

A few weeks ago I preached a lesson entitled "Tattling Priorities." It was based on the 1976 article of that name by Dan Shipley. It was based primarily on the teachings of Jesus in **Matthew 6**:

- **v21** – Hearts and Treasures always go hand in hand. What we store is, in fact, what we love.
- **V19-21,24** – It will always come down to proclamation of priorities and living that claim.

The premise of the "tattling" idea is that there can be inconsistencies, right? We say, "these are the things that are most important in my life." But if someone watched us live our life... confusion might ensue. But our choices, our words, our thoughts and ... lives... will always tell the story.

I stand behind every word of brother Dan's article and the ideas we taught from Scripture that day. But I must admit, one of these words we both used has some enigmatic properties that need study.

"Priorities" – What does that word mean? Well, it's actually hard to find. Now, the singular word:

"Priority" is much easier to find described in the dictionary:

"something that is more important than other things." Or maybe "the most important thing."

So then, "priorities" is a pluralizing of that: *"things that are more important than other things."*

Or maybe *"the most important things."*

Huh? How can such things exist? I mean, by definition a priority is more important than other things. So how can there be a plurality of things more important than other things? What about one another? Which is more important among the things that are more important. And can more than one thing be the most important... things? It all sounds a little fishy. And it is.

Did you know that the word "priorities" was almost completely absent from the English language until the 1940's? Yeah, people almost never said it. Now, the word "priority" was heavily used, I mean like, for the last 500 years. It was clear that in any situation and life, there can be THE PRIORITY – the most important thing. The thing that is more important than anything else. But in 21st century America, we came up with this idea of "Priorities – a list of most important things that share the top spot. The more I think about it, the more foolish & impractical it sounds.

Let me give you a practical business example:

A company has their big yearly meeting with 10 executives. The purpose: "to lay out our top 5 priorities." I'm hoping that sounds foolish to you already. So, they brainstorm and produce 5:

Success / Integrity / Quality / Customers / Employees

Inevitably the 10 people will order them a little differently, but they are okay with that, because while one may mean more at the moment to you than me, these ARE OUR MOST IMPORTANT THINGS.

Two major problems exist and will always be problems:

- 1) There will constantly be conflict among the gods. What do you do when an opportunity comes up to make an extra million dollars for your company, but it means hiding some things from the customer? Or what about when customers have demands that counter with employee demands? Some will look at their list and have things ranked higher but others will not. So which to choose? It becomes circumstantial. In a plethora of priorities there isn't one.
- 2) Because we have to juggle "most important things" per circumstance, and somehow feel like juggling them is okay (since we labeled them all important). We start segregating them into boxes. Equally important boxed. And we open them one at a time. Example – "in this case we are gonna make that money and next time we'll show more integrity." "this time we'll side with customer demand and at Christmas we'll rebound with the employees."

But what about if there was just ONE PRIORITY. Lots of thought and research and discussion went into it, and when it came to most important, we actually chose the most important thing!? How would that change things?

Our Only Priority is **INTEGRITY** – this will apply directly to **Success / Quality / Customers / Employees**

- 1) There is no conflict. No matter what important thing is being discussed, Integrity will dominate the conversation and settle all disputes and create the clear path.
- 2) The others may be boxes opened one at a time, but Integrity will be in every box!

Sacrifices will have to be made. Things won't be easy to do, but they will be easy to decide what to do!

- Million dollars for dishonest product? Customer over Employee – compromise that is fair to both –

Example: Johnson & Johnson – 1982 – 7 Deaths from Tylenol Bottles in Chicago. They'd been tampered with. What should board do? Well, according to priorities there are lots of options! Depends which wins the day! But in 1942 a mission statement went on record with two simple words: CUSTOMERS FIRST. That's it. So, they recalled all bottles, cost them 100 million dollars and stock price and shareholder happiness.

Argument: Stop talking about Priorities. Stop making lists and juggling them. Stop thinking in terms of a plurality of most important things. We do this. It almost comes natural at this point to do so. And has become foreign to think any other way.

