

The Power of Priorities

Series: REBOOT: Fresh Start for a New Year
Brad Bailey – January 22, 2023

Intro

Many of us likely heard about the **US flight system going offline** about 10 days ago. On that **Wed morning**... the **entire infrastructure that coordinates and directs pilots went down**... it required stopping all landing and take-off across the US... not since 9/11. What I heard reported is that on Tuesday they discovered that a data **file appeared corrupted**...and they decided to go through a **reboot early Wednesday morning**...and realized that it would **take a while**.

> And that captures something that can prove true for our own lives... there are times when change causes our inner operational systems to not operate well...and rebooting the system can restore that system... but it does mean going through a process of making adjustments.

We all have all **experienced various changes**.

So we are **beginning the first weeks of this new year**... in a series entitled **REBOOT: Fresh Start to a New Year**.

When a computer seems to be slow in operating...one of the issues can be **too many programs running in the background**.

Check and see what programs may be running in the background that are using some of the computing power....that don't need to be running...that aren't essential

In a similar way....our lives are **greatly affected by becoming overloaded**.

Overload - it is the greatest challenge to modern life.

We have become overloaded **with information** beyond what we can distill and discern.

We have become overloaded by the potential to **do things faster** and therefore do more than our souls can keep up with.

One journalist described America as "**the land of the rushed**." She wrote... "We have proudly defined our American Lifestyle as 'life in the fast lane.' Even our sentences are peppered with such words as time crunch, fast food, rush hour, frequent flyer, expressway, overnight delivery, and rapid transit. The products and services we use further attest to our hurry: We send packages by Federal Express, use a long distance company called Sprint, manage our personal finances on Quicken, schedule our appointments on a Day Runner, diet with SlimFast, and swim in trunks made by Speedo. [1]

We have become **overloaded with options**.

Until recently... the common human life worked the field they had... married one of the few eligible lives in their village...and got their milk from the same cow.
Today? > PICTURES OF SHOPPING

The essence of overload is this...

“When everything matters, nothing really matters.”

When everything is important...nothing is important.

Illus –

Throughout my teenage years I had a GR dog named Genny... tennis ball was her life focus... and when she retrieved it... returned... proud... wagging... her calling was complete.

One year I invited my friends to come celebrate her birthday... one showed up with a huge box of tennis balls he had collected. So he went across the yard... dumped them out across the grass...and we let her go.

What happened... she pick up one...began to make her way back a a retriever does...but then... looked down upon others... and with dismay... feeling compelled to get them... would have to drop the first to get another...but then did this over and over. In that moment, a saw a dog unable to fulfill her nature freely.

> Many of us may feel **our lives** are like that... **too many balls spread out across our path**... never able to feel the joy of completion.

> **It's hard to find rest in the vast sea of potential 'shoulds' we've created.**

I feel I never end the day... having finished everything.

And as I have shared in the past... I have seen something different in Jesus...something that invites me into a better way of operating.

I am struck by what Jesus prayed as he came to the end of his earthly life.

John 17:1-4

Jesus ... looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

He declared the moment that has come. The potential to know God... to be reconciled with God... had been completed.

And the final here...verse 4... is worth pausing to take in...

"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."

> Jesus is able to express this **unqualified sense of completion.**

I have never felt I have ever finished all the tasks on my list on any given day....and here the one sent to redeem the world... says he has finished the work he was given to do.

'How could Jesus talk about a "completed" work?

His three-year ministry seems **painfully brief**. **One prostitute** at a banquet was given forgiveness and a new life, but **many others** were still **living as outcasts in the shadows of shame**. For every withered muscle that flexed into strength, hundreds remain crippled. The blind, maimed and deformed abounded throughout the country. **Yet on that last night, with many urgent human needs unmet** and useful tasks undone, Jesus **expresses the peace of having finished** ... the peace of having fulfilled his calling.

The answer to our question lies in the words that follow: **"the work you gave me to do"**

Jesus did not meet all the human needs he encountered - many urgently desired by family and friends, and by others along his path. But he completed the mission his Father gave him.' [2]

In Jesus we see the power of priority.

Jesus **walked through life...** amidst a world of **countless needs... without being overloaded...** because he **lived with a clarity of priority.**

Jesus had a **clear sense of the purpose** of his life... and he was **centered in what it was all about.** [3]

The word "priority" comes from the **word prior**, which means **to come before something else.**

A priority is that which takes precedence...that which one carries within over all other potential needs.

Priority brings a larger peace when we are overloaded with the sense that everything matters equally.

Living with priority has the power to override life's overload.

There are many good things that we could do...but there is an overriding purpose that we will allow us to guide the countless choices.

Of course... this means **knowing what matters most.**

Having priorities is good... but what really serves life is having the **right priority.**

Many people succeed in some form of outward success...but know they have failed to succeed in what really matters.

