

GRAY MATTERS

Part 4

Colossians 3:3; Matthew 6:33

1. Everyone has it

- Psalm 90:12

2. How it's spent

- John 17:18; Matthew 6:33

3. Plan practically

- Ephesians 5:15-16

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Gray Matters, Part Four

In this sermon series, we're exploring how to make decisions in some of the gray areas of our lives when the Bible doesn't clearly instruct us. These gray areas are really important. Gray Matters. It matters a lot.

We started out by looking at seven questions to ask ourselves whenever we are making significant decisions that the Bible doesn't speak directly about. If you were not with us, I'd really encourage you to go to the sermons page of our website so you can listen to it or download the manuscript, because that will always help you.

Then the last two weeks, we looked at the gray matter areas of our use of alcohol and its impact on society, and our unhealthy relationship with food and our use of tobacco products. Many of you have been very kind in your comments that these messages have helped you consider your use of these things, and your desire to get them into proper balance.

I think, by way of review, I should tell you that this last week I found some research that confirms what we've been talking about. If you go to the sermons page of the website, I've got the link to the website that cites the research in the sermon manuscript. The website is the national institute of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.¹ But I just want to share this with you – in the US alone,

- An estimated 88,000² people (approximately 62,000 men and 26,000 women³) die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States. The first is tobacco, and the second is poor diet and physical inactivity.⁴

So I think you see why these are important gray matters. Listen – no one is going to judge you for what you do in these gray areas; that's why they are gray areas. What you do in these areas might be different than what I do, and that's okay. But you need to also know that even if we don't judge you, we do love you. If we see that you might be hurting yourself or someone else by your decisions, that your gray matters

¹ https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-facts-and-statistics?fbclid=IwAR28qGwggwXFJ7JWm3WdDhRi8iD0M5LPd_IEIM_5qXjdelpAle1Y9w3YzHk

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Alcohol and Public Health: Alcohol-Related Disease Impact (ARDI). Average for United States 2006–2010 Alcohol-Attributable Deaths Due to Excessive Alcohol Use*. Available at: https://nccd.cdc.gov/DPH_ARDI/Default/Report.aspx?T=AAM&P=f6d7eda7-036e-4553-9968-9b17ffad620e&R=d7a9b303-48e9-4440-bf47-070a4827e1fd&M=8E1C5233-5640-4EE8-9247-1ECA7DA325B9&F=&D=. Accessed 1/18/17.

³ Ibid

⁴ Mokdad, A.H.; Marks, J.S.; Stroup, D.F.; and Gerberding, J.L. Actual causes of death in the United States 2000. [Published erratum in: JAMA 293(3):293–294, 298] *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 291(10):1238–1245, 2004. [PMID: 15010446](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15010446/)

are getting out of balance, we will talk to you about that; we *need* to talk to each other about that – right? And we’ll do it in love – not in judgment.

Okay? So for today, as you saw in Pastor Casey’s lesson, we are going to talk about the gray matter of how we use our time and choose our priorities.

The Bible tells us to:

“Set your minds on things above, not earthly things.” (Colossians 3:2, niv)

That means that our priorities need to be based on God’s directions. Jesus helped clarify those for us even more – He said:

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he (God) will give you everything you need.” (Matthew 6:33, nlt)

So today we are talking about the gray matter of the use of our time. It’s ironic that I am talking about this today. This last week was pretty busy for me. Besides hospital calls and scores of emails and phone calls, I had 17 meetings (one of which was 4 hours long), three crisis counseling appointments, along with a sermon to write (which usually takes me 10-15 hours), and of course we had Ena Riddle’s memorial service yesterday. So, like many of you have had at times, it was another week without a day off. I’ve had a few of those lately. On Monday I have meetings all day, then on Tuesday and Wednesday we are out for the district Pastor’s retreat, and then we are out for the Leadership Yakima retreat Thursday-Friday (while still needing to write a sermon), then we leave for Guyana for a five day trip to help them dedicate the finished building, which I’ll need to speak at, all while trying to manage my parents’ situation in Salem with my mom’s terminal cancer...so yeah, I’m feeling like I don’t have enough time in my days right now. I love my work – please don’t get me wrong, and I get to work with the best people in the world.

Please understand, I’m not complaining—I’m just saying that managing my time has been difficult lately, and here I am, supposed to be sharing with you some insights on the importance of prioritizing time. That’s ironic, isn’t it? But I can tell you that while things have been difficult lately, I don’t believe I violated any of what I’m going to share with you today.

