

First Things First

Although tsunamis occur with a degree of regularity, the worst one since 1645 struck just seventeen years ago last Sunday, December 26. The third largest earthquake in history triggered tsunamis that broached the shores of the Indian ocean, killing over 227,000 people. The day after celebrating Christmas, they were clinging to life. Life can change in less than a second.

What could take only a second can change the course of an hour, a week, a month, and for some, a lifetime. If the course of life can change in a second then we need to consider that we have been granted over half a million opportunities for changing our life this year – about 526,000 of them. Roughly 241,000 of them will be taken just to keep you alive eating and sleeping. You will most likely have 125,000 of them taken by others as you go to work. That leaves 160,000 for the year, which seems like a lot but in reality you will probably only have time to use a mere handful in any given day and you probably won't even get to use all of those. Since more than 99% of those opportunities must necessarily be lost each day, it would be wise to choose very carefully which of the infinitesimal moments you will get to cling to.

Obviously, one of the great pieces of advice in life is to prioritize and put first things first. When it comes to the stewardship of what God has given us.

1. Prioritizing

- Abraham made God a priority in his finances

Gen 14:18-20 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he *was* the priest of the most high God.

19And he blessed him, and said, Blessed *be* Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he

gave him tithes of all.

- The Corinthians made missions a priority

1Cor 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

2Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

- The Ephesians made preaching a priority each week

Acts 20:7 And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

- David made meeting with God a priority each day

Ps 5:3 My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up.

Ps 59:16 But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.

The stewardship we have been given has been founded on the holiness of God because each moment of our life is separated unto God.

1Pet 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

It was in 1873, in Dublin that D. L. Moody heard British evangelist Henry Varley utter those life changing words: “The world has yet to see what God

can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.” It was after an all-night prayer meeting in Dublin, at the home of Henry Bewley. Varley did not even remember making the statement when Moody reminded him of it a year later. “As I crossed the wide Atlantic,” Moody said, “the boards of the deck...were engraved with them, and when I reached Chicago, the very paving stones seemed marked with them.” The result: Moody decided he was involved in too many ministries to be effective and therefore began to concentrate on evangelism. [Of course he was fully prepared for ministry before he chose to focus solely on it]

— The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 200

The thing to emphasize here is that we must make God our *first* priority.

Matt 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

In his book *Feminine Faces*, Clovis Chappel wrote that when the Roman city of Pompeii was being excavated, the body of a woman was found mummified by the volcanic ashes of Mount Vesuvius. Her position told a tragic story. Her feet pointed toward the city gate, but her outstretched arms and fingers were straining for something that lay behind her. The treasure for which she was grasping was a

bag of pearls. Chappel said, “Though death was hard at her heels, and life was beckoning to her beyond the city gates, she could not shake off their spell...But it was not the eruption of Vesuvius that made her love pearls more than life. It only froze her in this attitude of greed.” [This reminds us of Lot's wife]

— Source Unknown

Fans of the American Wild West will find in a Deadwood, South Dakota, museum this inscription left by a beleaguered prospector: “I lost my gun. I lost my horse. I am out of food. The Indians are after me. But I’ve got all the gold I can carry!” [He needed a little more horse and gun and lot less gold!]

— Today in the Word, March 1989, p. 34.

2. Equally important to what we take on is what we cast off.

Equally important to what we take on is what we cast off. If we *genuinely* love the Lord, we will not have any trouble with letting go of distractions from God like entertainment or worldly causes.

- Giving up the fleshly distractions might have to take some work.

1 Cor 9:25-27 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so

great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

- Martha had to face the challenge of which better thing she was going to attend to.

Luke 10:41-42 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

- Abraham gave up life in Ur.

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

- Moses chose affliction over riches.

Heb 11:23-26 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

24By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26Esteeming the reproach of

Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

This point only applies to the things that we allow to *take the place* of ministry. There are many things that we can do which would be okay as long as they don't get in the way of our responsibilities. We have to be careful which things we eliminate.

Clovis Chappell, a minister from a century back, used to tell the story of two paddleboats. They left Memphis about the same time, traveling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, sailors from one vessel made a few remarks about the snail's pace of the other.

Words were exchanged. Challenges were made. And the race began. Competition became vicious as the two boats roared through the Deep South.

One boat began falling behind. Not enough fuel. There had been plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat dropped back, an enterprising young sailor took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the ovens. When the sailors saw that the supplies burned as well as the coal, they fueled their boat with the material they had been assigned to transport. They ended up winning the race, but burned their cargo.

God has entrusted cargo to us, too: children, spouses, friends. Our job is to do our part in seeing that this cargo reaches its destination.

Yet when the program takes priority over people, people often suffer.

How much cargo do we sacrifice in order to achieve the number one slot? How many

people never reach the destination because of the aggressiveness of a competitive captain?

— In the Eye of the Storm by Max Lucado, Word Publishing, 1991, pp. 97-98

Don't just willy-nilly cast things overboard. It takes wisdom to discern what is truly necessary.

3. To everything, there is a season

Of the things we keep in our lives we must keep in the proper place.

Eccl 3:1-8 To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted;

3A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

A time to preach and a time to be silent

A time to go to church and a time to go the park

A time to embrace family and a time to let go

A time to work and a time to talk

In her book A Practical Guide to Prayer, Dorothy Haskins tells about a noted concert violinist who was asked the secret of her

mastery of the instrument. The woman answered the question with two words: "Planned neglect." Then she explained. "There were many things that used to demand my time. When I went to my room after breakfast, I made my bed, straightened the room, dusted, and did whatever seemed necessary. When I finished my work, I turned to my violin practice. That system prevented me from accomplishing what I should on the violin. So I reversed things. I deliberately planned to neglect everything else until my practice period was complete. And that program of planned neglect is the secret of my success." [Notice that she didn't shirk her other responsibilities, she merely took care of first things first.]

— Our Daily Bread, April 22

A time to get saved...and that's it,
there is only a time to get saved

2Cor 6:2(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)

Isa 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

As we set our lives in order in this time of reset, there are some things that commonly need to be refreshed: personal Bible reading and study, prayer and being mindful of our walk with God in prayer and fellowship. But, we also need that in a life with other believers with studying God's Word as a body, praying together, fellowshiping together, and working together as a church. This is a

time to examine life and to make sure we are taking care of our personal responsibilities *as well as* our responsibilities in God's service. In what way are you serving God in ministry?

1. Prioritizing Gen 14:18-20 , 1Cor 16:1-2, Acts 20:7, Ps 5:3, Ps 59:16, 1Pet 1:15-16, Matt 6:19-21
2. Equally important to what we take on is what we cast off 1 Cor, Heb 12:1, Luke 10:41-42, Heb 11:8-10, Heb 11:23-26
3. To everything, there is a season Eccl 3:1-8, 2Cor 6:2(For, Isa 55:6, Heb 3:13