

28/4/87  
C. Williams

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# Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

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## Lecture 3

### Setting Priorities and Organizing Your Life to Serve God

#### I. Introduction

- A. "Simplify your life!" -- That brief but meaningful instruction has been given to all of God's Church by Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach.
- B. Mr. Tkach is quoting a directive that Herbert W. Armstrong gave during his life. Mr. Tkach explains this expression to mean that we must SET OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT during this critical time before Christ's return. Mr. Tkach strongly confirms this principle as one of the four "mandates" he is putting before the Church.
- C. Truly, it would be virtually impossible for either Mr. Armstrong or Mr. Tkach to make the point more strongly than they have THAT WE MUST BEGIN TO ORGANIZE OUR TIME AND PRIORITIES GOD'S WAY IF WE ARE TO DO GOD'S WORK.
- D. We as leaders in God's Church must realize our responsibility to take the lead by setting our lives in proper spiritual order.

#### II. SPS

In this lecture we will learn how to set right priorities and organize our lives to serve God and His people the most effective way possible.

#### III. Need

We have often heard sermons and sermonettes or other lectures admonishing us to set our lives into spiritual order. This fact can cause us to confuse hearing with doing. We can become numb to the need to sort out our priorities and daily schedules. It is good, therefore, to review the reasons why we should focus on such things as priorities and schedule planning.

- A. Herbert W. Armstrong and Joseph W. Tkach have mandated that we should.

We in God's Church believe that Christ is the head of the Church and that He governs through His apostles.

The apostles at the helm in this era of God's Church have both directed that we stop and consider how we spend our time.

The apostle Paul gave this command to the churches in his own day. Read Ephesians 5:15-16 and Romans 13:11. God intended that His Church take Paul seriously then, and He intends that we take Mr. Tkach seriously now.

B. The time for God's Work is short and the job is big.

Preaching the Gospel to the world for a witness is a big job (Matthew 24:14), and we do not have forever to do it. This means we must be focused on our Work and efficient in doing it. Remember Romans 9:28, which states that God will do a "short work" on the earth.

C. Individually, each of our own lives is short.

No matter how long God's Work has left to do His work of preaching the Gospel, each of us has a finite lifetime. Life is short, and the days fly quickly by. Read Psalm 103:15-16. We must therefore "redeem the time."

Remember that the time for us to prove ourselves individually is now. Read I Peter 4:17. Judgment is on each one of us now. Therefore we must give earnest heed to the truth (Hebrews 2:1). We simply cannot allow ourselves to lazily wander through life without a sense of purpose and structure, hoping against hope that we will blunder into God's Kingdom by default. It will not happen.

D. This is the age of distractions.

This world is full of fantastically interesting diversions that can -- if allowed to become out of balance -- simply distract us from our primary goals. Although it is part of human nature to become sidetracked by life's little problems or pleasures, this modern electronic age exacerbates the problem with TV, movies, hobbies and a thousand other (sometimes worthy or worthwhile) diversions.

Therefore we must constantly be vigilant to focus on our primary goals first, and then, after that, allow ourselves to indulge in whatever good pastimes may be profitable in a lesser way.

Read Matthew 13:1-23. Remember how the tendency of people is to be diverted by the "care of this world" (verse 22).

Read Matthew 24:37-39. The end time will find people acting as they did in the days of Noah -- deeply concerned about material cares but oblivious to the important matters of life.

E. God made man to be goal-oriented.

Man functions best when he is focused on a clear goal and directed to a carefully defined purpose. To be so focused requires clear priorities.

Mr. Armstrong so believed in this principle that he made it the first law in the booklet The Seven Laws of Success.

Christ clearly ratified this principle of focusing on a goal when He commanded us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

F. We as leaders in the Church must set the example.

⊗ Mr. Tkach has repeatedly stressed that a LEADER LEADS BY DOING. We who serve the local churches in such key, visible roles are simply ignoring our duty if we fail to heed the directive to set priorities in our lives. See Hebrews 6:11-12.

Special note: Extra detail has been spent showing WHY we need to organize our lives. This is because experience shows many know what to do but lack motivation to do it. When we see the need clearly, then we will motivate ourselves.

IV. False Priorities

Before we discuss how to properly set priorities and organize your life God's way, it is helpful to see common mistakes made by many people who profess to have their lives in order but do not. Below is a partial list of some such false priorities. They are not in any particular order. Also, please note that many of these can be worthwhile pursuits in their proper place, but simply should not crowd out the more important matters that pertain to salvation.

