

1. Relationship With God  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
2. Relationship With Wife (if married)  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
3. Relationship With Children (if a father)  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
4. Finances  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
5. Health, Leisure, and Rest  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
6. Vocation  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high
7. Ministry  
non-existent | extremely low | average | somewhat important | very high

Business leader, author, and speaker, Patrick Morley helps men to think more deeply about their lives, to be reconciled with Christ, and to be equipped for a larger impact on the world.

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## How to Order Your Priorities

Patrick Morley

Once we invited Bill Walton, co-founder of Holiday Inns who experienced a late-in-life conversion, to speak at an outreach dinner. As it happened, our Bible study was meeting the next morning so I invited Mr. Walton.

The next morning after our Bible Study, a group of about eight men, ages thirty to forty-five, each spent two or three minutes describing where they were on their spiritual pilgrimages.

As each successive man shared, I noticed Mr. Walton, a father of four, becoming more and more fidgety. Finally, it was his turn to speak. He said, "It is true that I helped build a great corporation. But to do so I arrived at the office every morning by seven and rarely got home before ten o'clock at night." His brow furrowed, his shoulders drooped, and his lip quivered as he added, "I never saw a single little league baseball game."

He paused and stared sadly into our faces as though he could see the future. He took a deep breath to gather himself. Then, with trembling fists and booming voice, the room rattled as he roared, "I exhort you young men. Learn to live by biblical priorities!"

### WHAT ARE PRIORITIES?

Mr. Walton would have us know that men who fail usually fail because they didn't manage their priorities.

The dictionary says that a "priority" is something to which we give precedence because of its urgency or importance. To "prioritize" means to arrange in order of importance.

Priorities, then, are "pre-decisions" we make to decide in advance what we will give ourselves to. When we set priorities we are literally writing history in advance.

Priorities become a grid to help us distinguish opportunity from distraction. They are filters through which we can sift daily decisions to make sure we keep on track. When we set priorities in advance it reduces the pressure we feel when we must make decisions under fire.

## THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Jesus made decisions based on his priorities. One morning after a tiring night, Jesus went to have some time to himself. It was not to be...

*At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people came to where he was and tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:42-44).*

Notice three things. *First*, people tried to keep Jesus from leaving. Perhaps they appealed to his compassion. *The better job you do, the more people will ask you to do.* Without intending to, people will ask you to do things that meet their needs, but don't necessarily match your priorities.

*Second*, Jesus knew his purpose. He said, "I must preach the good news ... because that is why I was sent." His purpose determined his priorities. He did not let the emotion of the moment cloud his judgment. Since he decided in advance what he should do, he was not distracted.

Third, Jesus did what he was called to do. The pressure to do that which is good but not best has put many wagons in the ditch. There is one great rule for priority living we glean from the example of Jesus:

Make decisions on the basis of your priorities, not your pressures.

***Make decisions on the basis of your priorities, not your pressures.***

## HOW TO PRIORITIZE

No man can do everything. Choices must be made. How can priorities help us make choices about how we invest our limited time and money?

1. ***Don't give yourself to those who don't absolutely need you at the expense of those who do.*** Triage is the military technique of deciding how to prioritize treatment of wounded soldiers when a wave of new casualties swamps the capacity of the medic unit. The helicopters bring back three groups of wounded soldiers,

- Those who will die no matter what is done
- Those who will live even if treatment is delayed
- Those who will live only if given immediate treatment

Can you guess the order of treatment? For our personal decision-making we should conduct a little civilian triage,

- a. Who can't live without you, or you without them?
- b. Who would you help if you don't have to neglect group "a"?
- c. Who are those who will be fine with or without you?

Why is it that we often give the most of our time to those who care about us the least, and the least of our time to those who care about us the most?

That's why we should decide in advance what our priorities ought to be, prioritizing everything on the basis of who will cry at our funeral.

2. ***Never do anything someone else can do.*** Many years ago I decided I would only do things I do well. That served a good purpose, because it kept me in my areas of competence. However, I have also realized that simply because I do something well doesn't mean it's the best use of my time.

Prioritize everything on the basis of who will cry at your funeral.

Since then I've added a "Part Two." I also don't do anything if someone else can also do it. Since I write and prepare messages at my home office, this means if I need a photocopy I get up and make it at my copy machine. But when I am at the ministry office I have someone else make it. This principle frees up an unusually large amount of time. Try it (but don't tell your wife to take out the trash instead of you it really is something only you can do for reasons that should be obvious)!

3. ***Distinguish opportunity from distraction.*** Many times distractions come disguised as opportunities. Unless we have thought through who we are, what our lives are all about, and what's important to us, we will not have the focus to choose the best. Al Ries says that focus is the art of exclusion. A great secret of priority living is to have so thought through your life that deciding what to include and exclude becomes second nature.

4. ***Recognize the difference between a good idea and a God idea.***<sup>1</sup> We are naturally inclined to act on the impulse of a good idea. But sometimes good ideas get in the way of God ideas. Peter wanted to build three shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus at the transfiguration. The Bible says, "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them", and God spoke (Matt. 17:5). In other words, Peter's good idea was so impetuous that God literally interrupted Peter "while he was still speaking."

Prayer removes the impulse of the good idea born of human ingenuity but not of God. Pray, then plan. It is the habit of a man who would distinguish between good and God.

## AREAS TO PRIORITIZE

Every man must take personal responsibility for his private life and set priorities in five areas: His relationship with God, his relationship with his wife, his relationship with his children, his finances, and his health (including leisure and rest). No one else will, or can, do this for you. Also a man must set priorities for his work and his personal ministry.

Circle how high a priority each of the following areas has been to you. If what you circle is different than what you would like it to be, write down in the space provided: 1) What changes you want to make, and 2) What you intend to give up to make it happen.