The gray matter of our priorities can be hard. You know what it’s like; you have *this* appointment and *that* event, and you have to take the kids to soccer or gymnastics and you’ve got to do it all *after* a full day of work. Then when you finally get home, there are your household and family chores. You know what this is like.

So let’s learn some things together about this. First, when it comes to time...

1. Everyone has it.

Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. But it carries over no balance from day to day – every evening your account deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Spend every penny, everyday, of course!

Each of us has such a bank; its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits us with 86,400 seconds. Every night, whatever of this we have failed to invest to good purpose is gone – it carries over no balance, it allows no overdraft; each day it opens a new account for us. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against tomorrow's time. You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it wisely!

Do you realize that you have the same amount of time each day that Abraham Lincoln had, that Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa and Billy Graham had? They affected the world in powerful ways and they did it in the same amount of time each day that you have. You have the same amount of time each day that Jesus Christ had, and He is the savior of the world. *Jesus limited himself to the same amount of time each day that you have.* The difference then, is in *how* we spend the minutes of our days. That's why the Bible says:

“Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.” (Psalm 90:12, cev)

I heard a story about a man who worked at a factory. One of his main jobs was to blow the factory whistle at 5:00pm to indicate the workday was over. He walked to work each day and passed a jewelry store where a beautiful grandfather clock was displayed in the window. Every morning, he stopped and set his pocket watch to match the time on the grandfather clock. One morning the storeowner was out front sweeping the sidewalk and the factory worker asked him how he kept such accurate time on the grandfather clock. The jeweler said, “Oh, I set it every afternoon when the factory whistle blows at 5:00pm.” [That could lead to trouble!] We need to be sure we are aligning our priorities with the right thing.

We live by the clock, because time is important to all of us. Benjamin Franklin said, “Do not squander time, for it is the stuff life is made of.”

Many frustrated people seem to always fight the clock, habitually, as a way of life. They stay up late, then they sleep as late as they can and then rush frantically to school or work, gulping down an unhealthy breakfast in the car, applying their make-up (or using their electric razor) at the stoplight *and* talking on their cell phone at the same time. But as I study Jesus' life, I am amazed that He never seemed to be in a hurry. Even though He was doing the most important job in history (saving the world), and although He knew He only had a few years to do it, He *never* ran to his next meeting. He made time to consider the flowers and the birds of the air. He had time to put his hands on the little children and bless them. Time was His friend. If that was possible for the God who was a man, certainly it is possible for men and women who are made in the image of God.

So it's not a matter of getting *more* time—it's a matter of figuring out how to prioritize the time we have. It's about...

2. ***How*** it's ***spent***.

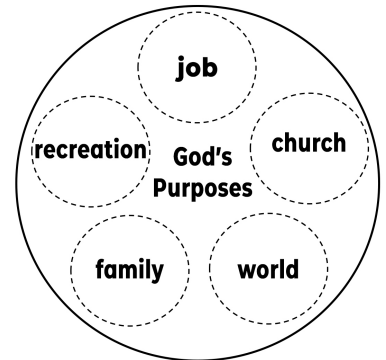
I think we would all agree that, if you are a Christian, the priority of your time is to be spent pursuing God's purposes. When Jesus was praying to the Father about us, he said that we have the same mission he does:

"In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world." (John 17:18, tmt)

That mission is to take the Gospel to everyone, in your entire world, loving people like Jesus does. You'll do that as you prioritize five basic areas of your life: **family, church, world, job, and recreation** (leisure time).

Those are the five areas of our lives, and what is interesting is that all these areas are about *relationships* – it's about how we use our time to pursue relationships with others and with God and with ourselves, and those priorities are to be based on what God wants for you and others. I think it's obvious what "family" and "church" are. Your "world" is your neighborhood and the places you go. "Job" (or school – same thing) is pretty clear, too. Now "recreation" is an interesting one; there's a few things we need to think about with that, and we'll talk more about that in a bit.

But here's the problem: we try to put those priorities of our time in some kind of static, linear order. The problem is that life is *not* neat and orderly and doesn't happen in a static or linear order every time. Instead, those areas of how we use our time are more fluid, flowing in and out of priority. So, instead of looking at them in an ordered line, look at them this way (***circles within a circle***). The *entire circle* is your life, being lived for God's priorities. Then you decide which of them you will do, and when, and for how long. But they rotate.



