

# “Four Priorities by Which to Live!”

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

**Intro.** – Charles E. Hummel wrote a book back in 1967 entitled *The Tyranny of the Urgent*. Its message is simple, yet very direct. Actually it’s a warning to all of us. Here in but one sentence is that warning: “Don’t let the urgent take the place of the important in your life.” How true! You see, the urgent will scream for our attention and even make us think we’ve done the right thing by calming its nerves. The sad thing; however, while we’re putting out the fires of the urgent, the IMPORTANT is put on hold. Kind of like the customer who had waited patiently for his waiter to return. The customer finally got the headwaiter’s attention and asked, “Just a point of information, did the waiter who took my order leave any family?”

All of this brings us to the question: What is important in our lives? Not what is urgent, but what do you count as top priority in your life?

**Illus.** – Members of a particular church were asked to indicate on a questionnaire how many hours they felt their preacher should devote per week to the following tasks: sermon prep, office matters, meetings, calling on the sick, calling on the lost, calling on the church family, all other misc. matters. The questionnaires gave the following results: the total number of hours spent was 82 hours per week. One member proposed 200 hours – note: a week only has 168 hours... Now here’s my point. Preaching isn’t the only responsibility with so many urgent matters screaming for attention. No matter the occupation, we all have umpteen matters (more than any of us could possibly do) demanding our attention. We soon find ourselves in a frenzy. Kind of like a stressed executive who asked his secretary “Where’s my pencil?” When told behind his ear, he responded, “Don’t you know I’m busy? What ear?”

For divine help in dealing with this pressing matter, we turn to 1 Thessalonians 2 where the inspired Apostle Paul gives four priorities by which to live – true for every church and every individual of any age:

*Purpose: to look at four priorities by which to live*

### I BE BIBLICAL (vv 1-4)

- surely Paul had a constant barrage of urgent needs pounding away at him...; nevertheless, he made sure his ministry was fixed on the most important. He always began with God’s Word = *Scripture!*
- did you catch those thoughts in the text?
  - 1) in strong opposition Paul spoke *the Gospel of God* – very foundation of his being not in error, or impurity or deceit = he held to *the truth!*...
  - 2) he considered the Word of God something *entrusted* to him...

#### A. Biblical *Mentality*

1. Sounds old fashioned, but Paul didn’t apologize for it... Our 1<sup>st</sup> priority we need to be cultivating is the making of God’s Word the final and complete authority in all areas of our lives!
2. Biblical thinking is the only way you and I will survive our “aimless” days in which we live:
  - KWIX – Moberly, MO radio station – asked seniors what they planned to do... “go to college so I can get a good job, so I can live the good life...”

#### B. Biblical *Lifestyle*

1. Start thinking and being led by God’s Word... change your way of living recognizing the temptation from Satan to get wrapped up in the urgent to the neglect of the essential!
2. Again, this is so obvious...; yet, it is so rare this day and age!

#### C. Biblical *Self-Examination*

1. Biblical thinking leads to self-examination... revealing who we really are...
2. Note: v 4 = soak up the Bible... let the Word of God begin its work on you!!
  - Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.”
3. Principles/precepts of God’s Word do something that no surgeon’s scalpel can touch (soul, spirit, attitudes)

4. God uses His word to *shape us up* – to mold us, to clean us up... to help us mature...  
With this, may we resolve not to let the tyranny of the urgent take away moments we must spend in God's word. We must be people of the Word!

## II BE AUTHENTIC (vv 5-6)

- notice how Paul shifts the emphasis – from the message to the messenger!

### A. Learn to be *Real*

- Illus. – remember Dad hearing young boys squeal tires... “That boy has a self-image problem...”
- 1. Paul was secure... all masks and cover-ups removed – he was vulnerable (open to God and man)...
- 2. Wasn't out to impress anybody... genuine... no guile... no pretense...
- 3. Are you as secure? Who are you out to impress? Do you have holy boldness without phoniness?
  - Illus. – Peter Cartwright preaching in the South. Host preacher told him, “Pres. Andrew Jackson just came in... be careful what you say.” Cartwright knew that A. Jackson needed the Lord like other “great men.” Cartwright preached without compromise. In the middle of his sermon he stopped and acknowledged Jackson's presence and said, “If Andrew Jackson doesn't repent and seek God's forgiveness he too will be just as lost as any other man.” Jackson respected Cartwright and from then on the two of them were best of friends.

