

Main Idea: In 2 Timothy 4:9-15, we can observe 3 priorities in Paul's life.

- I. Priority #1--The Lord
- II. Priority #2--People
 - A. Delightful People (9)
 - B. Discouraging People (10a)
 - C. Dependable People (10b-12)
 - D. Destructive People (14-15)
- III. Priority #3--Personal Growth (13)

It's amazing how our priorities tend to change as we grow older...
I can remember when computers first came out. I wanted one. I lost sleep thinking about what it would be like to have one. Not any more. I don't think about getting a computer any more. Now it's other things that occupy my mind.

What are the things that you think about? What matters most in your life? Then, a followup question.... What things *should* matter most in our lives? What priorities does God want us to have? This is a subject we need to address frequently, for we can easily get out of whack.

There's a wonderful passage in 2 Timothy that can help us. God preserved the testimony of a man who had an amazing perspective on his life. It was Paul, and in 2 Timothy 4:9-15, we can observe 3 priorities in Paul's life.

Allow me to sketch Paul's circumstances. He's incarcerated for Christ. His lodging is not the Hilton, but the Mamartine prison in Rome! I was talking with someone awhile back who had the opportunity to visit this place. In Paul's day, it was a pit-like dungeon with one entrance, a hole in the ceiling where the apostle was dropped in. That was his only source of light and air. There was a sewage line that ran near his cell. You can imagine the stench. In just a few weeks Paul would be executed. Death glared at him.

Listen. When you're in a predicament like that, it's pretty easy to sift through the chaff of life, and sort out what's really important.

What things really do matter most in life? For Paul, first and foremost...

I. Priority #1--The Lord

You won't see this priority spelled out in verses 9-15. But it's so basic to Paul that it undergirds everything he wrote in this letter. His number one priority in life was to live for his Lord.

- 1:1 "Paul an apostle by the will of God"
- 1:8 "...of me his prisoner"
- 1:12 "...for I know WHOM I have believed... HE is able..."
- 1:16 "The LORD give..." 1:18 "The LORD grant..."

¹ Adapted from a message preached at WBC 9/6/92

2:3-4 "...a good soldier of Jesus Christ...please Him who has chosen him..."
2:24 "...the servant of the LORD"
3:11 "...the LORD delivered me"
4:1 "I charge thee before GOD and THE LORD JESUS"
4:8 "...the LORD shall give me...love HIS appearing."

What made Paul tick? The Lord. What priority affected every decision, every plan, every ambition in the apostle's life? The Lord.

Is the Lord the first priority in your life? There's a great book about a man who played around with his priorities all his life. He had it all. He had power, prestige, money, influence. He tried it all. He explored every type of gusto this world could offer. He wrote an autobiography about his exploits. I recommend it highly. You don't need to buy the book, though, since you already have it. Who was that man? Solomon. What book?

Listen. Solomon accomplished a lot of great things in his life. But in his own admission, he messed up his priorities. And at the end, here's what he confessed.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

This is key. Abundant life is possible only when my first priority in life is the Lord.

What else mattered in Paul's life?

II. Priority #2--People

I want you to notice something very significant in 2 Timothy. It's Paul's last inspired letter. Notice how many people Paul mentioned by name...

Ch 1--Timothy, Lois, Eunice, Phygelus, Hermogenes, Onesiphorus

Ch 2--Hymenaeus, Philetus

Ch 4--Demas, Crescens, Titus, Luke, Mark, Tychicus, Carpus, Alexander, Prisca, Aquila, the household of Onesiphorus, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia

That's more than 24 people! Some ran the race of the Christian life well. Some did NOT run the race well. But you can't help but see the importance of people. Paul placed a high priority in his life on developing Christ-honoring relationships with people. He poured his life into people. He confessed he needed people.

In fact, do this sometime. Go through the book of Acts and all of Paul's writings and write down the names of people associated with Paul. Paul was no lone ranger when it came to ministry. He was a team player. There are around 100 different men and women named as part of Paul's circle of friends and fellow laborers.

Let's set something straight. A person who says, "I have the Lord. Christ meets all my needs. I don't need people..." may sound spiritual at first. But listen. That's unbiblical thinking. Do you know why? God Himself said in the beginning, "It is not good that man should be alone (Gen 2:18)." Human friendships are some of the greatest gifts our loving God sends us. We need each other. In fact, as a pastor, I am greatly

concerned about people who live as islands, who avoid getting involved with other people.