Do you see this? So the priority for any given moment is determined by the interplay between how you see things at that point in your level of maturity in Christ, and what's going on in your life at the time. This means that, even though we all have the same types of priorities and we all have the same amount of time, how we use them, and when, and for how long, is different for every one of us. It's a gray matter. Let me point out some truths here:

All five of these areas are included in God's purpose for your life. Not one of them is outside of His purposes for you. So we don't need to have a sense of false guilt just because at one moment we happen to be spending more time in one thing than we are in another. You can only really do one of those five things at a time, sometimes *maybe* two (like family and recreation).

Each of these areas is tied into *your* time frame, and the whole pattern is constantly changing. In the life of a Christian, things will rise to the higher priority and occupy our attention, and it won't cause any conflict as long as we maintain some important things:

- **Total honesty with God.** Be honest with him about what you want and need to do, and be willing to accept what he tells you.

- **Wise sensitivity to circumstances.** This isn't easy, but you often have to choose between *good* and *best*, depending on your circumstances. Choosing between *good* and *bad* isn't usually all that difficult, but choosing between *good* and *best* can be hard.

Also it takes a:

- **Willingness to pay whatever price is necessary to fulfill God's purpose.** Remember, your first priority is what God wants, and often what you want and what he wants are the same thing, but if they are not, *he comes first*. It's the only way to true joy and fulfillment.

Finally, you need:

- **Dependence on the Holy Spirit** to reveal the matters that are the most important priority at that particular time. You need to maintain a close relationship and ongoing conversation with the Holy Spirit so that he can speak clearly to you. This includes regular, daily time in the Word and prayer. Make sense?

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Let's say I'm at the office one day when the telephone rings and it's one of my sons, and he says, "Dad, I need to see you as soon as you can arrange it." Well, I'm going to check with Lois, our office manager, and I'll ask her to rearrange my appointments at noon and 1pm, and I call my son back and say, "Son, I'll see you at noon." As we talk, I'm sensitive to the fact that he's moved into the top spot for the moment, and it is pleasing to God that I deal with my son's need. It was part of God's purpose for me at that moment.

Then imagine that several days later he calls and says, "Dad, I have two good tickets to the Pippins baseball game and I want you to go with me." I struggle for a minute because there is no one I would enjoy going with more than him, and it would be great to see a good game (it's not like it's the Mariners!). But it's the same night as a counseling appointment I have with someone who is really struggling. I'm aware that my appointment with that person is a part of God's purpose for my life at that moment. So I tell my son, "I need to meet with someone tonight."

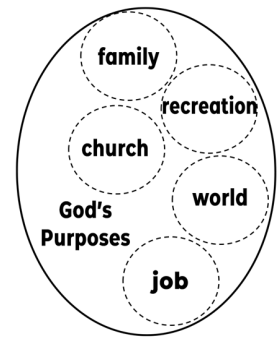
Are you seeing how it works? Each thing is important, and each rotates into the top spot at different times. Each is important!

I don't know that I've always chosen correctly. But since my boys have grown, I've asked them if they ever felt that I didn't prioritize them. They've all said that they always knew I would be there for them, and that even though there were times I couldn't be with them when they or I wanted to, they never felt neglected or resentful. I'm so thankful for that. You need to pray and determine what is best to do *at the time*, and it is fluid; it can change, it can rotate.

I hear people who say, "I'd love to volunteer at the church, but I've got to prioritize my family time." which is okay, but they do that so often that their kids lose the priority of the church because the church doesn't have an appropriate rotation in their life.

Now, part of the dilemma is that we can only be at one place at one time, no matter how hard we try. I remember one time in our other church on one Saturday, Shelly and I had a wedding that I officiated and she coordinated, then we had the wedding reception, while we had a military retirement reception, and also a graduation reception – they were all taking place at the same time. We spoke to all of them, and managed to leave the wedding reception a little early and drop in late at the retirement, but couldn't make the graduation reception. We can only give our attention to one thing at a time. Choices have to be made. But by applying these principles, we can rest in the fact that we are growing in our understanding of God's priorities for our use of time.

So, in the example with my son, if I had chosen to go to the baseball game instead of helping that struggling person, it would have been an example of arbitrarily placing my will over God's priority for that moment, and it would have looked **(out of order circles)** like this—everything is out of shape, out of order, and the ability for things to rotate is all messed up.



