

A Biblical Approach to Priorities and Time Management

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Introduction:

1) Key concerns in this workshop:

- How do we set proper priorities?
- How do I manage my time?

2) Foundational assumption:

You always have _____ to do what _____ wants you to do!

I. Basic Principles from Ephesians 5:15–18

Context:

Eph 1–3 – What God in Christ has done by his grace to save sinners like you and me

An observation about God:

Eph 4–6 – How we are to live for Christ in response to his grace

Eph 5:1–20 Call to walk (“live”) in love (5:2), light (5:8), and wisdom (5:15)

Principles::

1. You should view time as a _____-given _____ (v. 16a, Gk. *kairos*, opportunity)
2. You should _____-up your time _____ (v. 16 Gk. *exagorazō*, make the most of)
3. You should use your time _____, according to God’s will (vv. 15b, 17)
4. To do this, you must be _____ by the Holy Spirit (v. 18)
5. You must treat this topic as _____ business (v.15a)

II. Assessing an Alternative, Popular “Hierarchical List” or “Sequential” Model

Example: God 1st, Family 2nd, Work 3rd, Church 4th

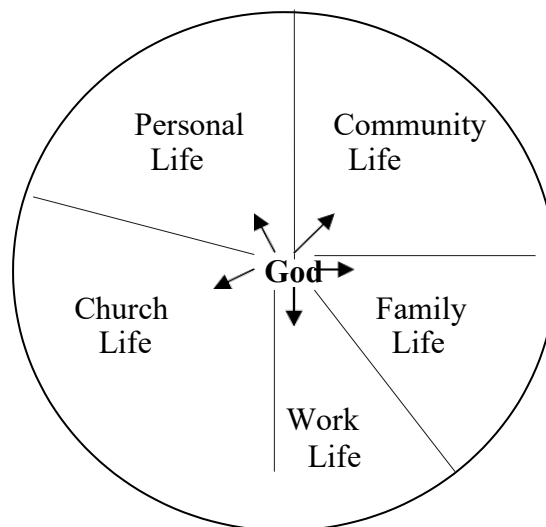
Strengths of this model:

- God must be first
- Rebukes workaholics, church-aholics, family-aholics
- Offers helpful categories

Weaknesses of this model:

- Doesn’t arise inductively from Scripture
- Can’t address the Bible’s counter-examples; too simplistic¹
- Fails to stress God’s centrality in all areas? (When do we ever move from #1 to #2 or #3?)

III. The Pentathlon Priority Pie Chart²



A. Biblical Basis. The apostles’ directives can be roughly categorized into five areas:

¹ Jesus frequently prioritized his spiritual family—the church—over his biological family and called his disciples to do the same: Matt 10:34-39; Mark 3:31–35; 10:28–31; Lk 9:57–62; 11:27–28; 14:25-27; 21:16–17; John 19:25–27; cf. Deut 13:6–11. See also Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (B&H Academic, 2009).

² I adapted the “pentathlon” concept from Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *How to Balance Competing Demands: Keeping the Five Most Important Areas of Your Life in Perspective* (NavPress, 1989), and the “pie chart” visual from J. Grant Howard, *Balancing Life’s Demands: A New Perspective on Priorities* (Multnomah, 1983). On priorities and time management, see also Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem* (Crossway, 2013); and Matt Perman, *What’s Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Zondervan, 2016).

Pentathlon Categories					
	Personal	Family	Work	Church	Community
Romans	12:1-2			12:3-21; 14:1-23	12:12-21; 13:1-4
Ephesians	4:17-5:18; 6:10-18	5:22-6:4	6:5-9	4:1-16; 5:19-20	
Colossians	3:1-11	3:18-21	3:22-4:1	3:12-17	4:5-6
1 Peter	2:11-12	3:1-7	2:18-25	3:8; 4:7-11; 5:1-5	2:13-17; 3:9-12

B. Explanation and Main Features:

1. God is the _____ of your entire life, not merely first in some hierarchy.
2. No one area is necessarily more _____ than another, but equally important for a biblically-balanced life. (This does not mean all five areas demand equal time in daily life.)
3. Each area relates to and _____ other areas.
4. Within each area, _____ specific priorities.
5. Some vocations merge _____ life with other categories.
6. Crises might require you to _____ devote _____ time to one area.

IV. A Practical Process to Establish Time Priorities

See below, “The Pentathlon Priority Pie Chart: A Bible Study & Personal Growth Assignment”³

Step #1 = List the major biblical _____ of life priorities.

Step #2 = List core biblical _____ within each category

1. Write down each command given in the passages listed
2. Add other verses/commands based on further study.
3. Group together similar commands under main headings

³ For a similar approach and a practical tool, see James C. Petty, *Step By Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* (P&R, 1999), along with his minibook, *Priorities: Mastering Time Management* (P&R, 2001).

Step #3 = List specific, practical _____ under each priority

1. Recommit yourself to God and pray for his wisdom (*Jas 1:5–8; Eph 1:15–19a; Phil 1:9–11*)

2. Factor-in both your abilities and your interests

3. Brainstorm. Consider:

- Activities now doing
- Consult your counselors (spouse, pastors, small group leaders, friends)
- Include activities that help you further develop each priority

Step #4 = _____ these activities into your daily or weekly plan. (Put them in writing.)

