

## THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST



*Things that matter most must never be at the mercy  
of things which matter least. -- Goethe*

### **Scripture:**

### **Psalm 90:9-12**

<sup>9</sup>For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. <sup>10</sup>The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

<sup>11</sup>Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you. <sup>12</sup>So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

### **Mark 12:28-34**

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup>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."<sup>31</sup>The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' <sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; <sup>33</sup>and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbor as oneself", this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.



### **MANAGING OUR TIME/ MANAGING OUR LIFE**

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and  
evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11)*

How can we set aside the time to discover the evidence that God cares for us and those we love? How can we be certain that our lives include times for hope, and the planning that goes with it?

"Teach us to number our days, Oh Lord."

"Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble."

"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, so that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."

The Bible says the challenge to take control of our own time and to enrich our spirits greets us every morning.

- We help our children struggle to control their time, and it is often over time priorities that great family conflicts are waged.
- As adults we must balance work and leisure.
- "Supermoms" struggle to balance work, family, and personal growth.
- The father who is successful simultaneously as a career professional, a trained athletic specimen of fitness, a counselor, a great lover and friend to all the children in the neighborhood is hard to find.

So much of faith has to do with the proportions we assign to spiritual and material things.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven R. Covey asks,

**Who sets the priorities in your life?**

**How do they fit into your personal mission statement?**

**Is the direction you are traveling likely to get you where you want to go?**

## CHECKLISTS

To get there, people have devised many ways to gain control over their time. Maybe you are a part of a generation characterized by notes and checklists. Are you a list maker? Do you make lists? Do you have yellow sticky notes all over your home? Raise your hand if you are a list maker. (By the way, do you know where your lists are?)

## APPOINTMENT BOOKS

Some people progress to a second level of time management in which life is run not by sticky notes, but by calendars and appointment books. These books have gotten more sophisticated. Men and women carry their "Day Planners" under their arms like a Bible. Raise your hand if you have a day planner calendar.

## PRIORITIZED CALENDAR

The next step to calendar thinking is prioritizing the calendar, clarifying the values, and weighing the relative values of different activities by their position in terms of the goals that you are trying to accomplish. Covey says that means placing an A, B, or C beside the items in your day planner to put them in order. The order depends upon your mission statement, or priorities.

The problem with lists is that they are messy. The problem with day planners is that they aren't very much fun.

The problem with calendars is that they can take over, and leave little time for the unexpected.

The question for us this morning is, "Where is the sticky note for faith," and on what list do we place the spiritual things that we talk about in worship, in study, and our mission work?

## LEAVING ROOM FOR THE PRACTICE OF FAITH

On the last page is a framework for the kinds of decisions we make, as well as the timeframe in which we have to make them. All of us do some things that are **important** and some that are not -- at home, at work, at play. All of us do some things that are more **urgent** than others.

**Urgent** means it requires immediate attention.

**Important** has to do with where it fits into our values system.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN URGENT AND IMPORTANT

First let's begin with the difference between the urgent and the important.

**TIME - It's urgent.** I think of a telephone ringing. A ringing phone seems to have an urgency to it. And yet when a person has come to your office to see you, or to your home to make a visit, often we end up answering the phone, rather than doing what is important. We will put someone in our office on hold for fifteen minutes, but we would never do that to a person on the phone. It wouldn't be polite. Urgent matters press on us. They insist on action. Some are pleasant, some are not. Urgent means, first of all, deciding if something is urgent.

**VALUE - It's important.** Importance has to do with results and values. Importance contributes something to your values and your goals in life. It's important to you if it gets you where you want to go. Faith is important.

*Now let's look at the diagram. (See last page of this printed sermon.)*

## QUADRANT I

In the upper left corner are activities that are urgent and important. Here, life is lived in between crises. If you spend most of your time in Quadrant I, then you spend most of your time solving pressing problems, and working on projects with a deadline. People who spend most of their lives in Quadrant I are crisis driven. They are dominated by life, like a pounding surf. They struggle back against the waves, only to stand back up and face another that knocks them back down to the ground. These people are literally beaten up by problems all day every day. Their only relief is to escape to something unimportant -- such as the activities found in Quadrant IV.

## QUADRANT III

Other people spend a great deal of time doing things that are urgent, but not important; that's Quadrant III. They think what they are doing is urgent and perhaps they assume it is also important. In fact the urgency is based upon the priorities and expectations of others. Those who live and think mostly in Quadrants III and IV lead basically irresponsible lives. Effective people stay out of Quadrants III and IV because, urgent or not, these things are not important. Who decides what is important? You do. In Quadrant III we respond to mail, we respond to interruptions, we react to popular activities, and we fill out our reports as we are directed. "As we are directed" is the key.

## QUADRANT IV

Life in Quadrant IV is life in hell. If this describes your life at home, at work, or in any other area, then you have to ask yourself why you are living it. If it is not important, and it is not urgent, then we are wasting our time. However, perhaps this is the arena of recreation. Perhaps the very fact that it is not important and has no deadline gives us just the break we need. This is a perfect description of relaxation, but it is a poor description of our life's work.

On the bottom section of the chart, when we do things that are urgent but unimportant, (Quadrant III) our focus is short term. We manage a crisis. We

become a chameleon. We feel victimized and out of control, and our own goals and plans are worthless. Worst of all, we become shallow and broken. And when we move to Quadrant IV then we are totally irresponsible. We are dependent upon others for even the basics of life.

So what does that leave? Where do we live? How do we decide about the things which matter most?

## WE WANT TO LIVE IN QUADRANT II

Here, is where the things which matter most are important, but they are not so urgent that they do not allow us to plan and set goals.

The things we deal with are important, but they are not urgent. This allows us to build relationships. We can plan for the long range, we exercise, and we do some preventative maintenance so that things do not become overpoweringly urgent. Here we let our spiritual life enter our daily life. What is important can be determined by our life goals and our religious faith. We can be opportunity minded, not crisis minded. We balance and set priorities.

## THE QUADRANT OF FAITH

So which is quadrant for faith? Is it Quadrant I or Quadrant II?

**Is your faith urgent,  
is your faith important?**

**The emergency room is not a time  
to begin your relationship with God.**

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is my Lord and Savior. God is the creator of things visible and invisible. Faith, hope and love, and the greatest is love. So where does that fit?
- Where is the place where people plan for the education of children?
- Is there a quadrant for me to attend the pastor's class on great ideas that shaped our culture? Where do we serve on a church or community board that improves or administers a program, or provides some help?

Both the rituals of faith, and the spontaneous and unexpected moments of faith are times when we make a place for God. That's why we call the room in which we worship a sanctuary. It is a sanctuary where the lines of architecture left our thoughts upward, it is a place where music lifts us, and it is a place where we practice the patience of listening.

**James 1.19:**

*You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

**If you are a stranger to God, then calling upon God in a time of emergency is like learning a new language, making a new acquaintance, learning a new skill.**

**Faith is not driven by deadlines, it is motivated by practice.**

**Things that matter most must not be at the mercy of things that matter least.**

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Ephesians 5)

	<b>URGENT</b>	<b>NOT URGENT</b>
<b>IMPORTANT</b>	<b>I.</b> <b>ACTIVITIES:</b> Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven project	<b>II.</b> <b>ACTIVITIES:</b> Prevention, PC activities Relationship building Building your Faith, Planning, Recreation
<b>NOT IMPORTANT</b>	<b>III.</b> <b>ACTIVITIES:</b> Interruptions, some calls, some mail, some reports, some meetings, proximate, pressing matters, popular activities	<b>IV.</b> <b>ACTIVITIES:</b> Trivia, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters



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