



A Time for Everything

Lesson 1

A Time to Prioritize

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Prioritizing Priorities: Prioritizing is an important skill to have both personally and congregationally. We will cover both throughout this study, but this introductory activity asks you to think about congregational priorities. Read 1 Peter 2:2, Matthew 20:25-28, and Matthew 28:18-20 as a whole class. Discuss what these passages say about our mission as Christians.

Now, in your smaller groups, list up to 15 things you do as a congregation. Rank them in order of importance and explain why you ranked them the way you did based on the mission Jesus gives us as his church.

___ Answers will vary by congregation. In the discussion, the instructor may want to lead people to see the priority of the activities that have to do with growing and going with God's Word, not catering to our own preferences but in service to others. The truth is that it is difficult to do a lot of things well. In a church's ministry, it must prioritize.

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Rightly Ordered Love

1. In his "City of God," St. Augustine talks about rightly ordered love. He calls God the "highest good." He makes the point that if we love anything/one more than God, even good gifts, those things become evil because we cannot properly show love for others if we do not properly love God first. That is such a challenge! Read the passages below and discuss the questions.

- *"They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." (Romans 1:25)*
- *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)*
- *"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:8)*

This is a list of relationships/responsibilities/blessings that God places into our lives:
Work, God, Spouse, Child(ren), Hobbies, Friends, Those in Need.

- How would God have us rightly order these loves? Explain your reasoning.
There may be differences of opinion on this one, but a good listing would be: God, Spouse, Child(ren), and then Everything else.

Personal Reflection: What does the order look like in your life?

Answers will vary. Depending on the group, you may just give a minute for them to contemplate without sharing unless some want to share.

- How does the world order these loves? Explain your reasoning.
In our country, we tend to be workaholics so that we can climb the ladder, make more money, etc. Often, I feel the order becomes: Work, Children, Spouse (Which is why marriage counseling is prevalent when the kids move out), and God comes in last place. Note how good the devil is at what he does! He flips God's ordered structure on its head!

We hear Jesus tell us *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,"* (Matthew 6:21) and join with St. Augustine's prayer: "Set love in order in me, Lord."

2. In addition to Matthew 6:21 above, what important points do the following passages make about personal and congregational priorities?

You will never find peace looking for fulfillment apart from God's ordering of loves. Make your treasure the Lord and his will and your priorities will fall into place. It all depends on God's blessing. When we keep the first things first, he blesses us with sleep and satisfaction in every gift he gives. Apart from God, that satisfaction will always be elusive.

- *“Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.” (Psalm 127:1-2)*
- *“That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13)*

3. How does the fact that we have eternity before us help us prioritize how we use our time on earth?

Picture a timeline that goes from 0-10,000 years. Plot out your life on that line. It looks like a sliver, doesn't it? Now change that timeline to represent 24 hours instead of 10,000 years. Do you know how long that same sliver would represent? About 11 minutes. Now imagine that you wake up one morning to your alarm and it won't shut off, you hit your head on the headboard as you sit up in bed, your feet hit the cold floor and you jam your toe walking by the baseboard, you go to grab coffee but the coffee maker is broken, you go to shower but the water heater went out... So, how is your first 11 minutes of that day? Terrible. Now imagine that the whole rest of the day everything went perfectly right, everyone is nice to you, you meet the love of your life and get engaged that same day, you win the lottery three times without even playing, you get promoted at work, and on and on and on. At the end of that day, if I asked you, *“So, how was your day?”* What would you say? *“Oh, I had an awful first 11 minutes?”* No! You'd say, *“This was the best day of my life!”* You wouldn't even be thinking about the first 11 minutes! The same is true with this life and eternity. And what does the hymn writer say? *“When we've been there 10,000 years, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.”*¹ With that perspective, I can give a crazy amount of myself in this life knowing that eternal life awaits me. What better way to use our time than for Jesus? God gets glory when we manage our time focusing on our priorities.

- *“Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:8)*

Group Discussion

Read Romans 12:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. You have 24 hours in a day and *each one* is used to glorify God. How does that knowledge:

- Convict you? *How often I view my time as my own and not one big burnt offering to my Savior. I end up focusing on my own priorities instead of his.*
- Bind you? *What a privilege to live for our Savior. His love compels me just like it did for Paul.*

¹ Amazing Grace by John Newton

- **Free you?** When I view my life as a living sacrifice and one lived to God's glory, then I'm free from thinking, "Am I doing the right thing?" or the guilt that is associated with needing to "do" to please God.
- **Motivate you?** What is Christ's love? He suffered hell so I would never have to! I want to respond in proportion to the gift. If you buy me a stamp, I'll shake your hand. If you pay off my mortgage, I'll kiss your feet. If you suffer hell in my place? There's nothing I wouldn't do for you!

Read Luke 10:38-42 and Ephesians 5:15-16. Individually, list five important things you want to use your time for to accomplish each day. Share your list with your group and discuss how to accomplish your priorities (i.e., what needs to be sacrificed to make the most of every opportunity?)

Answers will vary, but the point is to see that the only business of life is Christianity: Taking up my cross and following Jesus. Recognizing this, we will want to sacrifice time wasters so that we can take back the time (literally, "redeem the time") for more meaningful purposes.

Agree/Disagree: Sometimes, you are just too busy to do something.

If it's not important, then "agree." I don't have time to waste. If it's something important, then "disagree." We all have 24 hours in the day. We don't have time for the things we do not think are important.

Closing Activity

Back to the Beginning. In the introductory activity, you listed and prioritized ten things you do as a congregation. Imagine you are starting a new congregation. What five things would you want to make sure you used the majority of your time to do? (i.e., Evaluate the introductory list. What might you consider sacrificing and why?)

Pastors can use this as an opportunity to "shoot the dogs" and open discussion of some things we do as a congregation that are "off mission."