Paul made people a priority in his life. What kind of people? I see 4 kinds mentioned here...

A. Delightful People (9)

Verse 9 "Do your best to come to me quickly." Timothy was someone special to Paul. He was a spiritual son. He had labored side by side in the gospel ministry for 15 years. Paul could say he knew of no one quite like Timothy (see Phil 2:19-22 Tim was a SELFLESS SERVANT).

Some people are leaches. They get involved in a relationship merely for what they can get out of it. They soak you. They drain you. They're self-centered. That was not true of Tim (2 Tm 1:3-4). Tim was a refresher to Paul. Though much younger, he was an encourager.

What did Paul want Tim to do? [KJV] "Do thy diligence to come shortly ("tackeos"--tachometer)..." Do you sense the urgency? Come quickly Timothy! (see 4:21) Why the urgency? What did Paul just say in 4:6? He was about to die.

Watch this. Paul knew he would not be around much longer. He could say both: I am "ready" to die (6). And, I long to see you Tim (9).

Listen. Loneliness is painful. Paul was lonely. He longed for companionship. Timothy was a delightful person to Paul.

Do you have people like that in your life? I do. I hope you do.

But not all people are delightful...

B. Discouraging People (10a)

Verse 10 "For Demas hath forsaken me..."

Why did Paul want Tim to come so badly. Loneliness, yes. But more than that. I think Demas broke Paul's heart. Notice the word "for" beginning v 10.

Who was Demas?

Col 4:14 "Luke...and Demas greet you."

Phile 24 "Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers"

At one time Demas was part of Paul's ministry team. Apparently, he was one of his close associates. Paul had counted on Demas. But what did Demas do?

"forsaken me"--I want you to notice the pain of personal rejection. He has forsaken "ME." Demas was a deserter. He went AWOL. At a time when Paul needed him most, at his lowest point in life, Demas let him down. He took off for Thessalonica.

Why did Demas leave?

"he loved this present world"--Notice the contrast. Instead of loving Christ's appearing (8), Demas loved the world. Perhaps it was the love of money that capsized Demas. He's not the last professing Christian to abandon ship in favor of worldly pursuits. But don't condemn Demas. It could happen to us. 1 Cor 10:12 says, "If any man think he stands, take heed lest he fall."

It's true so we might as well face it. Some people will bring us great discouragement in life. They'll disappoint us. I mean people we've been close to, we've trusted, we've prayed with, we've served with.

What's are we tempted to do when we get burnt? Retreat! Hibernate! That's a natural reaction. But listen. God offers us supernatural strength to overcome that natural reaction!

Thank God for the third kind of people...

C. Dependable People (10b-12)

Verse 10b "Crescens...Titus..."

There is no hint of defection on their part. Apparently Titus had finished his ministry in Crete, and was dispatched for further duty in Dalmatia (Yugoslavia). We know nothing about Crescens other than he was another co-laborer of Paul's, and was sent to minister in Galatia.

Paul mentions some other dependable people...

V 11 "Only Luke is with me"

Dr. Luke, the one Paul called "the beloved physician" in Col 4:14. During Paul's missionary journeys, Luke was there. During Paul's first imprisonment, Luke was there. And now, to the very end, Luke was there. In fact, Paul says, "ONLY Luke is with me." Some feel Paul dictated this letter II Tim to Luke.

Luke was dependable. It was this same Luke that wrote the gospel and Acts. Next, Paul mentions a surprising candidate for the dependable award!

V 11 "Take Mark..."

We won't take time to dig up the past record on this one. You probably know it well. If you don't check out Acts 15:36-40.

Nearly 2 decades earlier, Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey. They took Barn's cousin, Mark. Unfortunately, Mark failed. He bombed out. He let the missionary team down, and went home. When it came time to choose teams for the second missionary trip, Barn wanted to take Mark. Paul put his foot down and said, "No way! Mark may be a nice guy, but he's undependable!" And to Barn's consternation, Paul didn't take Mark.

But that's not the end of the story! Aren't you glad we serve a God of hope! A patient and merciful God! Mark allowed God to change him. And God did.

"he is PROFITABLE TO ME for the ministry"

Wow! At one time a drop out, now a dependable worker in the ministry! Let me encourage you with this. Have you blown it in the past? There is hope and forgiveness!

V 12 "And Tychicus..."

Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Why? That's where Tim was. Perhaps Tych delivered the letter. Perhaps he was to relieve Tim so he could leave to go see Paul. Tych was the one Paul sent earlier to Crete to relieve Titus.

In my book, Tych was an unsung hero. So were Crescens, Titus, Luke, and Mark. They were people on which Paul could count. They were dependable.

Here's a fact. It's hard to find dependable people. I urge you, by the grace of God, determine to be *dependable*.

Paul placed a priority on people--Some Delightful, Discouraging, Dependable...

D. Destructive People (14-15)

I cringe when I read verses 14-15...

Verses 14-15 "Alexander...did me much harm..." Who was Alexander? Don't know for sure (I Tm 1:20?). We do know this:

1. Alex was well known to Tim.
2. Alex had done a GREAT deal of harm to Paul. ("MUCH EVIL")

What did he do? Lit. "he informed many evil things against me." Some feel that Alex was the informer who was responsible for Paul's second arrest. No wonder then Paul warned Tim to be cautious! But Alex did more than "inform." He...

v 15 "greatly withstood our words"

Some people are just down right destructive. They hurt us, and hurt us badly.

Q: Do we retaliate? Paul didn't. You see not one ounce of personal revenge.

V 14 "the Lord reward him..."

To sum it up, Paul placed a priority on people. He developed Christ-honoring relationships with people. He ministered to people. Some were delightful. Others discouraging. Some dependable, others destructive.

Two questions:

--What 5 people have most impacted your life for Christ?

--Can you name 5 people you have impacted positively for Christ?

Do you know something that's tragic? This. To see a person come to the end of his or her life without a relationship with the Lord, and without meaningful relationships with people.

What are the things that really matter most in life? The Lord, People, and...

III. Priority #3--Personal Growth (13)

Verse 13 is intriguing. In v 13, you see the practical, down to earth side of Paul. V 13 spells out the fact that Paul was no superman Christian. He was real.

V 13 also impresses on me a third area of priority for Paul--Personal Growth. Paul asked Tim to bring 3 things when he came:

1. Bring the Cloak.

Why the cloak? Where was Paul? Chained in a dark, damp dungeon. What was coming soon? Winter (21). There was no heat pump in the Mamartine prison! Paul needed warm clothing. The cloak was an outer garment of heavy material.

2. Bring the Scrolls [Books].

The word is "biblia" which lit means "papyrus rolls." What was written on them? We don't know for sure. One suggestion is that they contained the earliest forms of the gospels.

3. Bring the Parchments.

Parchments were books made of skins of animals. What were these parchments? One opinion is that they were Paul's necessary legal documents, even his Roman citizenship. It's more likely that they were copies of the OT Scriptures.

Don't miss this. Paul never stopped growing spiritually. He never lost his desire to learn.

1500 years later William Tyndale was lying in prison in Vilvorde. He was to be executed because he dared to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. It was a cold, dark winter, and Tyndale wrote a letter to his friend, "Send me for Jesus' sake, a warmer cap, something to patch my leggings, a woolen shirt, and above all my Hebrew Bible." (Barclay, 220)

Catch this. Though days away from death, Paul had not lost his desire to grow spiritually. To learn. To study God's Word. To read the Scriptures. Let's follow his example.

Conclusion:

What are the things that matter most in life? Paul had 3 priorities--The Lord, People, and his own personal growth. What are your priorities? Is the Lord your first priority? Do you make it a priority to get involved in the lives of people for the cause of Christ? Is it a priority in your life to experience personal growth every day?

We could close our Bibles, pray, and leave. But this evening we're going to close with a very specific challenge.

Real personal growth cannot occur apart from a regular intake of the Word of God. Most of us know we should spend more time in the Word than we do. I'm going to challenge you today with the 30/30 plan. I want to challenge each person here to spend time in God's Word within 30 minutes after you get up in the morning and within 30 minutes before you go to bed each night for the next 30 days. Whether you spend only a couple of minutes each time or not, the key is to be in the Word at the beginning and the ending of each day.

You say, "I don't have time." If you have time to eat, brush your teeth, comb your hair, read your newspaper, and check out the news on tv, you have time to begin and end your day in God's Word. So remember, 30/30 this month.

Communion

The Lord gave us something very wonderful to help us keep first things first. It's called Communion. By participating in this ordinance we remind ourselves whose we are, what He did, and why we are here. Let's prepare to worship Him...