A. Material gain - Possessions are needful but should not be our primary goal. Obviously one must make a living, so a deacon's or local church elder's job should not suffer. But remember that Christ said to beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists of more than what he owns (Luke 12:13-21).

- B. Sports -- Exercise is important, but being the best racquetball player in the district is not. Remember I Timothy 4:8.
- C. Hobbies -- Having a diversion from one's work can be good in balance. But for some, their hobby is their life. This is clearly wrong. The same goes even for outdoor pursuits like hunting, camping, etc.
- D. Status -- Some people place more value on how others look at them than how God looks at them (III John 9).
- E. Overwork -- Nothing in this lecture should be taken as a prod to nor endorsement of overwork. Overwork -- when one neglects his family, his health or other important personal responsibilities for the sake of a job -- is a vice and not a virtue. It is a sign that one's life is not properly ordered. Relaxation and entertainment are important parts of every person's life and should -- indeed, must -- be planned into your schedule. Even Christ took time out to rest and pray (Luke 5:15-16)

#### V. Setting Priorities

The first step in setting one's spiritual life in order is to clearly define what is important and what is not, and in what order. No one has enough time in his or her life to do everything one can think of to do. Therefore, common sense tells us we must list our priorities and discipline ourselves to follow the list.

Mere lip service is not enough. Probably everyone hearing this lecture could make up the following list from memory, but how many could really state that their lives truly reflect these priorities?

- A. The Kingdom of God -- This must obviously be our first priority. Christ commands it in Matthew 6:33 and elsewhere.

Included within this priority are the spiritual tools we must use to reach the goal of the Kingdom:

1. Prayer
2. Bible study and meditation
3. Fasting

- B. Health -- Often we take our health for granted or relegate it to a much lower priority. But the hard reality is that unless we are healthy we cannot care for any of the following priorities, let alone seek

the Kingdom of God effectively. This does not mean that our physical health must take more time than the following priorities, only that without health we cannot fully achieve the others.

- C. Our family -- Today in our society the family is often taken for granted, and sometimes virtually ignored altogether. This must not be so among leaders in God's Church.

A leader in God's Church is commanded to rule well his own household and have his children in subjection. Read I Timothy 3:4-5. Obviously this is a directive to make your family a priority.

Remember that God is a family name, and our goal is to enter God's Family. If we ignore our family so we can go fishing with the boys, we are making a fatal mistake. Read Ephesians 3:14-15 and see the emphasis on God's Family.

Mr. Tkach has stressed the importance of our families, and the tremendous truth that God's Church must be a family.

- D. Our job -- for those employed by the Church, this means that our service to God's people comes next. For those not so employed, this means that making a living and supporting one's family must come before even service to the Church in cases of irresolvable conflict. ~~II Thessalonians 3:10-12 makes plain we ought to work to support ourselves and our loved ones. See also I Timothy 5:8.~~

- E. Service in the Church -- Service is a high priority and of great importance. A person who carefully plans his time -- AND LEARNING TO PLAN YOUR TIME IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS LECTURE -- will have a lot of time to do such serving.

- F. Education and self-improvement -- Some people feel that once they have studied their Bible for half an hour, they have received all the education they need. This is not true. All should be actively involved in constant reading and study of other types.

In fact, it is this very truth that led to the creation of this lecture series in the first place.

It is to be hoped that this study will develop greater skills for service in God's Church. This would include more Bible study and study in areas such as history, vocabulary, speaking skills, managing people, etc.

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- G. Recreation -- This includes all other activities like hobbies, sports, entertainment, etc. This probably needs little comment because we can all think of dozens of things to do with our so-called "extra time."

IMPORTANT -- Rest, recreation and entertainment are necessary parts of life. To ignore these areas is harmful mentally and physically. All leaders in God's Church must realize that rest and a break from normal routine are vital, in balance, to their well being and thus, in the end, to their service to God.

## VI. Organizing Your Time

- A. A plan that organizes your time is called a schedule.

Having the proper priorities is the right place to start when trying to organize your life, but without a schedule such priorities are mere platitudes. It is your schedule that disciplines you into maintaining the priorities you have chosen. When you deviate from your schedule, you probably deviate from your priorities.



Special note: The schedule we are discussing here will in no way dictate bedtimes, times to get up, etc. These are for you to decide based upon your own needs and body clock. But what will be done is to show how to create a practical schedule coupling right priorities with an organized plan to implement those priorities. If you have no such schedule, then your priorities are probably out of control.

