

Setting Priorities

POINT TO PONDER

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

My worst kitchen failures come when I feel too busy to cook—when I’m juggling a bunch of projects. I wait until the last minute to start; then I look for a recipe that is fast, easy, and requires no defrosting. Grabbing up the first recipe with these promises, I run into the kitchen to start. The first few “easy” steps aren’t so easy—or quick.

Then I see step three: “Marinate overnight in the refrigerator.”

If I would just take the time to read a recipe first, we wouldn’t have Taco Bell for supper so often!

Know What You’re Living For

Wouldn’t it be a shame if your life got so busy . . . if you had so many balls in the air . . . that you reached the end of your life only to find it had been a waste? Even worse, what if you thought your life was a success, but God considered it a waste?

The apostle Paul probably had this thought in mind when

he wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). The thought of standing before Christ, the One Who died for me, inspires me to live completely for Him.

I'm reminded of the story about a man rescued by a stranger. The rescued man pledged his life to the stranger who saved him. From then on he served the stranger in any way possible to show his gratitude.

I also remember the parable Jesus told about the man who planned a trip to a faraway country. He called three of his servants to him and entrusted a sum of money to each one. The first two servants took the money and invested it wisely, presenting it to their master when he returned. But the third servant hid his money in the ground, where it could not earn interest for his master (Matt. 25:14–30).

God has given each of us a lifetime to work for Him. Yet it is so easy to forget that truth! We sit down to make new goals and plans (usually on New Year's Eve), and we dream.

We dream we have enough money to do anything we want.

I know exactly what I want my dream house to look like. It has two stories and a Victorian wraparound porch. The perfectly manicured yard has flowers tastefully arranged around the walkways and architecture. Inside I'll have a formal living room that isn't too formal to enjoy. I'd also like a music room with a grand piano, a luxurious chair to read a good book in, a few built-in bookcases to house my reading collection, and a crackling fire in the fireplace. I'd like a big, homey kitchen accessible to the family room. My husband would like a big-screen TV so he could keep better track of his favorite sports' teams. Upstairs I want a master bedroom with a private sitting area. Our private bath needs a sunken bathtub with a gurgling waterfall and a skylight. I'd like a spot to sit down when I put on my makeup and do my

hair. I'd like to have bedrooms for the kids, as well as a sewing room. The kids vote for a toy room (we might need a third floor!), and we all want a garage large enough for several cars and all our hobbies.

I want to be able to buy whatever I need or want—whenever I need or want it! I want the various gadgets and gizmos I see in the catalogs we receive so frequently.

I don't want to have to worry about money. I want more money at the end of our month! I want to be carefree! (Did I mention I'd also like a maid and my husband would like a gardener?)

We also dream of having fame and success . . . of having our names written in history books . . . of being sought after for our knowledge . . . of smiling at the crowds who have come to see us, confident and polished. We dream of accomplishing something no one else has ever accomplished . . . and being rewarded for it!

So we dream and dream and dream.

Then we work hard to reach our dreams, never stopping to ask ourselves if what we're working so hard for will satisfy.

God's dreams for us are much different. Does that mean He doesn't want us to have a comfortable home, quality things, or reasonable paychecks? Does that mean if we serve Him, we will lead isolated, lonely, frustrated lives?

Of course not! Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

But Satan's first lie—and one he still uses today—is that God is somehow trying to rob us of the good life. He deceived Eve in the same way.

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:2-5).

So Eve ate the fruit, thinking God did not have her best interests in mind. She learned she was wrong!

Know What God Plans for You

God has big desires for your life too. His desires for you revolve around His great love for you and the rest of humanity.

He desires an intimate relationship with you, one where you and He can walk and talk closely with each other. He wants you to know, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3). He wants you to love Him too! Fifteen times the Word of God talks about loving the Lord.¹ For example, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5).

God wants to make you into a beautiful woman with a godly character. Note what He said through Paul in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (emphasis added), and through John in 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is” (emphasis added).

And God desires to use you in a big way. He said, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11).

Remember that this One Who cares so much for you is the almighty God of the universe. Our God created all things by the words of His mouth. He is omnipresent (“free from the laws or limitations of space”), He is omniscient (has “perfect knowledge”), and He is omnipotent (possesses “absolute power”).² There is no one like our God!

Yet even more mind-boggling is the truth that the King of

the universe wants a personal relationship with you! He desires your love, affection, and loyalty.

When God created light, water, flowers, and wind, He did so by speaking. But when God created the first person, He lovingly took the dust on the ground and gently formed a man with His own fingers. Then He leaned down and breathed into man the “breath of life.” What a loving God we serve!

So why did God go to all the trouble of making us in the first place? Why was He not satisfied with the beauty of the flowers and the magnificence of the animal kingdom?