1. Eliminate or avoid activities that don't fit your priorities.

2. Use planning tools.

3. Beware of being too ambitious at the start.

4. Build-in fudge factors. Allow for both your inefficiency and God's providence.

<i>Summary Four-Step Flow Chart</i>																					
Step	Personal			Family			Church			Work			Community								
#1																					
#2	P P P			P P P			P P P			P P P			P P P								
#3	A A A A A A			A A A A A A			A A A A A A			A A A A A A			A A A A A A								
#4	<u>Sun</u>			<u>Mon</u>			<u>Tue</u>			<u>Wed</u>			<u>Thu</u>			<u>Fri</u>			<u>Sat</u>		
	A			A			A			A			A			A					
	A			A			A			A			A			A					
	A			A			A			A			A			A					

Step #5 = _____ out these scheduled activities, _____ on God's presence and power

- *John 15:4–5, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*
- *1 Corinthians 15:9–10, For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*
- *Philippians 2:12–13, Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

- *Philippians 4:13, I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*
- *2 Timothy 4:16–17, At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength. . . .*

V. Address additional hindrances

1. Indifference
2. Idolatry
3. Inefficiency (Prov 22:29; Col 3:17, 23–24; 1 Tim 4:6–16)

VI. Focus on Jesus, Our Model

1. Jesus came to do _____ will, to please his Father.⁴

John 4:34, “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

2. Yet Jesus did not do everything that _____ have been done.

3. And Jesus did not do everything that _____ him to do

How did Jesus handle demanding people? (See “Handling the Demands of Others” assignment below)

4. But Jesus did do what God his Father _____ him to do. He knew it and he rested in that.

John 17:4, “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

5. And by that work, we are saved and we _____ the work God has called us to do

John 19:30, When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Conclusion

You always have. . . .

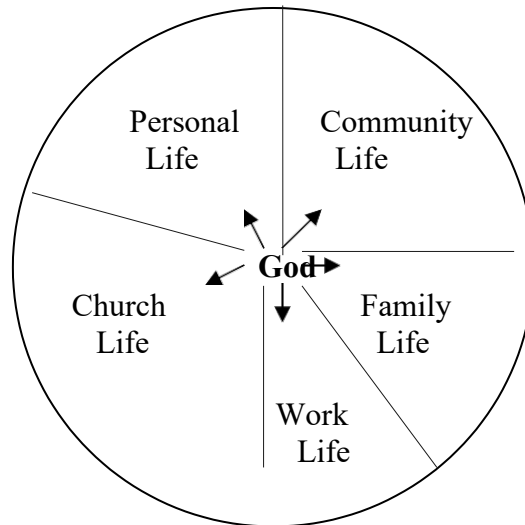
⁴ Considering doing a Bible study on this theme based on John 4:34; 5:19–20,30; 6:27,37–38; 8:26,28–29; 9:3–4; 10:37; 12:49–50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; 19:30; Luke 2:49; 9:51; Hebrews 10:7.



THE PENTATHALON PRIORITY PIE CHART

A Bible Study & Personal Growth Assignment by Robert D. Jones

This practical tool will help you determine what God's priorities are for you and help you use your time wisely in light of these priorities.



Step One: Select one (or more) of the above five areas in the above chart that you wish to focus on. Study the Bible passages listed for the area (or areas) you select and, on a separate sheet, list the commands given. Leave space under each command to do step two.

- Personal: *Ephesians 4:17–5:18; 6:10–18; 1 Peter 2:11–12; Colossians 3:1–11; Romans 12:1–2; Galatians 5:16–26.*
- Church: *Ephesians 4:1–16; 5:19–20; 1 Peter 4:7–11; 3:8; 5:1–5; Colossians 3:12–17; Romans 12:3–21; 14:1–23; Galatians 5:13–6:2.*
- Family: *Genesis 2:18–24; Ephesians 5:22–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:4–25; 1 Timothy 5:8.*
- Work: *Ephesians 6:5–9; 1 Peter 2:18–25; Colossians 3:22–4:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15.*
- Community: *1 Peter 2:13–17; 3:9–12; Colossians 4:5–6; Romans 12:12–21; 13:1–14.*

Step Two: Under each command listed under step one, brainstorm several specific practical activities you can begin to do to carry out each command.



Step Three: Select 2–3 new, specific activities listed in step two. Schedule and do them this coming week.



Handling the Demands of Others: The Model of Jesus in John's Gospel

A Bible Study Growth Assignment by Robert D. Jones (adapted from David Powlison)

At the end of his earthly life, Jesus Christ confidently declared to God his Father, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). From the outset of his ministry he had only one aim—to please God and do his will (John 4:34)—and he accomplished it. Meditating on John 4:34 and John 17:4 will itself prove challenging.

Yet Jesus did not accomplish this without learning to handle other people's demands. Like you, he faced demanding people, but he handled them in godly ways. He never let the demands from others sidetrack him from doing God's will. Instead, he used them as opportunities to minister. If you are a Christian, then with God's help so can you. Christ lives in you (Col 1:27; 3:1–4), you have his Spirit (Eph 3:16; 4:30) and his mind (1 Cor 2:16), and he promises to be with you and help you (Phil 2:12–13; 4:13; 2 Tim 4:17).

Assignment: Study the passages below from John's Gospel and fill-in both columns. Then, on a separate page, summarize your observations about how Jesus handled demanding people and how this might apply to you in your relationships. Include a prayer asking God to help you respond in Christlike ways.

Passage Person	What Demand Was Placed On Jesus?	How Did Jesus Handle This Demand? (For example, did he say Yes or No or ???)
2:3–4 Mary		
4:47 Official		
6:1–16 Crowd		
6:30–51 Crowd		
7:3–14 Brothers		
8:48 Jews		
10:22–39 Jews		
11:3 Messengers		
11:17–26 Martha		



13:8-10 Peter		
18:19-24 Priest		
18:33-37 Pilate		