

Mechanics of Repentance and Change

Where's God on Your Priority List?

For most of us, we consistently struggle to set our priorities right. Our lives have a way of managing us. Our over-connected, “social,” 21st Century culture presses in on our time and keeps us from doing many things we ought to. We are often unwilling to take control of our priorities.

The mechanics of repentance and change must involve prioritizing our daily lives to what God desires for us. “How can I please God today?” “Why am I not spending time with God every day?” “Where’s God on my priority list?” Essential questions such as these require a prioritization—a reworking of our schedules. All people throughout time have had these same problems. This continues to be a focal need of the modern Christian: placing God as priority one.

To grow closer, we must prioritize the important, release the trivial, and reject the frivolous. There are so many things in the 21st century longing for and demanding our attention, but nothing is new under the sun. Time and attention wasters have always been in the world. Listen to Spurgeon, “The common fault with most of us is our readiness to yield to distractions. Our thoughts go roving here and there, and we make little progress toward our

desired end.”⁷² We must focus on our hopeful end by asking ourselves, “Are we living our lives in such a way to receive the prize of Christ?”

Think about your weekly activities: what percentage of your life could you make drastic changes to for God’s glory instead of using it for temporary satisfaction? We have time for what we make time for. Paul Becker said it well, “Stop your frantic ‘doing.’”⁷³ We must stop saying, “I don’t have time.” We need to stop blaming time for our lack of concentration in choosing the greater things of God and how well we spend our time. Our “time is a function of priority.”⁷⁴

We are the Christians we want to be right now. We are as godly as we want to be. We worship as often as we want. We are choosing to live our lives the way it is. Great determination is required to change our lives in significant ways. Our lives are elastic but in a lackadaisical environment, stubbornly static. We tend to slip back to where we were quickly and permanent change can be elusive without a tenacious will.

*“The busier you are the more intentional
you must be.” – Peter Tanchi*

So to change and move our lives closer to God, it takes thinking and acting on many good habits that will facilitate life change.

“We toil for matters of the world: we rise up early, go to bed late, eat the bread of sorrow and all for a little wealth. We think nothing of the hardest labours to accomplish our worldly delights. Then consider prayer, reading, meditation, and worship: how difficult are these? How soon we cry out, what a weariness is this? A little time in duty is spent with a

⁷² “With Great Speed”, Truth for Life from Charles H. Spurgeon, accessed Jan. 15, 2020, <https://info.truthforlife.org/devo-jan15-2020>.

⁷³ Paul Becker, *Seeing Your Vision Come True* (Oceanside, CA: DCPI), 18.

⁷⁴ Peter Tanchi, GACX Compelled Conference Session (Denton, Texas, Sept. 26, 2019).

*great deal of murmuring.*⁷⁵

To Repent, Do What You Already Know to Do

It seems, in all the years I have walked with the Lord, that I never stay in one place with Him. Either I am becoming more like Him today or I am giving in to the flesh more often. I have realized that when I want to make a concerted effort to gain back the relationship with Jesus that I digressed from, I must first hold onto what I am doing well and get rid of things that take too much time or are sinful in nature. I then begin again, to work back in the spiritual disciplines that I neglected. I already know how to be a spiritual person. The trouble is I am not acting on what I know.

To Repent, Take Out the Trash

I usually begin repentance with remembering that there is no potential with God; God is always working in my life perfectly. Perfection has no potential. He can do no more; He cannot improve; He is perfect in all He does. I, therefore, must choose to yield to God's work by getting rid of the things I am doing that do not please God. God is working in us to will and to act according to His standard (cf., Philippians 2:13). The reason we choose sin is because of us not because of Him.

Notice that Paul instructed Timothy that a person must "cleanse himself" of behavior.

Now in a wealthy home there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also ones made of wood and of clay, and some are for honorable use, but others for ignoble use. So if someone cleanses himself of such behavior, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart, useful for the Master,

⁷⁵ Thomas Manton, *By Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000) in *Works of Thomas Manton*, vols. 1-3 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000). As quoted in *Voices from the Past: Puritan Devotional Readings*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Rushing (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust), 20.

prepared for every good work. But keep away from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace, in company with others who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:20-22).

This passage reminds me that I am responsible for what I do. God is already doing His work; I *must get rid of the things* in my life that are not noble.

Make the Next Right Decision

We live daily in moments of decisions. Every day we are faced with choices. Some of the choices we make are unique, but mostly they are repetitive. These choices compile and eventually make up our days and the totality of our lives. The application of these Christian truths may also be simplified to a decision-making process: *make the next right decision*. To repent, we must stop making the decisions we know not to make. We must change our minds about the acceptability of the things we do that do not glorify God.

Let's face it, most of us would be pretty good Christians if we would apply what we already know to do. The Christian life boils down to simple truths: love, faith, and hope. The devoted life is grown with prayer, the Scriptures, community and worship.