Our world is better at **telling us how to climb ladders....**than it is in **helping us know if we have placed the ladder on the right wall.**

It's incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busy-ness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall.

"It is possible to be busy – very busy – without being very effective". - Stephen Covey

As we read at the start of this series, **Jesus spoke of priority.**

Matthew 6:32-33

"Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What does Jesus say our priority should be?

To seek first the kingdom of God. To live with the eternal will of God in mind. [4]

Jesus said.. **when you do this... the basic needs will come.**

As C.S. Lewis said...[5]

"Put first things first and we get second things thrown in; put second things first and we lose both first and second things." - C.S. Lewis

Jesus lived with a priority that is **not a WHAT but a WHO.**

The Father's work and will.

Our priority is not simply the top of a list, but whose heart we carry inside.

What Jesus describes is not simply a list... but an over-riding sense of what matters most.

- It involves our use of time...but also how the will of God is a part of all of our time.
- It comes **not from dividing up our life like a pie chart... or ranking** some type of order... **or trying to live** according to some **religious obligation.**

It comes from who God is... not what you make him.

We seek His Kingdom because it is above all... it is what actually reigns...and actually lasts forever.

As someone has said, if we do not choose the kingdom of God first, it will make little difference in the long run what we have chosen instead of it.

It's **not so much the top of the list...but what is at the forefront of what matters.**

- What do I think about the most?
- What is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing on my mind at night?

If we're honest... most of us know what is at the forefront of our thoughts and mind is not what it should be.

The **classified section** of the **Quay County Sun newspaper** in June of 1978 contained this ad:

“Farmer with 160 irrigated acres wants marriage-minded woman with tractor. When replying, please show picture of tractor.”

We may not all be so obvious about what really matters in our lives... it will usually show... especially to those close to us.

As one writer once said...

“Tell Me What You Pay Attention to and I Will Tell You Who You Are.” – Jose Ortega Y Gasset.

Living with the power of authority... is a challenge to develop...and maintain.

When Jesus said we are to “seek” the kingdom... he used a tense of the word “seek” that means that we should seek and continuing to seek. It is not a matter of a one time decisions... but of choosing to seek God’s will throughout life.

My sense is that **we all feel we may not be living with the priority** we know we should. [6]

Some of us feel regret... perhaps that can help us... but regret is never God’s end in itself. We **need to shift from regret to rebooting.**

How can we live with the power of priority?

1. Begin with determining who you are living your life for.

What we see in Jesus is that he lived with a claim on his life...for which the outward commitment aligned.

His prayer is a reflection of **the one he sought to please...** his will...that mattered most.

There is purpose and order to our existence.

Jesus... lived with the end in mind... and it was a relationship.

Our priority is not simply a task, but a claim on your life.

Your priority is **not simply** your life’s **commitment**, but your life’s **commission**.

It is **not simply** a “have to”...but **your life’s highest honor**.

So living with priority... begins with receiving that claim on our lives.

Some of us may try to avoid such a claim... perhaps because there are things we don't want to change ...or how it might affect our relationship with others. What we need to realize is that we have made those things and those people competing claims... competing kings... and we are living between kingdoms. And everywhere will prove to be nowhere.

2. Embrace the power to make changes.

The power of priority involves **taking charge of your life...** instead of having it take charge of you.

What distinguishes us as humans from all other animals is **our inherent ability to examine our own character**, to decide how to view ourselves and our situations, and **to control our own effectiveness.**

There are circumstances that we do not control...but our priority is not one of them.

We have to **overcome the type of resignation** which tells ourselves... things like:

- *"There's nothing I can do."*
- *"That's just the way I am."*
- *"I can't really start fulfilling my purpose **until my circumstances change.**"*

In our culture we often direct our sense of personal fulfillment to certain circumstances in our lives... including marriage, parenting, and work.

> **Jesus had no marriage, no children, and no day job** during the very years by which he defined his sense of fulfillment.

When Jesus expressed the peace of having completed his calling... it reflected something that transcended such circumstances and roles.

> **Every one of us has a purpose and a calling** that **transcends our circumstances** ...including marriage, parenting, and the particulars of work.

HOW we live out our priority may involve those circumstances...but it is not dependent on them. We may live out our purpose THROUGH them ...but it is not IN them.

We **become effective** when we **stop living in merely a reaction** to life... and **become proactive**...when we stop defining life by the problems "out there"...and start embracing the changes we can make.

3. Accept the need to say "no" in order to say "yes."

Saying **"yes"** and saying **"no"** have a **significant relationship** to one another.

Whenever you say “yes” to something, you’re saying “no” to something else.

Saying “no” to any option can be hard...especially in an age of FOMO... fear of missing out.

For many of us...saying “no” to what others seek from us is hard... it **seems selfish... rude... and in truth...it often is.** But there is an ability to say “no” to some things that is essential....and particularly**essential to saying “yes” to other things...** to first things.

