

Driving lesson

As she slid behind the wheel for her first driving lesson, my friend couldn't contain her excitement. "You need to make adjustments so the car is comfortable for you," the instructor began. "so, what's the first thing you should do?"

She thought for a moment and said to the driving instructor - "Change the radio station?"

Priorities

So today I just want to talk for a few minutes about priorities.

We've just read a story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. I think we would all agree that Jesus was a man who had his priorities right. And he always seemed to say and do the right thing when the situation demanded it.

And yet, when the news comes to him that Lazarus is ill, he waits for two more days. The most obvious question for me is "why did Jesus wait?"

The answer it seems to me is that Jesus is able to distinguish between the urgent and the important. He is able to understand when something requires an immediate response and when it does not.

That got me to thinking – do I get the urgent and the importance confused? What about you?

And if "Time is Money" (and we're told that it is) then what we do with our time is just as important a subject for a Christian as what we do with our money. We are stewards of time just as much as we are stewards of money.

It's odd that in an age when we have a house full of time saving gadgets, we have less and less time. We rush around, trying to beat the clock, convinced we can squeeze in one more job, one more trip to the gym (quick, I might get home in time for The Bill or Eastenders) and then we flop down exhausted, feeling inadequate that we don't seem to have achieved very much in 24 hours.

Powerpoint slide – Stephen Covey's matrix of Urgent versus Important

As you can imagine, business leaders fret about this sort of thing too (they call it productivity) and so management consultants devote a fair bit of time to the issue. One of their number, Stephen Covey, addresses this in his simple time management matrix (see attached Powerpoint slide). It's a management technique but I think it also has a practical application for the way we go about our everyday business. You might see it as a statement of the obvious but it's worth reflecting on. On the Y axis we have level of importance; on the x axis we have level of urgency. So everything we put in Box 1 should be both important and urgent (i.e top priority). Everything in Box 2 is important, but not urgent. Box 3 is urgent, but not important and Box 4 is not important nor is it urgent. (The funny thing is I know that most TV programmes should be in box 4, but why do i waste my time watching them?)

Stephen encourages the pupil to consider their daily activities and put them into these boxes.

But before we can sit down and put our activities in these boxes, I think we have to be clear about what our priorities are. So how do we go about getting our priorities right?

What would Jesus do?

We could ask ourselves, WWJD in our position? You may have heard this phrase before, “what would Jesus do”? It was popular in America at the end of the 19th century and then made a big comeback at the end of the 20th. You can now get bracelets with WWJD to wear as a daily reminder. But the amazing thing I find is that Jesus rarely responds in a way that I would expect. So in order to figure out WWJD, I have to keep returning to scripture.

And yet here we get a surprise. I read this story and expect Jesus to drop everything and to head straight for the home of Lazarus. That feels to me like the sort of thing that slots neatly into the important and urgent box.

It is clear that the situation with Lazarus **is** important in the context of John’s gospel, but it is **not** urgent. If Jesus was an ambulance driver, then that would have been the case for Him. If He was nothing but a great healer, then he would have rushed straight there.

But notice that Jesus is clear about His mission. He says in verse 4 that “this sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it” Jesus has a mission, not to heal everyone immediately (we already know that), but to point to the Glory of God and to that fact that He Himself is the saviour of the world, the one that will reconcile man to God.

Jesus has got his priorities right. He is looking at things with from a Kingdom perspective. You see, our instinct is to wonder why Jesus doesn’t rush to heal Lazarus before He dies. But for Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was not an end in itself. And so he takes his time – waiting 4 days until it is beyond doubt that Lazarus is dead (The Jews were of the belief that the Spirit hung around the body for three days until the body would then start decomposing).

This “odd” reaction is not a one off. For example, when the paralysed man is lowered through the roof on a mat (Luke Chapter 5), Jesus’ first reaction is to forgive him, not to heal him. The man wanted healed. But Jesus doesn’t put healing above forgiveness of sin in his list. And the man is healed and picks up his mat and goes home, glorifying God.

Jesus was here to Glorify God and to remove that barrier between God and us. That was important, that was urgent. Everything else moved into box number 2 or 3 or 4.

So what should our priorities be?

Jesus left us with the Greatest Commandments and the Great Commission.

Love the love you God with all your heart and all your mind and love your neighbour as you love yourself. Go and make disciples of all nations. And do these things for the Glory of God.

Perhaps now is the time to sit down and look at what we’re doing as individuals and as a fellowship of believers and test what we do with our time.

When someone asks you, what is the most important thing in your life, what do you say? How does that stack up in terms of time that you devote to it? The clock doesn't lie. If we say that God is the most important thing in our lives but he gets one hour a week and watching the Tour de France gets 6 hours, then what does that say about our priority? (You can tell that writing this has been a challenge to me)

Even modern day economists are starting to understand the impact time has on our ability to consume goods. This from Scott Burns in his book "The Household Economy"

"We need time. We need time to work, to eat, to sleep, and to accomplish all the daily chores of living. We also need time to know and understand our mates, our children, and our friends. Most of our relationships, in fact, require more time than we have, and it is difficult to avoid the feeling that we could never have enough. Nor is our list of demands on our time complete. We have ignored the time we need to be alone, a necessary but invariably short-changed period. . .

"All these demands come before the proliferating hardware used in the consumption of still more time - before the possession, use, and maintenance of motor cars, small and large boats, tennis rackets, skis, and golf clubs, sewing machines and looms, bathing suits, hi-fi sets, i-pods, video cameras, mobile phones etc. All these things - the inevitable trappings of affluence - make still more demands on our ever-diminishing store of time. They are responsible for many of the sour notes sounded as affluence becomes more general and more disappointing. . . Just as it requires time to produce things, it also requires time to maintain and consume them."

If we are to fulfil the commandments (developing a love for God and a love for each other) and the Commission (to make disciples of others) then this is going to take time.

Think about your best friend or your favourite hobby. What did it take to get it that way? It took time. You don't get a single figure handicap at golf without plugging a away for a few hours a week. If we want to develop relationships with friends or with God, we have to put in the time. There is no shortcut.

Sometimes, it means we have to be inventive and creative. We have to juggle competing priorities. It is not easy – I know this. I decided to use the time it took to travel to London on the train as my prayer time. So I read my Bible and then start my prayers. After about 5 minutes or so I pass into a deep communion which, to the untrained eye, might look like sleep.

WWLD?

So let's put ourselves in Lazarus sandals for a few minutes. How do you think he reacted to being raised? Do you think Lazarus had the same priorities after he came back that he had before he died? How much time do you think he wasted after he came back? Not a lot, I suspect. No – he knew what was important. I reckon he spent a lot of time hugging his sisters and family and telling everyone he met about this amazing man called Jesus.

So I'd ask you to think about what you do with your time and keep testing it against the priorities set out for us. Think about what is important. Make some tough decisions.

David Wilkerson, who wrote *The Cross and the Switchblade* decided to pray for two hours a night rather than watch television. His journey with God led him to inner city New York where his work with gangs changed many lives, including his own.

The Importance of Rest

But there's one last thing I'd like to say and I think it is an important message. I know that there are some folks here today who commit a lot of their time to the church, to out-reach, to building relationships with neighbours, friends.

And sometimes, you have to do take a step back and do nothing occasionally.

Although Jesus re-calibrated our understanding of the Sabbath, it remains an important aspect of our faith. Psychologists and business leaders alike both recognise that we need to be able to put our feet up once in a while. Our work to extend the kingdom of God is no different.

Doing nothing is important, and sometimes it can become urgent too!