

Tyranny of the Urgent

READING

John 17

John 11

Luke 5

John 5

2 Timothy 4

Our problem isn't really that we don't have enough time.

Our problem is that we haven't thought through our priorities.

This article is based on an old pamphlet with the same title, written by Charles E Hummel.

Are you too busy? Need more time?
Is your life an ever lengthening trail of unfinished tasks?
Wouldn't it be great if we had an extra 12 hours every day.

To be honest, I think we still wouldn't get enough sleep. We'd still waste too much time watching TV. We still wouldn't get enough exercise.
We would still have a list of things we wished we had made time to do. In fact, it would probably be longer.

Our problem isn't really that we don't have enough time.
Our problem is that we haven't thought through our priorities.

Most of us work hard. Sometimes for long hours on important tasks.
Finishing them gives us a special joy.

But every now and then our nagging doubt returns and our anxiety rises again.
We worry that there is something really important that we have not done. And maybe we have left it too late.
We realise we have spent too much of our time on the wrong things.

A famous doctor who had done important research was retiring and was asked if he had any regrets.
Yes, he said with tears, I often worry that I have wasted my life.
We all worry about that.

But if we had a proper list of priorities that we had "signed on for", then whenever we had two competing options for our time, we simply need to work out which one is higher priority and do that.

Sounds easy.

It's not that easy.

Things that consume our time, range in importance.
Building our relationship with God is important.
Watching "Biggest Loser" on TV probably isn't.

They also range in urgency.
A ringing phone is urgent, (if we don't answer it, we'll miss the call).
A good book is not urgent, we can read it anytime.

We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important.

The important thing rarely needs to be done today.
Extra prayer, visiting sick friends, extra study.
These can all wait.

But the urgent things scream for our attention.
The phone must be answered, other people's demands devour our time.
While the important ones whisper quietly and are ignored.

We realise we have become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.

Is there any escape from this slavery?

Yeshua, on the night before he died, said this to his father:
"I have finished the work you gave me to do."

Finished?
But he only had a 3 year ministry? Many people still walked the streets without forgiveness, without healing.
Surely he still had more he could do? Surely he could have gone on for 30 years doing valuable and worthwhile ministry.
Many urgent human needs remained unmet, but Yeshua had peace.
He had peace that there were no things left undone that he should have done.

Yeshua worked hard. People were always demanding of him.
Even after a busy day, crowds came to him for healing and deliverance.

One day he was so exhausted from teaching all day, that he fell asleep in a boat and even a storm didn't wake him.

Yeshua was often busy, but he never seemed rushed. He was busy, but never feverishly busy.
He was busy, but he always had time for people.
I can't imagine Yeshua rushing anywhere.

In John 11 we read the story of Lazarus.
When Yeshua heard that his friend Lazarus was sick he stayed where he was 2 more days.
Lazarus was sick and he urgently needed healing. But Yeshua knew that it was more important to let Lazarus die.

Once we start prioritising on important things, we will sometimes let urgent opportunities pass, and sometimes we will let those opportunities die.
But that is necessary.

To live like this, we need to know what is important and what is not.

In several places in the Gospels we read of Yeshua withdrawing, usually very early in the morning, to quiet places to pray.
In chapter 5 Luke tells us that Yeshua **often** withdrew to lonely places to pray.

Was this his secret to an unrushed life?
Is this how he managed to maintain a steady composure amid all the screaming urgent tasks?

In John 5 Yeshua said that he only does what he sees the father doing.

What do you see the father doing?
Are you doing that?
Are you doing anything else?

Yeshua had priorities.
He knew what God had given him to do, and he was going to do that and nothing else.
Even if that meant that something was left undone. In that case, it was either not important, or God had given that task to someone else. But either way, Yeshua had confidence in his priorities to be able to leave urgent, (but not so important), things undone.

Only by doing this did he have enough time to do the important things.
Only by doing this, was he able escape the tyranny of the urgent and to say at the end of his life. "I have finished the work you gave me to do."