

The Preacher's Priorities

**“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word”
(Acts 6:4).**

A discussion on preacher's priorities ranks right up there with preparing for the pains of going to the dentist's chair.

We may not like to think about priorities but it is a must if we hope to succeed in the preaching ministry. Setting priorities is a mouse-sized task. Anyone can do it. The Bible has made it easy and established them for us. It's disciplining our lives to fulfill the priorities that become the elephant-sized dilemma. Let's admit it. It is a struggle to keep our lives moving according to our priorities.

“We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the Word of God, not administering...select seven men...We will put them in charge of this business. Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word...This idea pleased the whole group” (Acts 6: 2-5, *NLT*).

Priorities of Highly Effective Preachers

Preacher, take a moment and underline Acts 6:4 in your Bible. It is your job description, your priorities in ministry.

- Prayer – communicating with God about others.
- Preaching – communicating with others about God.

Because the early preachers set their priorities correctly the church grew.

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7).

It is so easy to become preoccupied with the “daily ministration” of the church. There are many things fighting for our attention.

God is searching for men who will return to the established priorities found in the Word of God. These are:

- Prayer
- Ministry of the Word

A preacher has many responsibilities, but none as important as these. The Word of God and prayer can be compared to the two wings that lift and carry a bird in flight. They provide a balance in our lives and ministries. Prayer and the Word of God keep us moving forward and upward.

Henry Ward Beecher once delivered a lecture at Yale entitled “Preaching: the Preacher's Whole Business.” His foundation was that we have one business—the business of preaching. Some think preaching is only a small part of the duties of a pastor. This is contrary to Acts 6:4. Preaching is our main responsibility.

How Do You Fit Priorities into Your Life?

The easy answer to that question is through personal discipline. Easier said than done. Paul admonished Timothy,

“Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness” (1 Timothy 4:8, *NLT*).

Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is credited with comparing priorities to rocks in a jar. (Hopefully, his illustration will help you to understand how to fit priorities into life.) The jar represents a week

of time. The small rocks represent all the things that you normally do in a week. The large rocks represent the important things like prayer, Bible study, preaching, family time; things that you need to do but have a difficult time fitting into your schedule. Your job is to fit as many big rocks in the jar as possible. But you never fit them all in. What is the secret? Put the big rocks in first or you will not be able to fit them in later.

An Old Story—A New Twist

Charlie Hedges in *Getting the Right Things Right* retells a story written in the Bible two thousand years ago:

There was a lot of activity in the house. "It had been that way for almost two days. Servants frantically scurried about like mice sniffing out cheese. Delivery boys came and went bringing food, flowers, beverages, and table settings. Yet despite the precise planning, chaos prevailed. The ladies of the house were no better off, especially the older sister who was quite concerned with correctness. They were about to serve dinner to the most influential man in the country. Things had to be perfect!

"When the honored guest finally arrived, the young sister abandoned her preparations and went into the parlor to chat with their guests and listen to the sacred words of the Honored One.

"After a short time the older sister's frustration peaked. She charged into the sitting room and said to their guest, "Jesus, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the serving alone? Tell her to help me!"

"Jesus responded, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered by so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, and Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

This story has as much relevance today as it did then. It describes the tension within almost every human being, the tensions between doing things right and doing the right things."

Warren Wiersbe in *Bible Personalities* has an interesting quotation: "Our Lord was not objecting to the "many things," but He was showing her the effect produced upon her by "many things" was that "one thing" was lacking. He was revealing to her the fact that she needed concentration at a center, and where this was so, activities could still be carried on in peace and poise and quietness."

- "One thing is needful" (Luke 10:42).
- "One thing will I seek after (Psalms 27:4).
- "One thing you are lacking" (Luke 18:22).
- "This one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13).

Jon Walker in "Did Jesus Rush through His Week?" warns us that the more we strive to be Christ-like, the more we develop the un-Christ-like attitude of busy-ness. This does not have to be so. It can be overcome by keeping the main thing, the main thing!

You never think of Jesus as a hurried person rushing through life having difficulty focusing on priorities. He understood the following:

- Knowing His purpose.
- Sticking with His purpose.
- Staying with God's timetable.

Measure the Tasks against God's Purpose

Each task of the week should be measured against God's purpose. Prayer and preaching should be the two filters through which all other ministerial tasks must pass. Let us keep focused on the task.

“Meanwhile, we’ll stick with our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God’s Word. The congregation thought this was a great idea” (Acts 6:4, *The Message*, Eugene Peterson).

“So let’s keep focused on the goal, those of us who want everything that God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet” (Philippians 3:14-15, *The Message*, Eugene Peterson).

We are all given the same amount of hours in a day. Have you ever watched an athlete? They sacrifice daily to press toward their goal. Do not allow your days to be filled with busy-ness. Keep the big picture—a larger purpose in view.

Study Questions

1. What are the preacher’s priorities according to Acts 6:4?

2. Setting priorities is easy. What is the difficult part?

3. What is the job description for those in ministry?

4. What is the primary business of a preacher?

5. How do you fit priorities into your life?

6. What can we learn from the story of Mary and Martha?

7. Jesus was seldom in a hurry. How did He accomplish this?

8. What are the two filters through which all other ministerial tasks should pass?

9. How should we measure each of our weekly tasks?

10. Compare the discipline of an athlete to what is needed by the preacher.