- B. How to organize your time.

The proper way to organize your time is to start with the largest segments of time and work toward smaller segments. Therefore the following section will break your time down into large and small segments and suggest how you can use the time to best advantage to live God's way and serve His Work.

## VII. Schedule Suggestions

- A. Your lifetime -- The largest segment of your time is your entire lifetime. When we set our priorities, we automatically organize this.
- B. A year -- The next smaller segment of time is a year. God is the author of the year. When we begin our planning by the year we automatically conform to God's system.

When we plan our year, we should, of course, gear our plans around the Holy Days. God's Holy Day plan is a yearly plan. Review Leviticus 23. When we organize our life -- such as our vacations, trips and even our job -- around the Holy Days we automatically set our priorities right for the year.

Israel was organized around God's Holy Days and we should be as well.

C. A season -- There are, of course, two types of seasons: 1) the Holy Day seasons and 2) the weather seasons.

1. Holy Day seasons -- In our planning and organizing for the year, we must do more than merely note the yearly time or cycle of the Holy Days (as mentioned above). We must also remember that the Holy Days fall into certain clumps or groups also called seasons.

A leader should include this knowledge in his planning. For example, the pastor or elder is instructed to preach certain topics in their correct seasons (II Timothy 4:1-2). A deacon should realize that the need for his services may increase dramatically during the Passover season or during the fall Holy Day season.

2. Weather seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter) -- Solomon wrote that there is a time for every right endeavor (Ecclesiastes 3:1). A little planning can go a long way toward helping you use your time to best serve the interests of God's Work without slighting your own needs.

For example, you may find the pastor has planned a YOU trip for next summer. Perhaps you could help if you are able to get time off work without penalty. Maybe your employer will allow you time off if you work extra for him during the Christmas holiday season. Planning in advance like this can be beneficial. This is just one hypothetical example to show how considering the season can make you a better planner.

D. A month -- A month is a natural and God-made division of time.

In ancient Israel, the beginning of the new month was celebrated with special ceremonies that called attention to the fact of passing time (see Numbers 28:11).

Note: These new moon days never had the same status of God's commanded Holy Days and need not be observed today.

Nonetheless, planning month by month is a natural and wise practice. For example, some pastors meet with a core of church leaders every month to plan the next month's social activities, etc. Such planning, whether done in formal meetings or not, is to be encouraged both in the Church and in our own individual lives. It will 1) tend to avoid conflicts in our schedules and 2) allow us to focus on the important spiritual and church-related events in our lives without ignoring our personal responsibilities in other areas.

- E. The week -- The week is one of the most basic units of time management. Again, God is the author of the week. It is a picture of God's 7,000-year plan for man.

The Sabbath is the focal point of God's week and is a commanded observance (Genesis 2:1-2, Exodus 20:8-11). When we view our weekly lives in terms of the Sabbath, we again automatically focus first upon those points that should be our priorities.

- F. The day -- The final unit of time we will discuss here is the day. Often, it is the only unit of time we think of when we think of our need to schedule our time. BUT ONCE WE HAVE ESTABLISHED OUR PRIORITIES AND PLANNED OUR YEARS, MONTHS AND WEEKS, THE PROPER USE OF OUR DAY BECOMES CRYSTAL CLEAR.

No attempt will be made here to dictate personal schedules. Matters such as bedtimes and times to get up are for each person to decide according to his needs, body clock, etc. But a number of important principles need to be brought out.

1. Sleep -- Sleep is an important part of the day. Each of us needs to learn how much sleep we need and discipline ourselves to get it. No one is an aid to God's Work if he or she is exhausted.
2. Prayer -- Prayer, along with Bible study and occasional fasting, is one of the BIG THREE tools that God has given us to stay in contact with Him. They MUST have priority in our schedules.

No two people will pray at exactly the same times during the day, or even the same length of time. The Bible recommends praying more than once a day; David prayed at least three times a day (Psalm



55:17). See also Daniel's example in Daniel 6:10).

In addition, both experience and the Bible show the wisdom of praying in the morning -- before we have begun the rigors of the day, which tend to strain our attitudes. See Mark 1:35 for the example Christ set of rising early to pray. See also Psalm 5:3, where David speaks of morning prayer.

Obviously, this will not hold for all schedules. A man who works the night shift from midnight to 8 a.m. would be exhausted and ready for bed when the rest of us are rising to pray. Perhaps his "morning" will be late in the afternoon when he gets out of bed. But the principle of praying before you start out your daily routine, whenever it begins, is sound.

