

"Only 1 in 3 American workers plan their daily schedules and only 9 percent follow through and complete what they have planned." — John Maxwell (*Today Matters*, page 75)

energy on pursuits for which he is not fitted and he is wiser still who from among the things he can do well, chooses and resolutely follows the best."<sup>6</sup>

### 3 Choose your priorities carefully

If you choose to live a balanced life, not only will you live your life according to your priorities, but you will also evaluate those priorities by thinking in terms of the eternal and not just the temporal. Jesus entreats us, "So make God's kingdom and His righteousness first in your life, and all the other things will be given to you as you need them" (Matthew 6:33 TCW).

### A Final Thought

Ten years ago, globe-trotting journalist Carl Honore had what he called his "airport epiphany." He was so driven to squeeze

more and more into every day that he began to think how he could speed-read bedtime stories to his little boy. "I was waiting for a flight and I saw an article about the One-Minute Bedtime Story. My first reaction was, 'Hallelujah!' But that moment of ecstasy was followed by remorse. 'Whoa,' I thought, 'have I really come to where I'd put my son away [to bed] with a sound bite?'"

From that moment on, he decided he would set his priorities and do fewer activities. And he has found that the result and reward of doing fewer things is that you enjoy them more and you do them better.<sup>7</sup>

In essence, priority living is simply bringing order to your life and making every moment count.



#### References:

- 1, 4 & 6 John Maxwell, *Today Matters*, Warner books, 2004, pages 182, 67 & 71.
- 3 & 7 *Set Your Priorities*, U.S. News & World Report, January 3, 2005, page 36.
- 2 & 5 Joan Esherrick, *Good Better Best*, Moody Magazine, July August, 2002 page 55.

*Distributed by:* Upper Columbia Conference Stewardship Ministries. *Director:* Vacant.

*Produced by:* Pacific Union Conference Stewardship Department.

*Director:* Gordon Botting. *Design/Assistant Editor:* Carol Lowe.

Page 4

# The Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward

January 2006  
Volume 11, Issue #1

## PRIORITY LIVING

by Gordon Botting

The story is told of a couple who attended a county fair where a gentleman was offering rides in an old biplane for \$50 per person. Although the couple thought it would be fun to ride in a biplane, they felt that the price was exorbitant. They tried negotiating to get him to lower the price, but he wouldn't budge.

Finally the pilot, tired of their bantering back and forth, made the following offer: "You pay me \$100 to take you up, and if neither of you

say a single word during the flight, I'll refund your money in full."



one solitary word during the whole time we were in the air. Here's your money back — you deserve it!"

Immediately they agreed to such a bargain and climbed into the biplane. As soon as they were airborne, the pilot proceeded to do every aerial maneuver he could think of — diving, looping, rolling, and flying upside down, hoping to make them scream out in fear.

When the plane finally landed, the pilot said to the husband, "Congratulations! For a man who talks so much it really surprised me that you didn't say

"It was difficult," agreed the husband, "particularly when my wife fell out."<sup>1</sup>

As you reflect on this fictional tale, I'm sure, like myself, you want to scream out, "Where are your priorities, man!" But sometimes in today's rat race as we are driving, looping, rolling, and just plain flying upside down at 90 miles per hour, we fail to get our own lives in focus.

Stewardship is a total life-style. It involves our *health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality* and *finances*.

## Prioritize With Deliberation

As we begin this New Year with its clean slate, maybe it is time for each of us to be more deliberate about what is important in our lives. One author has put it this way, “Maybe God doesn’t want you involved in every opportunity that comes your way. Maybe He wants you to say ‘no’ to some good things in order to say ‘yes’ to the best.”<sup>2</sup>



The apostle Paul summed it up in Ephesians, “So be careful how you live, using the wisdom that God has given you. Take advantage of every opportunity to do good” (Ephesians 5:15-16 TCW).

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that directionless living is not an option for the born-again Christian. Jesus lived his 33 years on this earth with an unmistakable focus on His work and priorities. In speaking of His Heavenly Father’s purpose for His earthly sojourn, Christ declared, “I have honored you while I have lived here, and I’ve finished the work that you gave me to

do” (John 17:4 TCW). No more, no less.

To assist us in choosing our priorities, here are three areas worth reviewing:

### 1 Time is our most precious commodity

I’m sure you find yourself thinking the following on a daily basis: “I wish I had more time, I desperately need more hours, or please, just give me two more minutes.” Many of us fit the philosophy expressed by executive coach Linda Finkle, “There’s this belief that we can create a 26-hour day somehow.”<sup>3</sup> Fortunately or unfortunately, each of us has the same 1,440 minutes in a day. Unlike wealth or health, time is one of the few gifts of equality for all humans.



Since time is both precious and priceless, let each of us during the next twelve months follow the advice of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Guard well your spare moments. They are like uncut diamonds. Discard them and their value will never be known. Improve them and they will become the brightest gems in a useful life.”<sup>4</sup> Since you and I cannot

“So if you focus on what’s good, your life will be full of light. If you focus on what’s bad, your life will be full of darkness.” — Jesus (Matthew 6:22-23 TCW)

change time, we must change how we manage it.

### 2 We cannot change time, only our priorities

With all that occupies our time, such as profession, relationships, ministry commitments, physical needs, and daily chores, how can we choose the essential priorities? Here is a list of questions that may be helpful:

- Is this activity essential for life and health?
- Does this area of service fit my gifting?
- Does this activity violate my core values?
- Is this the right season of my life for this activity?
- Who am I really trying to please by doing this?
- What is the worst that can happen if I say no or if it doesn’t get done?<sup>5</sup>

John Maxwell, in his best selling book, *Today Matters*, has found that these three critical questions have helped him develop his priorities.

#### What is required of me?

To be realistic in any area of your life, you must start with an

assessment of what you must do. To be a good spouse or parent, you must first ask the question, What is required of me? To satisfy your employer, the bottom line is, What must I do to be productive? As a student, your goal should be, What must I do to please my teacher? As a Christian, shouldn’t your ultimate desire be to delight your Heavenly Father?

#### What gives me the greatest return?

As we mature we often discover that some daily and yearly activities yield a much higher return for the amount of effort put into them than do others. Obviously, the next step is always to concentrate on higher-return activities.

#### What gives me the greatest reward?

If you only do what you have been assigned and even if you do it as the Bible says, “with all your might,” it will probably be highly beneficial, but you will be neither satisfied or content. The eighteenth century British Prime Minister William Gladstone summed it up well when he said, “He is a wise man who wastes no

**About the Author:** Gordon Botting, DrPH, CFC, has a dual role as the Director of Stewardship Ministry for the Pacific Union Conference and Director of Health, Community Services and Stewardship in the Northern California Conference.