield your life to Jesus, he already has a plan for your life. He already has something that he wants you to do, and there are multiple and many ways to do that, but the chief way we bear fruit is by making disciples. The chief good work of a Christian is becoming and making disciples. Not just becoming!

How many of you have heard of the theory of constraints? The bottleneck theory? The principle is that most people think that when something isn't working right, whether it's at work or at home, that... Let's just say that you have five things that aren't working right, then you have five problems. But the theory of constraints says no, you really only have one problem at any given time, because if you solved the other four problems, you still wouldn't speed up your effectiveness or processes. Let me give you an example: I'm at a Holiday Inn buffet breakfast and there's a bottleneck. They put the toaster in the middle of the buffet line, so everybody got halfway down there, put their toast in, and then they came to a stop. In the theory of constraints, it doesn't make any difference what other problems they have, until they solve that problem, nothing's going to speed up. But, let's just say they would have moved the toaster down to the end so that people would go through the line and put their toast in at the end, then what would have happened? Then the next bottleneck would have shown up, the omelet station probably. So that's the way the theory works.

Let me tell you where the bottleneck today is in the body of Christ for men, this is it. This has changed over the last twenty years. Twenty years ago, the bottleneck for men's discipleship was there wasn't enough good curriculum. A lot of us started promoting the idea and encouraging curriculum developers to do all that kind of stuff, and they did! Today, twenty years later, there's a plethora of these things, but let me tell you what the problem is today. The bottleneck today is that men who have been discipled are not turning around and making disciples of others. Somehow we've gotten the idea that making disciples means becoming disciples. Jesus didn't say come and be discipled. Now, you can't give what you don't have, so you need to be discipled, but he didn't say come and be discipled. He said go and make disciples!

Then just to make sure we loop in the poor, Paul's in front of the brothers in Jerusalem and in Galatians 2:10 or 20 he said the only thing they asked me to do was to remember the poor, the very thing that I was eager to do. So these are good works. The Big Idea today, these priorities can help me manage all of those pressures that are otherwise going to manage me.

How can we sustain our motivation?

How can we sustain our motivation? I'm out of time, so what I'm going to just say to you, in Luke 7:44-48, Jesus tells a story about a man who was forgiven a small debt, and therefore was small in his gratitude, compared to a man who was forgiven a large debt, and therefore was very grateful. The way you can stay motivated, all of us, to live by these priorities, is to remember that you're a terrible, wicked, evil, sinful man without Jesus Christ. You know this is true, because every one of us knows somebody right now who has professed faith in Jesus Christ and is ripping his family apart, who has gotten sucked into the world and is creating havoc and devastation. It is by grace, God's amazing grace that we have been forgiven so much. When we forget that, Luther said if you only think of yourself as a little sinner, then you only need a little savior. But if you are wise, and think of yourself as a big sinner,

then you will realize that you will need a big savior. The Big Idea today, use these priorities to help you manage the pressures that will otherwise manage you. It's all about Jesus, men, let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, thank you so much for how you have given us this magnificent manual to guide us into every possible area of our lives. Lord, these five priorities, there certainly can be other priorities that others would have, but for every one of us these are five essential priorities that we need to make part of the fabric of our very lives day to day. I pray Lord that you would show each of us where we are strong, where we are weak and where we need to make corrections, and that we feel affirmed and encouraged for the ways that we are living by Biblical priorities. Yet Lord, let us not be proud and therefore ungrateful, but rather Lord let us see ourselves as the kind of man that is totally and completely dependent upon the Gospel of your grace for every move that we make. In Jesus' name, amen!