

Top Priorities -- Imperative Firsts

by Russell DeLong

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and prioritizing God's will and kingdom in our daily lives.

Scripture: Exodus 20:8, 1 Kings 20:38, Proverbs 3:9, Malachi 3:10, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:37, Mark 1:35, Colossians 1:18

Topics: "Prioritizing God", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

Russell DeLong emphasizes the importance of setting priorities and top priorities in life, drawing parallels to the critical decisions made during wartime. He highlights the dangers of substituting secondary matters for primary ones and the consequences of neglecting imperative firsts. Using biblical examples from the Old and New Testaments, he illustrates the significance of recognizing and honoring top priorities to avoid tragic outcomes. DeLong provides five top priorities for successful living, including prioritizing God's will, seeking the kingdom of Heaven, dedicating time for prayer and Bible reading, observing the Sabbath, and giving the first portion of income to God's work.

Transcript

During the war we all became familiar with the term priorities. We met it in relation to

automobiles, steel, food, and transportation. Several times I was "bumped off" an air flight because some top military "brass" had to get to some strategic place or conference and possessed a priority. He came before I did, was more important -- and rightly so.

In addition to priorities there were top priorities. Even among those who possessed

importance there were others who were more important than the important, and a few top persons who were most important. The rating depended upon rank and relative significance in relation to speeding the war to victory.

Whether you have ever thought of it or not, is it not true that life itself sets up priorities and top priorities? If one would succeed in the battle of personal living he must designate some things as important and other things as most important. There must be top priorities, imperative firsts.

Probably the number one danger of modern living is to substitute secondary matters for

primary, nonessential for essential, incidental for fundamental, and peripheral for the central.

The Old Testament records a classic example of this human tendency. A prisoner was put

in custody of a keeper, with this charge: "Keep this man, guard him, watch him. If for any reason he escapes -- be missing thy life shall be for his life." There was a top priority, an imperative first. But what happened? The custodian or keeper became occupied with other matters -- secondary, incidental things -- and forgot his top charge. The prisoner escaped. And then what? The warden cried out to the king, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Did that excuse him or absolve him from blame? The king decreed: "You knew the charge. You knew the penalty. Thou thyself hast decided it. Thy life shall be for his life." So he was condemned, not because he was busy doing sinful, evil things necessarily, but because he betrayed his top priority -- his imperative first (I Kings 20: 38-42).

The classic New Testament illustration of this same principle is commonly designated

"The Story of the Rich Fool." Jesus himself related it. In essence it is this. A man's business prospered; he had to build larger barns to care for his bounteous crops. He sat back smugly and complacently and said to himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God broke the silence and said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." What a pathetic tragedy! Here he was at the triumphant apex of his career, just ready to live life to the full. But now his number was up. He must die. He ignored top priorities. He put sensuous satisfaction ahead of his soul. He gave all of his time seeking for gold and none searching for God.

Successful living must recognize top priorities, imperative firsts.

Permit me to suggest what they are:

1. God's will for your life must be first -- your personal desires second.
2. Make the kingdom of Heaven first in your activities. Jesus commanded, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things [needful things] shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6: 33).

Here is the top priority. It must transcend even home, friends, school, work, and pleasure.

In all things Jesus must have pre-eminence (Col. 1: 18).

3. Give God the first hour of every day. It is recorded of Jesus, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1: 35). Early prayer and Bible reading each day is an imperative first.

4. Give God the first day of the week. Here is another top priority. The Sabbath must be a

holy day and not a holiday. Its observance is so important that it is included as one of the Ten Commandments. You must not ignore it or shove it to a secondary place. It rates top priority in God's requirements and thus of necessity must be an imperative first in man's observance.

5. Give God the first portion of your income. Under the old Jewish order the first fruits --

the first of the flocks, herds, and material increase -- were the Lord's. One-tenth was the minimum. Offerings were to be over and above the tithes. It is still God's plan for financing His Church. So give Him the first tenth, top priority, and He will bless your nine-tenths.

So here are the top priorities, imperative firsts.

1. Give yourself to God.
2. Give the Kingdom first place in your activities.
3. Give the first hour of every day to prayer.
4. Give the first day of every week wholly to God.
5. Give the first portion of your income to His Church.

If you give God and His kingdom top priority, He will give you top blessings here and eternal life hereafter.

I propose this personal question: To what do you give top priority in your life?

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