The purpose of our lives, as stated in God’s Word, is to bring glory to God. The Old Testament states, “Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, *I have made him*” (Isa. 43:7, emphasis added). And the New Testament says: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and *for Him*” (Col. 1:16, emphasis added). Revelation 4:11 reiterates: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

Know that your life has purpose, dear woman! No matter how unimportant you feel sometimes, remember God has great plans for you. He has so much invested in you! If you still doubt His love for you, take a few minutes to read Psalm 139. He cares about your deepest thoughts, your loneliest cares. He knew you and formed you in your mother’s womb. He thinks about you all day long. He loves you!

And God wants you to love Him. Scripture says: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4).

God wants to cultivate His character in your life—traits like

love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23).

He wants you to know Him through His Word. The psalmist said, "I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word" (Ps. 119:16).

God wants to have fellowship with you. That's why you have the Bible: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Know What Is Important

Why have I spent so much time showing you from God's Word what a mighty, wonderful God we serve? Because I want you to realize that your entire life must revolve around Him. Before we talk about loving our husbands, reading to our kids, or baking cookies for our neighbors, we must share common ground concerning our priorities.

Realize that your husband is not your first priority; God is! Your life does not revolve around your kids; it revolves around God! Your aim in life must not be to influence the world; God must influence you! Again the Bible says it best: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

Seek God by spending time alone with Him each day and by consciously walking with Him throughout each day. In part 1 we will discuss some practical ways to do this.

As your thoughts and your life begin to center on God, you will find the other priorities of your life appropriately lining up.

The New Testament, for instance, is clear that our spiritual family—especially our local church—should have a high priority in our lives. However, each time the Bible gives instructions to the church on matters of behavior, we find many applications of how

a Christian family should conduct itself. Realize God wants you to serve Him in your physical family. That means your husband, your children, and your extended family should have a high priority in your life. Home is where you begin to learn to walk in obedience to God by practicing such commands as “love one another,” “submit to one another,” and “serve one another.”³ Therefore, we’re going to spend a lot of time in this book talking about some practical ways to serve God by serving those closest to you.

Your spiritual family will benefit from the strength of your physical family. Never meaning to put down the importance of your physical family, I want to stress that we must not neglect our eternal spiritual family. Learning to function in healthy church relationships is a priority that is sadly missing in the lives of many Christians today. After we talk about practically loving your physical family, we’re going to concentrate on what roles you should play in your spiritual family, both your local church and the Body of Christ around the world.

In fact, we need to lift our eyes to this world next. How can you meet the needs of those who don’t know God? How can you reach them—by telling them what God’s Word says and by showing them His love through you—when you have babies underfoot and a mountain of laundry to do, as well as soup to make for your pastor’s wife who is sick? We’ll be sure to talk about that challenge!

IN SUMMARY

God has great plans for you! He wants to bless you and make you a blessing to others. Trust Him. Then when the world’s priorities (Mark 4:19) entice you, turn your eyes to Christ instead.

When [Jesus] had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the

gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34–37).

EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT

Memorize Ephesians 2:10 and recite it to a minimum of five women.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

STUDY GUIDE

1. According to John 10:10, why did Jesus come to earth? Can you name some Christian women who seem to have abundant life? What do you think their secret is?
2. According to Colossians 1:16, why did God create all things? List some things created by God mentioned in this verse. According to Revelation 4:11, does God allow any accidents? How do you think evil people and terrible circumstances can be part of God's will?
3. According to Matthew 6:33, what should our top priority be? After reading verses 25–34, list some things God will handle for us when our priorities are straight.
4. According to Mark 4:19, what are the world's priorities? List some logical consequences of making these things your priorities.
5. After reading Mark 8:34–37, list some things you would have to give up in your own life if you were to make God your top priority. Ask God to help you realize the eternal value of a relationship with Him.

GROUP PROJECT

Each woman in your group should spend some quiet moments by herself to write a purpose statement for her life. Encourage each woman to list one goal for improvement in each priority area (God, physical family, spiritual family, world). These goals should be measurable and easily attainable in the next month. For instance, a goal for the priority of God might be “I will read my Bible every morning at breakfast.”

After each woman has written a purpose statement and some goals, let the ladies share their work with each other. If possible, have each woman choose an accountability partner who will check the progress on her goals one month from today. Be sure to mark this date on your calendars!

EXTRA READING

- ✓ Kramer, Rita W. *Peanut Butter on My Pillow*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980. This funny yet practical book describes how to get control over your priorities as a wife and mother. Currently out of print.
- ✓ Ortlund, Anne. *The Gentle Ways of the Beautiful Woman: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Beauty*. Reprint (3 vols. in 1), New York: Inspirational Press, 1998. Volume 1 of this book is titled *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman* (© 1984 by Word, Inc., Waco, Texas). In this classic Ortlund discusses setting priorities, making goals, scheduling your daily life, organizing your life behind the scenes, and God’s view of a beautiful woman.

NOTES

1. Deuteronomy 6:5; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; Joshua 22:5; 23:11; Psalm 31:23; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27.

2. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. & updated (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 942.

3. 1 John 3:11; Ephesians 5:21; Galatians 5:13.