



ONE PRIORITY

Introduction

How many things do you have on your to-do list? 5? 10? 20? Are you stretched so thin you don't bother keeping one?

If you're like most people, the list of things you need to get done is longer than you desire and grows every day. In fact, so many people struggle with keeping track of everything they need to do that most smartphones come equipped with apps to help track it. It's common to hear people say things like "Alexa, remind me to get milk from the store" or "Hey Siri, add a reminder for me to book a flight tomorrow." And for those who still prefer pen and paper, there are dozens of journals to buy aimed at helping you maximize productivity with effectively organizing your to-do lists into monthly goals and weekly commitments.

The truth is no journal or app can fix the source of why most people struggle to finish their to-do lists: too many competing priorities.

The Word

Mark 12:28-34 (NIV)

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Breaking It Down

Our passage of scripture includes only seven verses but offers a lot of key information.

The man asking the question was an expert in the commandments.

Religious teachers at that time were called scribes. Scribes were considered experts in Mosaic law (aka "the commandments"). The man asking Jesus was not asking out of ignorance but out of interest.

One commandment is most important.

The religious teacher asked Jesus a direct question: which of the commandments was most important? Jesus' answer was clear: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Jesus went beyond the most important commandment.

Although the scribe didn't ask what the second greatest commandment was, Jesus gave it. He said that loving our neighbor as ourselves was the second greatest commandment. He gave the scribe more than what he asked for – He gave him what he was seeking.

The scribe seemed impressed but not surprised by Jesus' answer.

The scribe's first words were "well said," suggesting that the scribe was impressed by Jesus' understanding of the law. He followed those words up by agreeing with Jesus' answer. As an expert, the scribe knew all the Mosaic laws (over 600!) and recognized the wisdom in Jesus' response. We don't know if the scribe previously considered those two as the greatest but his answer suggests that he immediately understood why Jesus selected them – because all other laws were about recognizing or atoning for sins.

Jesus saw wisdom and potential in the scribe's response.

As a religious expert, the scribe could have debated Jesus' answer like other religious leaders of the time often did. However, the scribe not only agreed with Jesus but understood Jesus' reasoning. Jesus called out his response as a wise and encouraged the scribe by letting him know he was on the right path.

loving our neighbor as ourselves. Many Christians say you can't love your neighbor until you love yourself. The foundation of truly loving yourself, however, is loving God unconditionally. Anyone that hates themselves doesn't love God enough to trust that God is reshaping and restoring them to the beautiful creation He originally designed them to be.

Notes



Bible Reading Plan

We recommend using the New Living Translation (NLT) or New International Version (NIV) when reading these scriptures each day.

Day One

Matthew 6:33

Day Two

Proverbs 3:9-10

Day Three

Matthew 10:38

Day Four

Psalms 9:10

Day Five

James 2:8

Day Six

1 John 4:8

Day Seven

James 4:12



Lesson in Action

AT 17, Trevor had become a father. He was already struggling to graduate high school and didn't expect (or want) to be a father. After telling his mother about his girlfriend's pregnancy, she gave him one piece of advice: ask God. He decided to listen, especially since she had given birth to him at age 15.

So, early on a Saturday morning, Trevor went to the church to pray. He wasn't sure how much he believed in God but figured asking couldn't hurt. He walked in, sat down on an old pew, and began to talk to God like an old friend.

"I'm not sure if you listening, or if you're even real. If you are, I'm not sure you'd even want to listen to me. I don't give you much of my time. But right now, I'm not praying for me. I'm praying for a baby. My baby. I don't know what to do but I know I am not ready to be a father. So, I'm asking that you take care of the baby. I hope it has a better life than I had."

Trevor walked out of the church and didn't think twice about his prayer. Twenty years later Trevor walked back into the same church, as its pastor. As he passed the bench where he had prayed, he suddenly remembered his prayer and realized that was the day everything changed. He came in praying unselfishly for his child. He left pursuing his purpose.

That day Trevor preached his initial sermon as pastor, concluding it with the sermon about how one unselfish prayer changed his life.

"That day I went in to pray for God to handle my problem. I left with the real problem being solved: my selfishness. By praying for my son to have a better life than me, I was actually praying for me to become a better father. That's how God works."