How many times has God's desire to create harmony in your life turned into discord in your life because you arbitrarily chose your own ambitions over God's priorities for you? Life will be a whole lot harder to balance this way. Maybe you have done this by a failure to be absolutely honest in your relationship to God's purpose for you—to carry out His mission in the world. Maybe you are prioritizing something over what he wants for you in that moment.

It may be that you were not as keenly sensitive to the circumstances as you ought to have been.

Maybe you were not willing to pay the price necessary to carry out God's mission.

Could it have been that your life was so out of balance psychologically or spiritually that you didn't have complete confidence in the fact that the Holy Spirit could and would reveal His desired priority in your life?

Since God's priority system is not a static listing of things, but is based on your relationship to him and his purpose and your present circumstance, it is important to realize that this system can be thrown off by the violation of one or more of these principles. That's what Jesus meant when he said:

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” (Matthew 6:33, nlt)

Since we are talking about getting priorities out of balance, let me take just a minute to talk about this issue of our leisure time, or “recreation.” First of all, you can go to the sermon page on our website and review our series on “sabbatical” from last January. That might help. But I also think it's important to say that for many of us, this area of recreation is the one that can too easily get out of proportion to the rest of our priorities. And it can happen more than we realize. With the abundance of entertainment avenues available to us these days, before we even know it, we can

end up wasting hours online on our phones or binge-watching shows. For some, sitting down to play some online gaming results in our going from daylight to dark within the blink of an eye. And then there's the issue of the content of what we watch, what we view online, what we see in the video games we play. Should we really be watching those things? King David actually said something that would make you think he just walked out of a movie theater or walked away from his TV or computer when he said:

“I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3, nkjv)

There's a motto to live by! David had learned his lesson the hard way.

The Apostle Paul must've had video games and Netflix in mind when he said:

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9, nlt).

I'm just saying we need to think carefully about what we choose to do for entertainment when it comes to our recreation.

John Wesley was a great theologian and preacher and man of God from the late 1600's and 1700's who had a standard of living that his mother taught him, and it's still a good standard for us today. In fact, in the Church of the Nazarene it's something we try to remember and use to determine our priorities: “Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over mind, that thing for you is sin.”⁵ I think that's pretty good advice especially when it comes to our use of time regarding recreation, don't you? The very word, “recreation,” actually means “re-creation.” That means we do those things that *build up our lives*, not the things that tear us down.

Okay—we've learned that we all have the same amount of time, and that it's about how we spend it on God's-purpose priorities.

Let me wrap this up with one last thing...

3. Plan Practically.

When we think about how we make decisions in the gray matter of time, the Bible uses another word; instead of *managing* your time, it speaks of “*redeeming*” the time, which is an even better idea. The Apostle Paul writes:

“Act like people with good sense and not like fools. These are evil times, so make every minute count.” (Ephesians 5:15-16. cev)

⁵ Church of the Nazarene Manual, 29.1

The phrase “make every minute count,” means to be constantly looking around to make the most of every opportunity. Emmett Smith was a great football running back, but he wasn’t the biggest or the fastest, or even the strongest. What he excelled at was running with his eyes open, and he was one of the best at seeing holes as they opened in the line, and then running through them. I wish the Seahawks could find someone like that. Actually, I wish the Seahawks could find an offensive line. But I’m getting off topic... looking for opportunities and then taking them is the way we should live – looking for every opportunity to invest time wisely for God’s purposes. Because when an opportunity passes, it cannot be reclaimed—it is gone forever. That’s what it means to make every minute count.

To do that, don’t be afraid to use the practical tools that are available to you. There are a lot of practical things out there that people smarter than me have created to help you with your time. There are all kinds of apps and even printed organizers. If nothing else, Use a to-do list. There are so many tools out there for you to use that it would take too much time here to go through them all, but experiment and find one that works for you so that you can start prioritizing your time among those five areas of your life: Family, church, job, world, and recreation. If you don’t manage your time – someone else will manage it for you. You can’t save time, and really you don’t even waste time—you spend it, and you are going to spend it somewhere and invest it in someone. If you don’t control your schedule, someone or something will always be happy to do it for you. Some people complain they just don’t have enough time to spend with their family. You’ve got exactly the same amount of time as everyone else; you just aren’t managing your time wisely or managing yourself wisely.

Folks, either our time runs us, or we manage our time. We’ve all got the same amount, so let’s follow the Spirit and maintain God’s fluid priorities, and use whatever tool is necessary to get it done.

Pray