

Putting First Things First

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

“ Exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks,
be made for all men”
(1 Timothy 2:1).

The Apostle Paul once said, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.” (1 Corinthians 10:23) This means that there are many things that we *could do*, but few things that we *should do*.

John Maxwell in his book *Developing the Leader Within You* quoted a speaker who said, “There are two things that are most difficult to get people to do; to think and to do things in the order of importance.”

Have you ever wondered why animal trainers in the circus carry a stool when they go into a cage of lions? The trainer will hold the stool and push its legs towards the lion. This is because the lion will try to focus on all four of the legs at the same time. This overwhelms the lion, and it becomes weak and tame because its attention becomes divided. The devil tries the same tactics on us when he tries to divert our attention from our priorities in the Christian life and ministry.

John Maxwell relates the tragic story of an airplane that crashed. As the plane was approaching the airport for landing, the light that indicates the proper working of the landing gear failed to come on. The plane flew in a large circle while the cockpit crew checked to see if the gear was actually not deployed or if the bulb was defective. As the flight engineer tried to remove the bulb it wouldn't move so the rest of the crew tried to help him. As they struggled with the bulb, no one noticed that the plane was losing altitude, and the plane crashed. While the crew of trained pilots played with a light bulb the plane with its passengers crashed into the ground.

So many times we spend quality time doing the things that are not important at all. In Acts 6 the Apostles became occupied with the “daily ministrations” of feeding the widows. One day they reached the realization that they would have to make some priorities; putting first things first. It was simply not right for them to busy themselves with waiting on tables and neglect their real ministerial priorities.

Ministerial Priorities

They stated their priorities in the ministry as:

1. Give ourselves continually to prayer.
2. Give ourselves to the ministry of the Word.

As a result of them putting first things first “...the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

A necessary part of spiritual leadership is praying for the people you are leading. It is a sin to fail to pray for those to whom you are spiritually responsible. You must be an example to your people. You cannot lead them to where you have not been yourself.

One day Jesus visited Mary and Martha in their home. Martha received him into the home, and moved busily about serving Jesus. Mary, on the other hand, simply sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word.

Martha complained, “...Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” Jesus answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:40-42, *NIV*).

Our service to Jesus is essential and good, but we must always remember that our first and most important priority is to devote ourselves to prayer, loving the Lord, and the ministry of his word. Watchman Nee said that it is possible to be “serving the House of God but have forgotten the Lord Himself.”

Oswald Chambers claimed, “The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service to Him.” Paul always remained devoted to Jesus Christ and “determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul was committed to Jesus; not just to a cause.

A story is told in 1 Kings 20 of a man who was given the responsibility of taking care of a prisoner. When given this prisoner he was warned, “Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life.” The prisoner escaped and the servant confessed, “And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” (1 Kings 20: 39-40) We should not become so busy that we forget or neglect our priorities. Remember, if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy.

Prayer Warrior, Vesta Mangun, in her lesson, “Leadership in Prayer--Indispensable Example” tells us that you can:

1. Measure your love for your people by your prayer life.
2. Measure your concern for your people by your prayer life.
3. Measure your vision for your people by your prayer life.
4. Measure your leadership of your people by your prayer life.

It is so easy to get busy doing things for God that we fail to take time with God. This causes us to lose sight of God’s view of things and weakens our relationship with the Lord. It results in us wondering aimlessly without direction. A line from Alice in Wonderland says, “If you don’t

“The Powerhouse for the Church is not the BOARDROOM but the PRAYER ROOM.”
(H. E. Sciem)

know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” In Acts 2:40 we are told to save ourselves from this untoward generation. The word “untoward” means that we are not going toward anything.

We lack direction, purpose, vision, meaning, and priorities. We are going fast, going busily, going often but going nowhere.

However, a person who makes time to pray will find a God who takes time to answer. We must make the time through having correct priorities. Rev. T. F. Tenney admonishes us, “Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing!”

**Preaching, teaching, talking to men for God is a great thing...
Talking, interceding, prevailing with God for men is greater still.**

Study Questions

1. What are the two most difficult things to get people to do? _____

2. What are the priorities of ministry according to Acts 6? _____

3. What is a necessary part of spiritual leadership? _____

4. How can we measure our love, concern, vision, and leadership of our people? _____

5. What happens when we make time to pray? _____

6. What is greater than preaching, teaching, talking to men about God? _____

7. What does “untoward” mean? _____

8. What did Jesus mean when He said to Martha, “one thing is needful?” _____

9. In Acts 6 what was the result of the apostles getting priorities straight? _____

10. Why does an animal trainer carry a stool into the cage of a wild animal? _____

We have lots of time to talk to others - how much time do we have to talk to God?

Additional Notes
