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The Tyranny Of The Urgent

Mark 1:35-39

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The Dallas Morning News recently carried a story on the growth of the Christmas lights installation profession in our city. This business has quadrupled in six years, with costs ranging from \$100 to \$7,500 per home. Why do people now pay to put Christmas lights on their homes? The number one reason: it saves them time. We understand the appeal, don't we?

We are working on average 20% more hours per week than we were in 1973. But the quality of our lives is not improving; in fact, it is suffering.

Recent studies report that 60% of successful professionals suffer from chronic stress and depression. 48% of top corporate executives report that their lives are empty and meaningless.

For the past 25 years the American Index of Social Health has tracked the well-being of Americans. While the gross domestic product has risen continually for the past 25 years, the social health index is 52% *lower* than it was in 1973. We have more, but enjoy life far less.

Recently I reread a little booklet entitled *The Tyranny of the Urgent*, by Charles Hummel. Its central point is simple: there is a great distinction between the urgent and the important. The urgent demands our time, but usually wastes it; the important redeems it, gives it eternal significance. Doing urgent things takes from us our energy, peace, and joy; doing important things gives us fulfillment, significance, peace, joy.

How much time do you spend doing the urgent? How much time do you spend doing something important? You and I can trade the urgent for the important in this new year. I've brought proof today.

Choose a model

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes, or sandals, actually. You begin your Sabbath day by preaching and leading worship in the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum, your ministry base in Galilee. This is the first of the day's three services, beginning at 9 a.m. And the people hang onto your every word; never have they heard such authority before. The One who inspired the word by his Spirit, now teaching it to his people.

Then you cast a demon out of a man sitting right there in the synagogue, amazing everyone present. Not a boring morning at church, wouldn't you agree?

From the synagogue service you go to Peter and Andrew's home for lunch. Taking the preacher out to lunch apparently has very old roots. But there's a problem—Peter's

mother-in-law, the one who was going to cook the meal, is in bed with fever. And so you take her hand and heal her.

You spend the afternoon at her home, teaching your disciples. Then comes the sunset, when the Jewish Sabbath ends. But your reputation has spread far and wide, so "the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door" (Mark 1:32-33). And so you end your day by healing the sick and driving out demons from across the entire community.

What will you do tomorrow? Jesus preached in church, healed a demoniac, healed Peter's mother-in-law, taught his disciples, and healed the sick and demon-possessed from across the entire town. Just one day in the life of our Lord. And yet he went through this day with remarkable calm, peace, and purpose.

Imagine that your purpose in life is literally to save the world, to bring eternal salvation to all of humanity. Can you feel the stress, the unbelievable pressure of it all? And yet the One who was given this life purpose went through that life with the greatest peace, joy, and fulfillment of any man who has ever lived. He was never hurried, hassled, or burned out. He experienced serenity in the midst of life's greatest stress.

He will teach us how, if we want him to. If you want him to.

Years ago someone gave me some excellent leadership advice: choose the best mentor you can find. Get a model, an example, someone whose life you can emulate. Choose a mentor, well.

Athletes know they cannot improve unless they compete against people better than themselves. Business professionals know they must hire "tens," because "tens" hire "eights," "eights" hire "sixes" and "sixes" hire "fours." Teddy Roosevelt said the secret to his success was that he surrounded himself with men better than himself.

Choose the best mentor you can find. I nominate Jesus.

Define your purpose

With him as your model, you can escape the urgent for the important. But you must do what he did. First and most important, you must define your life purpose, your reason for being.

You see, life is best lived on purpose.

Aristotle defined excellence as "expressing your highest talent to its fullest measure." What is your "highest talent"?

Winston Churchill, standing before the House of Commons in June of 1941, said, "I have only one purpose, the destruction of Hitler; and my life is much simplified thereby." What is your "one purpose"?

The psychologist Maslow concluded, after many years as a therapist, that an artist must paint, a poet must write, a musician must make music, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What did God make you to do?

Will Rogers was more plain but no less profound: "If you want to be successful, know what you are doing, love what you are doing, and believe in what you are doing." Do you "know what you are doing"?

