

The Importance of Prioritizing Our Lives

I once read about a man named Ivy Lee. Mr. Lee was a management consultant, as well as a forthright and self-confident man. In the 1930's Ivy Lee, somehow, was able to secure a private interview with Charles Schwab—not the owner of the investment brokerage firm that many think of today—but Charles Schwab who was the president of Bethlehem Steel. Schwab was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the early years of the 20th century. During this meeting, Ivy Lee assured Charles Schwab that if the management leaders at Bethlehem Steel would follow his advice, the company's operations would be improved, and their profits would increase. After hearing this, Schwab responded in this way, "Mr. Lee, if you can show us a way to get more things done, I'll be glad to listen to what you have to say; and if it works, I'll pay you whatever you ask within reason."

At this point, Ivy Lee handed Charles Schwab a blank piece of paper and said, "Write down the most important things you have to do tomorrow." Schwab wrote his list. "Now," Lee continued, "number them in order of importance." Schwab prioritized his list. Lee continued, "Tomorrow morning start on #1 and stay with it until you complete it. Then go on to #2 and #3 and #4 and so on. Don't worry if you haven't completed everything on the list by the end of the day. At least you will have completed the most important projects. Do this every day. After you've been convinced of the value of this system, have your men try it. Try it as long as you like, and then, send me your check for whatever you think the idea is worth." A few weeks after this meeting, Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000. Remember, this is the 1930's. Adjusted for inflation in today's money, this would be somewhere between \$400,000 to a half a million dollars. Schwab would later say that it was the most profitable lesson he had ever learned in his long business career.

Interestingly, this idea of prioritizing our lives is certainly not original with Ivy Lee. In fact, prioritizing has more to do with *who* we put first in our lives rather than, necessarily, *what* we put first. It's as simple as saying to ourselves, "What would God have me do in this situation?" This is what I mean by prioritizing. How do we know what God's will is? We discover this by looking at the principles and precepts of God's word given in the Scriptures. This is not something that we only do in a moment of time, but rather, studying the scriptures is a lifelong joy and responsibility (2 Peter 3:18). When we get our priorities out of order, we place ourselves, rather than God, on the throne. We've already seen in John 21 that, just shortly before his ascension back to the Father, Jesus is giving his disciples, and us, some important instructions for our lives. Let's continue our look at the lessons that we need to learn from this important chapter in John's gospel by looking at:

—Peter’s Denials of Jesus

Every one of the gospels record that Jesus prophesies that Peter will deny him just prior to Jesus going to the cross (Mt. 26:30-35; Mk. 14:26-31; Lk. 22:31-34; Jn. 13:36-38). Keep in mind that—not only does Peter *deny Jesus three times*—when Jesus first says this, Peter insists that he will *never deny Jesus!* For example: in Matthew’s gospel, after Jesus tells the disciples that, “You will all fall away from me this night,” Peter insists that, “Though *they all fall away* because of you, *I will never fall away.*” Peter goes on to say, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Mt. 26:30-35; see also, Luke 22:33; John 13:37).

Beginning in John 18:15ff, we’re told of each of the three times that Peter denies Jesus. The first denial happens as Peter stands by a charcoal fire warming himself just outside in the courtyard of the house in which Jesus has been taken to appear before Annas. At this point a servant girl says to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” Peter adamantly responds, “I am not.” In a moment of time, it can be so easy to deny Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, simply by placing a priority on what we want, or think we need at that moment, ahead of what the Scriptures call us to do. God’s Word taught in the Scriptures must always be given the *priority* position in our lives. It’s only when we place God’s will as the priority of our lives that we can be sure that, ultimately, everything will turn out for our good and for God’s glory.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.