When we can grasp that our days are numbered... that we are to use time wisely... then we can begin to appreciate that making choices is not just about what we say yes to...but what we say “no” to.

Jesus understood the natural limitations of time and space.

In his humanity Jesus had limitations that he flowed within. Like being in a human body that needed nourishment and rest and could only be in one place at a time. Like there only being 24-hours in a day.

He didn’t ever presume he could serve everyone.

His disciples would be struck that he had gone out in the morning... and find he had gone to pray with his Father in heaven. It was not a lack of commitment to them...it was a grasp of knowing that first things are first...and will serve what is second.

He **withdrew from the crowds to pray** (Luke 5:15-16)...And he **taught us: “... when you pray, go into your room, close the door** and pray to your Father, who is unseen” (Matthew 6:6).

He didn’t give in to his mother and brothers who tried to use their relationship with him to pull him away from the crowd he was ministering to (Matthew 12:46-50). [7]
People wanted to make him an earthly king...and he refused.

And just because we might be offered something that might be good for our career, that might serve our ego, that most people would have said YES to, doesn’t mean you can’t choose to say NO.

Jesus knew the power of priority involved staying focus ... it involved saying no in order to say yes.

4. Consider what is most distinctly yours...what only you can do.

Again... Jesus said to Father...I have completed “**what you gave me...**”

He had a clarity about who and what was uniquely entrusted to him.

When needs arise...**I have found it really helpful to consider my unique position.**

If there is a communal need...I always may have a part to play.
If a **more specific need**...I **bring it before the Lord**...and seek to see if there are **better people to serve it**...or if I **have a unique position**.

So consider: **What do you offer that's unique?** And then make a priority of that which is uniquely entrusted to you.

CLOSING

Let me conclude us with this...

Completion doesn't mean every possibility at hand is fulfilled.

Some of us would do well to go spend time in a cemetery ...and realize no one finished their lives **having finished everything** they could have done. What matters is to have fulfilled our ultimate calling.

With His last breath, He cried out on the cross: "It is finished!"

When Jesus declares a completed life... there are so many lives and needs that **could have been on a list**.... But of course **he makes no reference to any such list**... rather he states... 'I completed the work you (father) gave me to do.'

- He completed all that was needed to fulfill his calling.... **And His calling couldn't be contained by death..**

Jesus never intended to complete what he could conceive of... **only to cast it into motion**. Completion **meant passing on** the unstoppable... it meant **entering human history as the light** of the world... and **soon beginning to pass on the mantle** of the kingdom as he declared to his followers that they were the light of the world... the salt of the earth... a city that cannot be hidden.

Whatever your particular calling... whatever part of Christ's calling you discover as your own... it's never just your own. **As you share it with others... it will carry on.**

Jesus told a story to help us... it involved a master having given different servants different amount to manage. To those who were faithful with what they were given... the master said:

'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'
– **Matthew 25:23**

Living with the power of priority is NOT about trying to be more than you are... or living beyond our natural boundaries.

It is about living out of the primary claim on our lives...

One central source who defines both our destiny and therefore our days.

Resources:

For some good practical steps towards reducing overload for managing type lives, see [Drop the tasks that are holding you back](#) by Gary Reinecke on Jan 11, 2023

Notes:

1. Peg Zaemisch, "Relating Life Is Harder on the Run," Dunn County News, 26 November 1995, p. 4A.

2. This sense of Jesus' unique completion is expounded by Charles E. Hummel-Freedom From Tyranny of the Urgent: Page 23

3. This is reflected many accounts of Jesus... including in John 4 where his disciples get lunch because they saw no value in engaging the Samaritans in whose area they were. When they return they find Jesus has just changed the heart of a Samaritan woman and her village. His reply speaks of his priority.

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. John 4:34 Jesus taught us to "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15). Consequently, we should not lay up for ourselves "treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19).

Paul says that same thing in many places in his letters. For example, in Colossians 3:2, he writes, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things."

5. Letters of C.S. Lewis, p. 228

6. A part of the challenge we could explore, is the competition. When I think of what might pull on us... is choosing what we do day to day... I think it includes....

Pleasure – I flow with what is merely easy or enjoyable

Ego – I do what I gain affirmation for

Insecurity – I avoid what may be discouraging

Anxiousness – that becomes driven by urgency over importance.

"The greatest danger in life is in permitting the urgent things to crowd out the important."

7. In addition...

He said no to being controlled by money. "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13).

He said no to Peter and the disciples who had an inappropriate agenda for Jesus to be a political king or military warrior rather than a sacrificial lamb. (Matthew 16:23).

He explained...that he had come first for the Jewish people... "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

For more regarding Jesus and the need for boundaries in life, see:

Jesus Set Boundaries By Bill Gaultiere <https://www.soulshpherding.org/jesus-set-boundaries/#>