



"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31).

"How do I help someone... ... develop activity priorities?"

As is often the case in these essays, trying to help someone is dependent on the way you yourself approach the specific issue being considered. In everything, having to develop priorities in life is always a difficult task for anyone. Some people have greater difficulties than others. The first step is to sit back and give yourself time to think about your own priorities. There is no point in trying to help someone else sort out their priorities if we cannot sort out our own. So, in the following, it is important that we put our own house in order first - the first practical step in sorting out our own priorities. Once we have done that, we can then help someone else sort out their priorities.

What are some steps?

The first is to determine goals. What are the most important things in your friend's lives? For followers of Jesus Christ, it is service to God and His Son. If our friend's goal is to serve God, all other activities can be seen in relation to their importance to Service to God.

If the main goal in life is to serve God, this becomes the most fundamental activity. It is overarching. Every other aspect of life is seen to contribute towards this.

This might be termed a Global Goal - it is all encompassing and subsumes all other goals and priorities. This may be a life-long or long-term goal. As part of determining priorities, this should consider timeframes - how long, and how often? Related to this is the proximity of people involved in these activities and how easy or difficult it is to maintain contact. Maintaining contact can include, physical visits, phone calls, messaging and social media.

But this isn't enough is it? How does this service work itself out in practice? We or our friend needs to set sub-goals that fit within the global goal. And what are the time frames for achievement of goals? For the Christian, goals might include such things as:

Personal

- Private worship, prayer and praise - this is vital at the beginning of any plannings, and day and any activity - asking for God's guidance on our service.

Communal

- Community worship prayer and praise
- Christian care activities and community service
- Attendance at ecclesial (church) meetings

Family activities

The family in this instance recognises the immediate, parents and children, and then the grandparents and uncles and aunts and then those who are so much part of the family unit they are 'like' family. The priorities to be determined might be:

- Family dinners
- Family picnics and outings
- Informal visits
- Formal visits
- Family electronic messages and phone calls

Employment

A Christian will give as much as is possible to an employer to perform his/her Christian responsibility to be a good employee. He/she will also do what is possible to cater for the living of a family in relative comfort. The biggest question here is for the person to determine what the balance is between serving God and spending time in the most appropriate way, or spending more than enough time in employment (or too much) to the detriment of spending time serving God?

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Hobbies

A similar question occurs with hobbies. What is the value of hobbies in life? Many people would draw attention to the benefits hobbies have in life - stress relief, social connections, mental and or physical health - all of which can lead to a balanced and fulfilling life. Can the direction of the hobby be focused on serving God through helping others?

Health - sport

Few people would argue that spending time in physical activity and looking after a healthy lifestyle and diet can fail to benefit anyone in a balanced and fulfilling life. Is there a way that this physical activity can be used as part of our life service to God? Maybe we demonstrate our service through Christlike behaviour witnessed by others during our sporting activity. All aspects of our life should be oriented to being a witness to our God and Jesus.

"But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." (Luke 12:31)

Frequent practical realities

Despite our good intentions, the realities are that sometimes our sub-priorities have to be waived. Circumstances determine that we are unable to follow through on something that we had placed as very important. It could be illness, a phone call, a visitor, a new work commitment, and a host of other things. Provided our global priorities are not compromised, we can adjust the sub-priorities and often re-allocate the time we intended to spend. The real danger is that if this happens too often, then we need to re-evaluate what we are doing and make alternative arrangements to re-establish what we had determined as being important sub-goals.

Sometimes we can get carried away because we see that so much needs to be done and we keep saying 'Yes' when invited to do something. Too many 'yeses' and we can end up over reaching and not doing everything as well as we should. Sometimes, in order to ensure that the quality of our service is not compromised, we need to say 'No'. This is not saying 'No' to God, it is saying 'No' so we can make ourselves focus on improving the quality of what we are doing.

Priorities focused on love

The overarching principle is that we will always develop our priorities based on our love of God, Jesus and our fellow humans. If our priorities are centred here, we cannot go wrong. To a question by a Pharisee as to which was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