Prayer

"I pray too much." I have never met a person who believed this about themselves. We all understand that we could and should pray more. Prioritizing prayer models what Christ did and is invaluable to us.

If we would stay off our "smart" phones longer than a few minutes between busy duties and desires throughout the day, we might find many prayers headed heavenward.

Many times, after I see myself slipping with God, I notice that I first stopped praying as I should. I started "slipping" with God. Reading God's Word and praying to Him are the "meat and potatoes" of Christian growth. When we stop praying, we are in trouble. And it's usually trouble that gets us back into

the habit of prayer. Maybe you can identify with Peter as Spurgeon did:

“And starting to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:30).

“Sinking times are praying times with the Lord’s servants. Peter neglected prayer at starting upon his venturesome journey, but when he began to sink, his danger made him a suppliant, and his cry, though late, was not too late.”⁷⁶

Now is the time of repentant prayers.

Family Devotions

Ask any “solid” Christian what should one do with their own family to facilitate spiritual growth, and almost certainly one will hear, “Read the Bible and pray together every day.” I saw an example of this when meeting with a dear Indian friend of mine. I and another man met at his house for breakfast, and he asked to be excused for a few minutes during the meeting. We were meeting in the dining room and I noticed he moved to the informal eating area of his home. There he met his high school aged daughter. I saw him open a Bible and read a few verses with her. He then prayed for her before sending her off to school. My friend gave me a powerful reminder of the importance of a father in a child’s life and devotional life in the home.

There is no substitute for family devotions. God’s word is active and living. It realigns our thinking, priorities, and focus. God’s word is necessary for our growth.

Dads and moms need to regularly show their children how important the Scriptures are in the home. It is the parents’ responsibility to teach their children to spend time with God daily. They should model this.

⁷⁶ “Enlist God’s Aid Through Prayer”, Truth for Life from Charles H. Spurgeon, accessed Dec. 28, 2019, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/daily-devotionals/1/14/0/>.

Act With Determination

There must be a willful determination in us to seek God. Our fleshy natures are so powerful and always with us. Paul proved he understood our conflicted natures well when he wrote Romans 7:15, “For I don’t understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want—instead, I do what I hate.” Those natures of ours demand attention and must be forcefully put down.

We see many examples of the resolute in the Bible. Joshua spoke to his people about the staunchness of choice in Joshua 24. Daniel exhibited great relentlessness even in the face of the consequence of death. We see this determination, of course, throughout Jesus’ ministry. He would get away to pray. He would pray when others were sleeping. He would move from town to town because he didn’t want comfort; He wanted to fulfill His purpose in life. The clearest example of His persistent determination was evidenced by His sweat drops of blood-laced prayer to the Father in the Garden before His crucifixion: “Yet not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42b) and His willingness to go to His cross.

Endure

I wish I could say that the longer we live, the less determination is needed for a spiritually focused life, but our flesh natures must be at least partially described as *doggedly persistent*.

Therefore, endurance is also required. We must be in a constant state of motion toward God. Tozer adds insight to the necessary endurance required: “To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul’s paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too-easily-satisfied religionist [...]”⁷⁷ “We must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us” (Hebrews 12:1b).

⁷⁷ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 15.

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Scripture Passage

Matthew 9:35-38

Questions

- 1) Where's God on your priority list?

- 2) How many times a week do you spend reading the Bible and praying in your home? Circle one: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- 3) What are the frivolous distractions that seem to gather too much of your time?

- 4) What hobbies or things do you enjoy that you may devote too much time to?

- 5) If you have children, how are you teaching your children the value of the Bible and prayer in your home?

Aim Point

- 1) Write out what you do Sunday through Saturday in a typical week using the times of day to map out where your time is going. What could you get rid of or cut down on to spend more time investing in God's kingdom work?

Example

Monday

MECHANICS OF REPENTANCE AND CHANGE

6 am Breakfast
7 am Devotional
8 am Breakfast
9 am Work
10 am ”
11 am ”
12 am ”
1 pm ”
2 pm ”
3 pm ”
4 pm ”
5 pm ”
6 pm Dinner
7 pm Watch TV
8 pm Watch TV
9 pm Watch TV
10 pm Watch TV

2) Call someone and ask them to hold you accountable for the #1 Aim Point by asking you weekly if you are reading a chapter a day and praying.

3) Find a ministry and work in it.

4) Call a ministry leader right now and ask them if they need volunteers.

5) Begin to read one chapter of the Bible a day from a book in the New Testament. If you are married and/or have children in the home, have a meeting and let them know that your family is going to begin to read a chapter and pray together before breakfast. If mornings are too “crazy” for you (like if you have five children), then pray for them before breakfast. Read the chapter of the Bible in the evening. We have time for what we make time for.