If I asked you to “List the Top 5 Priorities in Your Life.” Most would go at that without a second thought. “Okay, Kris is asking the most important things in my life.” So, we’d all make a list something like this:

Faith / Family / Brethren / Self / Job – Maybe yours would vary, but most would include this. Maybe some would say brethren in place of friends or something. But likely we’d have VARIED ORDERS. And when we were all done and compared notes, though some would have them in different places, we’d all feel pretty good about our list and see that we all share the same PRIORITIES so we are in a good place. I don’t a good place. I see problems.

Matt. 6:21, 24 – Jesus is telling us – don’t do this. Don’t have priorities. It will create inconsistency and turmoil
1) There is conflict. At times we will have to choose between what God said and my Family Situation demands. Conflict between time with Family and time taken for Myself. My Job and my Brethren. Choices will have to be made and since all of these are “most important things” we’ll make choices to cater to one based on circumstance.
2) We will live with 5 boxes. Mutual exclusivity will rule the day and we’ll be okay with it! On Sundays I open my Faith box and nothing else gets in. On Monday-Friday it’s my Job box. On Saturday my Family box. We want to juggle them all but we can’t so we have to give precedent to ONE AT A TIME. (Ah... Priority concept lives in us all)

But what if we let go of this recent, “you can have it all” wording and went back to the word that makes sense. The word that follows Jesus line of thought here and ultimate point: PRIORITY.

Matthew 6:33 - Say it with me to yourself: **My One and Only Priority is GOD.** *There is only one most important thing. It is always the most important thing. He is in all I do, with all I do, and influences all I do!*

God is not my Top Priority. He is my Only Priority. Is that Bible Idea?

Galatians 2:20 – Does that sound like – “God is one of the main reasons I live” NO. He is my whole purpose!

Colossians 1:18 – Remember this text about Jesus. He’s not asking to be on your list. He demands to BE the LIST!

You might be thinking, “Okay, I get it. But what about my family, brethren, friends, my own things, and my work?” It is no different than our business example. They are still important, they just aren’t the priority. So, the priority lives in and amongst them and influences them. This fixes our problems:

1) Conflicts are resolved. “My family is saying this, but my Job is demanding that.” Not a problem. Run it through your total commitment to honoring God and letting His will resolve this. Not money or family. But God.

2) Yes there are still boxes. There is the friend you, the brother you, the family man, the co worker. Sometimes we open one and can’t get to the others right now. But GOD IS IN EVERY BOX!

Colossians 2:9-12 – How can Christ not have this place in your life, your whole life?

Watch what happens to all the “important things” in your life when you have only One Priority:

Faith – Not on the List – Faith in God is the List. My default thinking and actions and intentions are of faith.

Family – **Colossians 3:18-21** – *What is fitting to God directs every interaction, every conversation, every submission, every leadership decision, every attitude. When family disobeys God, you know what to do. When family needs help through a tough time, you know where to turn. Every time. God is priority. He is in the family box.*

Brethren – **Colossians 3:6-14** – *How much do I do for them? How do I react to their problems? How do I deal with issues that come up between us? Will I chose them over my family or work? These are no longer questions that take much time. No debate. I live let Christ live in me & to make God’s people stronger & to help keep us together.*

My Self – **Colossians 3:1-5** – How much time do I take for me? How much time thinking about myself? What can I do in terms of fulfilling my own personal desires? Well, it no longer depends on what box is open, or where your head is that day. It is simple. I live for God. I live to obey God. I live to prepare to take myself before God. Everything I do for me has to fit behind God and unto Him.

My Job – **Colossians 3:22-24; 4:1-2** – But what about when I’m a work. What about when employees pressure me? What about when laziness seeps in on me? What about my bosses behavior? My employees behavior? You no longer wait to see what priority floats to the top that day or wins out. “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” and “knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.” He dominates. He is the only standard. He is in every box.

Final thought – the phrase “tattling priorities” takes on an ever deeper meaning for me now. If you have priorities then they already tattle that you are set up for failure. Listen, kids are not your priority. Spouse is not priority. Job is not priority. GOD is the only priority. He lives in and influences all of those important things. Maybe this sounds like things will be harder and more confrontational. The opposite. Life is simple: Christ is First in Everything.