### B. Learn to be *Kind*

- 1. Paul was an Apostle = genuine 1<sup>st</sup> century “bigwig”; yet, didn't push for limelight nor power abuser!
- 2. A top priority for Paul along side of being Biblical = be courteous...!

### C. Learn to be *Genuine*

- 1. Not being a phony... i.e. the standard hype prevalent today.
- 2. This means being free to question... admit failure and wrong...
  - a. authentic people don't always have to win:
    - Illus. – class under E. (Cotton) Ray Jones... man admitted to problems, challenges etc.
  - b. Mary's comments about many lady speakers... “...talk as if everything all right...”
- 3. Authentic people usually enjoy life the best. Why?
  - a. don't take themselves so seriously...
  - b. laugh, cry, think clearly because they have nothing for which to prove
  - c. have no fear in being found out, because they are hiding nothing....

## III BE GRACIOUS (vv 7-11)

### A. Care Like a *Mother*

- 1. Paul was both approachable and tender... mother like characteristics....
- 2. Paul not interested in dumping a full-load of laws on the people... wanted to share not only the Gospel but also his life...
- 3. Restoration Churches criticized for lack of compassion (abrasive and judgmental rather than tactful/thoughtful/compassionate...). There is real temptation to *use* people rather than *love* them!
- 4. Note: not suggesting there is no place for convictions to Truth... but it is wrong to be right when one is right in the wrong spirit...
- 5. Gospel must be presented to a hungry, aimless world in a thoughtful, gracious wrapping!

### B. Deal Like a *Father*

- 1. Ephesians 6:4 “*And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*”
- 2. Illus. – Charlie Shedd *Promises to Peter* – tells of time Peter, his son was messing with a bale binder of twine. One day, garage nothing but a maze of twine. Cutting through Shedd thought to himself, “I'll teach him a lesson.” Then it dawned on him: “Why do I want this twin and so what if he messes it up?!” That night supper... “I've changed my mind, have the twine... tools... I can buy them but can't buy new boys.” Never touched them again!

3. People become more important than rules and things in an atmosphere of graciousness!

#### IV BE RELEVANT (vv 12-13)

- "having bearing on the matters at hand"

##### A. God's Word is *Timeless*

1. Even though the truth of the Bible is ancient, when it is received it goes *to work!*
2. The Bible is *up-to-date... state of the art... always current/working...*
3. My question to you: Do you really believe this?... When read &/or hear the Bible, do you accept it as it really is – THE WORD OF GOD?!

##### B. God's Word Links *Talking With Walking*

1. If we hope to effectively reach people for Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must put relevance as a high priority upon which to focus...
2. Jesus did! He met people as they were NOT as they ought to be – e.g. angry young men... proud politicians... blind beggars... streetwalkers... grieving parents... all got Jesus' TIME!
  - Christ could have blown them away with His knowledge/authority but purposely stayed on their level. For what reason? To meet their real need – the need for a renewed mind and heart!
3. Need to return Cross back to the forefront – we've left the impression that belongs only in the sophisticated seminary or in the confines of a church building.

**Conclusion:** A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, dragging a eight-point buck.

"Where's Harry?" he was asked.

"Harry had a stroke of some kind. He's a couple of miles back up the trail."

"You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?"

"Well," said the hunter, "I figured no one was going to steal Harry."

Surprised to see an empty seat at the Super Bowl stadium, a diehard fan remarked about it to a woman sitting nearby. "It was my husband's," the woman explained, "But he died." "I'm very sorry," said the man. "Yet I'm really surprised that another relative, or friend, didn't jump at the chance to take the seat reserved for him." "Beats me," she said. "They all insisted on going to the funeral."

In recent years a head coach divorced his wife of 26 years when he left coaching a college team to become head coach in the National Football League. He said he needed a wife while coaching on the college level for social functions and to show families that he would be looking out for their sons. In pro football, however, she was an unnecessary accouterment and a distraction to winning. He said winning football was his number one priority and his two sons second. How tragic!

In contrast to this, Tom Landry, also a former coach of the Dallas cowboys said, "The thrill of knowing Jesus is the greatest thing that ever happened to me ... I think God has put me in a very special place, and He expects me to use it to His glory in everything I do ... whether coaching football or talking to the press, I'm always a Christian ... Christ is first, family second and football third."

Yes, tyranny of the urgent will always outshout the essential nature of the most important if we let it. We must determine not to let this happen. God has given 4 priorities: 1) Be Biblical – set firm foundation; 2) Be Authentic – apply the truth; 3) Be Gracious – develop compassionate attitude; 4) Be Relevant – stay current