

Identifying What's Important

Joe Slater

We place a higher importance on some things than on others. Aside from simply asking, how can people know what's really important to us? Here are four ways:

TALK. We talk about the weather. We talk about our family. We talk about sports. Why? Because these things are important to us. They aren't bad things, and it's fine to talk about them. But how much do we talk about God? about the Bible? about the church? *"My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all of Your commandments are righteousness"* (Psalm 119:172).

TIME. Each of us has exactly the same amount of time each day. It's up to us how we use it. It takes time to sleep, work, and eat. Most of us have at least several hours of discretionary time each day. Perhaps we watch some television or read a book. Would that book happen to be the Bible? Do we spend time in prayer and actual study (not just reading) of God's word? What about church attendance? Compare the time spent meeting with fellow-Christians to what you devote to recreation. Rest and relaxation are important, but so are spiritual matters.

TREASURE. Paying attention to the way we spend our money requires diligent discipline. We might be shocked at how much we fritter away on arbitrary things. I challenge you to compare what you spend on recreation and vacations with what you contribute to the work of the Lord. Your estimation of the importance of His work will certainly be reflected by your material support of it.

TALENT. Your talents are not the same as the next person's, but each one has abilities. We use our talents to earn a living, maintain a home, enjoy a hobby, etc. All of those are good things. What about serving God by helping other people and working on projects for the church? Here again, your use of your talents demonstrates your estimation of the importance of the cause of Christ

What is really important to you?

ORIGINAL OR INNOVATION?

"I do not like National League Baseball," my friend said. "Who do they think they are, changing the rules of the game and making the pitchers bat?"

I thought he was joking; but he was serious. Born near an American League city, shortly after the American League had changed the rules of baseball and stopped requiring the pitchers to bat, he grew up thinking that an innovation was the original and that the original must be an innovation.

The same is true in regard to the church. A church that sticks to what the Bible says will be viewed, by most people, as an odd bunch who have really changed things. Having grown up with religious doctrines and practices that cannot be found in scripture, they think of these innovations as the original. When they meet Christians not practicing what they have always known, they think of these people as innovators. They treat the innovation as the original and the original as an innovation.

Baseball is a human invention, and if humans choose to change the rules they may do so. I prefer the original rules, but the new rules are not sinful. Christianity is from God, and according to Jesus any human changing its teachings will be rejected.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21, ESV). *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matthew 15:8-9, ESV).

Is what you believe and practice the true, original Christianity, or a human innovation? You need to find out. It will make an eternal difference.

Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)

BURIED TALENT

You are a unique person. No one else is like you. God made you an individual with characteristics, personality, and tastes that distinguish you from every other human being who lives or has ever lived.

"Identical" twins aren't. People who know such twins can usually tell them apart from their manner of being.

As a child of God, you have unique experiences, talents, gifts, and opportunities. No one else has lived through the exact same sequence of events. No one else has processed them like you. No one else has the same set of capabilities that you possess. No one else witnesses the same opening doors, rubs shoulders with the same set of people, sees the same potential for good.

So when you, living in God's kingdom and enjoying all spiritual blessings in Christ, fail to use the gifts the Lord has given you and miss taking advantage of the opportunities he has set before you, the world is poorer because of it. The kingdom of God is weaker because of those unused gifts. And you are diminished in your faith and service since they lie dormant.

Use your gifts. Ask God to open doors for their use. When the chance comes, no matter how small it appears, take it. Large trees grow from small seed. Great deeds begin in small ways.

Be willing. Do not close yourself off to service in areas you think are now shut.

Someone wrote that from time to time we ought to reinvent ourselves. For the Christian, God often brings us to a point where he wants us to take new turns, learn new skills, exercise underused muscles. And he may well prod us to brush off some old gifts that were left aside.

We have our reasons. God has a greater purpose and a greater good. We think flight from service has its justification. We cite circumstances, relationships, or limitations. The Lord understands, and he still prods, calls, sends, and equips.

Fears, hurts, and failures of the past may have caused you to shrink back. Worries about the future may hang heavy over your heart. Let God heal the past. Let him take care of the future. Raise yourself up, look around at a perishing world, see the family of faith in need.

Use your gifts. To bury them is to bury yourself. You know this to be true. As you unearth your gifts, let God give you life, power, wisdom, and the motivation of his love and grace.

--Randal Matheny (via forthright.net)