

Priorities

Nov. 26, 2006

Bible passage: **Romans 12:2** (*The Message*)

VIDEO: *Hook*, Robin Williams putting business call before family time.

SONG: *I Go to Extremes*

Stan Abell

When Richard showed me that video we just saw and suggested he thought it would be good for what I wanted to talk about, he was more on target than he could have possibly known. I've watched and re-watched that video. Every time I have watched that video, it's been like looking into a mirror and seeing an image there I don't particularly like. In taking a long, hard look at that video, it has put the fear of God in me that those kids speaking in the video could easily be my kids.

And that Billy Joel song Chris just sang...I wonder how many of us can identify with that. We work 70 hours a week, we go to extra meetings, we cram for tests, and for what? For me, it seems like I go to extremes trying to find satisfaction and fulfillment in life doing all of those things when what is really important in life is right here without doing anything too extreme at all. Again, for me, the problem is that in the past four years I've been going a hundred miles an hour in 10 different directions—I think I've often run right past what is most important in life...family, relationships and friends

I think you might be able to tell that I'm in a pretty reflective mood today. This past Monday I did a funeral for a long-time friend of mine, Ronda, whose father had passed away. As we talked about her dad, a flood of memories and thoughts about my own dad began to overwhelm me. Many of you know that I lost my dad back in August. Over the last few months I've carefully and protectively constructed memories of my Dad to remember the good times—but talking with my friend took me to places with my Dad that I haven't thought of in years. There was a period in my Dad's life where alcohol really skewed his priorities. I vividly remember weekend after weekend as a child that my dad promised that this weekend was the weekend we would do something special...this weekend would be the weekend we'd spend the whole weekend at the lake skiing or fishing.

And...weekend after weekend I'd stand at the door with my bag in hand ready to go, but Dad wasn't there. After a while this cycle of disappointment had become routine, and I finally made a vow to myself. I vowed that when I had my own kids, that I'd never ever ignore them...I'd always make time to play ball, or do whatever they wanted me to do with them.

Well, as I think most of you know, I am a father of two. More than that though, I'm a husband, a brother, a colleague, and a friend to many of you here. And in looking in this mirror lately, I've been forced to evaluate a lot of things...asking myself, where *are* my priorities.

Last Saturday night I got a real wake-up call. I got a call to do something that I really thought inconvenienced me. I was pretty bent out of shape about it, so I put the kids in the car and headed down College Avenue in a huff. I was going pretty fast and got stuck behind two cars in a slow contest. Finally was able to shoot around them and then I really gunned it...I'd show them! Well, no sooner had I gunned it than I saw flashing blue lights—I got pulled over. The next ten minutes was an embarrassing blur.

You know...5-year-olds ask the darndest questions. Why is the policeman pulling us over...*I was speeding*...Why were you speeding...*I was mad*...Why were you mad...Annie, is Daddy going to jail...No Harry Daddy's just going to get a ticket for speeding. Well, as it turns out for me, the ticket was much more than about speeding in the car. For me that was a ticket for speeding in life. As I sat there in the car with my forehead resting on the steering wheel, it occurred to me that I really have been speeding...and just like my dad I seemed to have gotten my priorities out of whack. How far and fast will I drive before there's nothing is left in the rearview mirror.

I've been so worried about grades, or church, or meetings or traveling, that I've gotten away from what's really important. When it comes to prioritizing what is really important in life, I wonder how many of us get our own voice mixed up with God's. That is to say, get what God believes is important mixed up with what we think is important. Really, priorities are pretty simple. Listen to what the writer of Romans says:

“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

I find it very ironic that at the last moment, we had a request to do a baptism today. Today, we have a family that is placing their child before God, and before you, as an offering—an offering that reminds us that there is nothing more important than fixing our attention on God.

Family Comes Forward:

I'd like to invite Don and Linda Hurry to join me. From what I understand, we tried to do this last year...but the weather was too crummy where you were? I appreciate your persistence.

Baptism:

Baptism is a sign of the love of God. The church has long affirmed that God loves each one of us always and forever. Baptism is a sign that we are accepting that love. Today you are saying “yes” we make this child a priority in our life.

Don and **Linda**, in baptizing your daughter, we use water to symbolize a new birth into the love of this community of faith. Just as **Jordyn** was born from the water of a womb, so she is being officially born into the faith through water.

Now, **Don** and **Linda**, I ask you to take these vows.

- Do you profess your faith in God and in Jesus Christ? (We do.)
- Do you agree to commit yourselves to living a life of faith, and to do everything in your power to see that your daughter develop a relationship with God that can sustain her through life? (We do.)
- Will you promise to keep her under the guidance of the church until she can accept for herself the unconditional love of God? (We will.)

Jordyn Alexis, I baptize you in the name of the God who creates you, the Christ who loves you, and the Holy Spirit who keeps you. Amen.

- (To the family and congregation) Will all of you live your lives in such a way that **Jordyn** can grow in the knowledge and love of God? (With God's help, we will.)

Let us pray. Loving God, there is nothing more important than for a child to know they are loved. The water is a sign of your unconditional love, and this baptism is a reminder that the well being of **Jordyn Alexis** is the responsibility of this entire community. Through prayer and spirit, we wish her wisdom, happiness and success. AMEN

Baptisms and births are always wonderful times of celebration. But at the funeral I mentioned earlier, I had a really profound experience in many ways. You now how at funerals you often hear words like...“we are here to celebrate so and so's life?” Or, “so and so would wouldn't want us to be sad.” Well, I talked about that with my friend Ronda. I asked her...“what would your dad want?” Would he want people to be happy? Without hesitation she said, yes, he'd want people to be laughing and having a good time—in fact, if we could get away with having the funeral at the Snooty Fox that'd been just fine.

I don't want to say I didn't believe her, but the reality of funerals often times has a way of belying our best intentions. However I couldn't have been more wrong. After I spoke, Ronda's husband Gary got up to talk about his father-in-law. He began to share some stories that had folks rolling. But then he said something that caused a chill to run up my spine...he said...I called him Pop, he was my dad, he was my buddy.

As I listened to story after story about this man, it occurred to me that I was listening to stories about a man who had slowed down in life and got his priorities straight. He was a teacher and a coach—there were floods of letters from former students and players who said everyone else had given up on them, but not Coach Weesner. It became clear to me that this was a man who put priorities on what's important in life. He had made a lifelong commitment to relationships and the time to build them.

As Gary ended his talk by toasting Pop with a glass of Pop's homemade wine, it occurred to me that, at a funeral, I had learned a whole lot about living. AMEN.