3. Bible study and meditation -- Bible study should be a daily habit. When possible, setting it at the beginning of the day can help you start off the day with special inspiration. However, Bible study in the evening, when the mind is clear of the clutter of the day, can also be beneficial. If unexpected pressures cause you to miss your Bible study at times throughout the week, then look forward to the Sabbath when you should have extra time to drink in of God's Word. You have an added benefit when you take time to reflect on how to apply God's law in your life. This is the only appropriate form of meditation.
4. Fasting -- Perhaps once a month is a good average. Health factors or special emergencies may dictate less or more often, etc.
5. Exercise -- Many of us neglect this area of our lives. On the other hand, some few get sidetracked into so many sports activities that they become a false priority.
6. Your family -- An important subject of its own. Mr. Tkach has been stressing this subject at great lengths.
7. Your job -- Obviously the bulk of your day must be spent at work.
8. Self-improvement -- As stated earlier, each person should devote some time to furthering his or her education, such as through reading, in areas of interest that directly relate to the higher

priorities of life, such as an office in the Church, a vocation, etc.

9. Rest and relaxation -- None of us can remain physically or mentally healthy without a breathing spell sometime during the day. And from time to time, we need to plan for extended periods of rest, relaxation and time with the family.

#### VIII. Other Considerations

Setting priorities and establishing an organized schedule go a long way toward using your time wisely. But there are other ways to make the most of your time and hence your life. The following points list a few additional -- but critically important -- tools.

- A. God's help -- We need God's help in everything we do. But we often forget to ask for that help in physical matters such as the use of our time.

Benjamin Franklin said that he worked all his life on organizing his time, but that he never fully succeeded. He had to continually strive for "order," as he termed it. None of us will be able to stick to our schedules perfectly, either. In fact, many of us will not do well at all at first. This is part of human nature. Remember these verses:

Romans 7:23-25 -- We can make resolutions to use our time better, but of ourselves, we really cannot do it. Realize that we must go to God for help.

John 15:5 -- If we try to do it on our own strength, we will fail. We need to learn this in everything that we set ourselves to do. It is only through God that we can accomplish anything of true and lasting importance.

Hebrews 4:16 -- It is God's will for us to learn to order our lives around Him, and He will provide the help we need if we go to Him for it. But we must be earnest (see Matthew 7:7, Luke 18:1-8), and we must go all out to put forth the maximum effort (Luke 13:24).

Matthew 15:21 -- This is what we are striving for -- to have God say to us "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

- B. Focus on a few things -- Some people use their lives to become a jack-of-all-trades but master of none. Those of us who have been called to be leaders in God's Church have received the most precious of all callings. We should therefore make it our goal to

become experts in our responsibilities, even if it means that we aren't going to be the best basketball player in the local YOU adult-team division. That is, we must focus our efforts on the true priorities and see this as an exciting and worthwhile life's project.

- C. Concentration -- Although we focus our efforts, we will accomplish little unless we divorce our thoughts from peripheral subjects while we concentrate on the issue at hand. Herbert W. Armstrong was legendary -- by his own admission -- for having a one-track mind. All of us should be one-track-minded to the degree that we concentrate upon the issue at hand while doing it.

For example, trying to prepare a sermonette and listen to the football game on the tube just won't produce the best results. That is one reason why Christ commanded that we go to a place alone to pray (Matthew 6:6). He knew that distractions would hinder our concentration when we try to talk to Him. The same is true in every area of our lives.

- D. Intensity -- Although we may focus our efforts and concentrate, halfhearted efforts don't produce quality results. Plain old hard work is a learned discipline that we all must acquire if we are to use our time and not simply pass the time. See II Thessalonians 3:10-12.

- E. Delegation -- Those who are leaders in God's Church must lead, but that does not mean they must do every little chore themselves. Many things can and should be delegated. Christ and the Father have indeed practiced delegation when they called us to assist in their Work. Delegation is a subject unto itself and would be a good topic for outside reading. It requires a careful balance between knowing what to delegate and knowing how to control those to whom duties have been entrusted.

## IX. Conclusion

- A. "Simplify your life" -- Mr. Tkach and Mr. Armstrong have said this to God's Church on numerous occasions.
- B. They explained this to mean that we should set right priorities and use our time wisely for the best benefit spiritually.
- C. We who are leaders in God's Church must implement this important mandate in our personal lives, to the end that we may set the example and serve the Church as God desires.