Jesus did. "Very early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (v. 35). In Mark's original Greek it is clear that Jesus got up around 3 a.m. to do this. He "left the house and went

off to a solitary place"—the Greek shows that he purposefully, deliberately found a place where he could be alone with his Father. And he spent the entire morning in prayer.

Why? This was the very beginning of his public ministry. Already our Lord has defeated Satan in the wilderness, called his first disciples, preached to the crowds, taught the people, healed and exorcized demons, and drawn gigantic crowds from all over Galilee. Now what? What is next? Where should his work go?

Would he stay in Capernaum and build a megachurch for the crowds who would come to him? Would he stay there and wait for the people to come to him?

No. After his morning alone with his Father he knows his ministry purpose, more clearly than ever before: "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. *That is why I have come*" (v. 38). He would go to the people, and not wait for them to find him. This is why he has come.

And so this is what he did: "He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons" (v. 39). He found his "true north," his purpose in life, and he never left it.

Have you found yours? Have you defined a life purpose which will lead you out of the urgent and into the important? Could I recommend Jesus' life purpose to you?

He does: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," he claims (Matthew 28:18). If he has all authority, we have none.

And his life purpose for us is clear: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." A disciple is a follower, someone who obeys another as his or her master. We are in business, as a church and as Christians, to "make disciples." This is what we were created by God to do. This is our purpose in life. We are to invest our lives in helping people follow Jesus. God's word is just that simple.

I know you'd like to hear something more exciting, something more cutting-edge and glamorous. But Jesus made you, and he knows your heart and soul. He knows what purpose will give your life its greatest significance, peace, and joy. And he wants you to spend your life helping people follow him.

He promises in turn that you will discover the "abundant life" he has for you (John 10:10). You will find your life filled with meaning, significance, importance. You'll trade the urgent for the important.

Meet with your Father

Now, I know what you must be thinking. You have a job to do, and a heavy schedule to meet. I said just a few minutes ago that the typical American is working 20% more hours per week than he used to. You have a family to raise, or school and activities to accomplish, and more demands than you know what to do with. Am I asking you to add something else to your life? Is Jesus?

Yes, and no.

Jesus says that we exist to help people follow him. What does this life purpose mean for *your* life, in the most practical ways possible? What are you to *do* about this? In many ways you're where Jesus was in Capernaum—people and priorities crowding in from all sides, and you wonder what you're supposed to do next. What does it all mean for you, today?

For the next number of weeks, we'll look for ways to deal with this issue. We'll discuss our most common problems and pressures in light of the model and life purpose

of Jesus. Our series, entitled "Living On Purpose," will deal with everything from time pressures to finances to spirituality and self esteem. I'm going to show you how Jesus will help us trade the urgent for the important, every day.

But you can start right now. You can do exactly what Jesus did. In fact, you must.

Facing the pressures of enormous time and people problems, Jesus got alone with his Father. He got up well before sunrise, and made a time and a place where he could be in solitude with his God. He spoke with his Father about his life, his purpose, his future. And then he knew what he was to do next, and how to do it.

I do not know what you are to do next to help people follow Jesus, to define and fulfill your life's purpose. But your Father does. And he is waiting to help you, to speak with you, to guide you. However, every conversation requires two people. You must get alone with him, and listen to him. You must make time in your life and your soul for him. Only then can he lead you in the direction he created you to go.

So your Father is asking a very simple thing of you today, as you begin a new year. This is so simple that I've struggled with making it the practical point of the entire message, but I feel I must, that this *is* God's will and word for every one of us.

God simply wants you to make half an hour to be alone with him, every morning this week. Half an hour to talk about your life's direction in this new year, to think about your purpose and priorities, to know what steps you are to take next in helping people follow Jesus. Half an hour for a week, 3.5 hours out of your life, invested for the sake of a year spent well and a life lived well. Not much to ask, is it?

Will you give this to him?

Conclusion

God simply wants you to *want* to fulfill his purpose for your life. Start there, with him. And that will be enough.

There is a prayer I urge you to take with you and pray each morning as you begin your half-hour with your Father. It is by Thomas Merton, and means much to me. It is available at the doors for you to take home with you. Let's close our study today with its words:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.