

Prioritizing in the Busy Seasons of Our Lives

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: This comes from Leah. She says, "I don't have one specific question for you. It's more of a situation that my husband and I are just really becoming very discouraged by." Now, you've got to follow this one. "We've been Christians for about 7 years. We've seen God work so much in our lives and has brought us through many difficulties. We made many financial mistakes in our early 20's that we are now paying for. My husband works 50 plus hours per week and we are paycheck to paycheck. I stay at home with our three boys, ages 2 and 7 month old twins who were born 11 weeks premature and have some extra needs. We're struggling both with time and money. Soon my husband may need to get a second job. I spend the entire day bouncing back and forth between different kids' needs, trying and often failing at minimally keeping up with the house, laundry, and cooking.

But the biggest problem here is that we have less and less time for prayer, reading the Word, going to Bible studies, evangelism, our marriage, etc. We've cut out all luxuries like television, going out to dinner, and other things for both time and money. We've been praying for a very long time for help in paying off debt and for an income source for my husband that doesn't require quite so much time away from home at both the job and the drive time. While in all other areas that we've prayed for we have felt His presence and have seen answers in one way or another, this is one area that we just feel He is quiet. I struggle with praying for issues related to money because I spent years in a megachurch that focused too much on money, in addition to other major flaws, so I am very apprehensive in praying for this area of our lives.

We don't want our prayers answered so we can add luxuries back into our lives. We see how God is using this time to strip us of things that have brought sin into our lives and hindered our walk with Him. We just want more time to spend with God to grow spiritually, to grow in our marriage and to be able to pour into our children. Right now, I just feel like we are simply existing. We use the time we have to put a sermon on in the background while taking care of the kids, and my husband uses his drive time and his lunch hour to pray. But we don't have the time to cry out to Him for all that we need to pray for: for our family, for church needs, for this nation, for missionaries, for our children's salvation, and to be spending uninterrupted time learning and memorizing His Word. We just need some encouragement, direction and prayer. I want to be sure that I understand the difference in His Word about praying for spiritual things versus supernatural things. I've listened to sermons and read about prayer many times, but I want to be sure to be praying for these things in a way that is honoring to God. Thank you, Leah."

Discussion:

Tim: So, you kind of get the gist? Anything jump out at you?

(from the room) Maybe experientially, it sounds like listening to sermons, or maybe even reading books - it can be very hard, especially for a mother to be hearing a pastor talking about

praying and long times of praying, and then a mother trying to assimilate that into her life with three children and kind of feel like I'm not doing it. I can't do what they're saying, and feel like she's not doing enough, which sort of sounds like that's the problem. It sounds like she's pressing on, but she has this high standard that maybe has been created by hearing of great missionaries in the past or some sermon.

Tim: Yeah, it's interesting. She says that her husband uses his drive time. Now, she first said that her husband is working 50 plus hours plus the drive time, which makes you think that the drive time is fairly significant. And then she says he's using his drive time for prayer and his lunch hours, but she says that she lacks - "we don't have the time to cry out to Him for all that we need to pray for: for family, church needs, nation, missionaries, children's salvation..." And you know the reality is, (incomplete thought) if you use - I don't know how much of the lunch hour, but if you use the majority of an hour at lunch for prayer - let's say you bring your lunch; you pack it, you bring it with you, you take some time to eat it. You could easily give a half hour to devoted prayer. And let's assume he's driving a half hour each way. I suspect that Christian men who give an hour and a half to dedicated prayer is probably the exception. And so, yeah, I think you're right. I think her standard - she may desire something that she feels like she's not able to accomplish, but the truth is we do often get into certain chapters of our life where there are needs - especially when there's children.

What we all have to do is prioritize. And life is changing all the time. You talk to R.L. R.L. getting a mechanical engineering degree. This portion of his life looks different. You talk to my wife. From about the time that we had the four children until the youngest child got to five or six years old where the oldest was actually significantly able to start really helping out, that time in her life is far different from this time in her life.

The thing is, there was a time when I was seeking to plant a church down in Stockdale, TX, and I was the primary guy down there. I was doing the preaching. I was leading the prayer meeting. I was leading the evangelism. I had a full time secular position. And I had a full time family. And so life looks different in different chapters of our life. That's just the way it is. And what you have to do is prioritize. Many of you know about Susannah Wesley and all the children she had. What? Upwards of 20? And this lady has three. And I'm not diminishing the difficulty of having three - especially twins, but when you have 20... There are ladies historically who have walked with Christ and what would she do? She would put her apron over her head. She would choose those choice times.

One of the godliest men you could read about is John G. Paton's father. He would go into an inner room in the house. He had a business right there in his home, and at lunch time he would go in there and he would pray. And they would hear him just crying out on behalf of their souls. You know, we have to prioritize. The Lord doesn't expect us to do what we can't do. But He does expect us to do everything we're supposed to do. And you need to capture that thought. If God has given you ten responsibilities in your life, He expects you to take care of those ten responsibilities in your life. But the thing is, prayer may be one aspect of that. The time you

spend in the Word may be one aspect of that. But at that certain time in your life, you also have to balance the other 8 things. He doesn't expect you to pray 24 hours a day. He doesn't expect you to pray all your waking hours. In fact, there is a time when praying would be wrong. You can go to work for somebody. This very man, if he thought, I need to pray more, and so you know what I'm going to do? Aside from my lunch break, I'm going to sneak away at different times and find a secluded closet somewhere that I can go pray, and his boss would not think that's a good thing. And I don't believe God would think that's a good thing. You say, he needs to pray. We need more prayer. No, not at that time you don't. If you do need more prayer, then there needs to be proper prioritization. One thing is you need to sleep too, and if you're not well slept, you're not going to give your employer the kind of time that you need to be able to give to him.

So, I would also say this. There seemed like this woman had a hesitation to pray because of some experience she had at a megachurch. She had a hesitation to pray for money. It's almost like, we pray for spiritual things, and God answers us, but we're kind of hesitant to pray about this. It's kind of like coming out of a background where you have this mindset that sex is dirty. And now suddenly you're saved, and you want to cast that off. God created that. Or you have this idea, you know, miracles or whatever - that's charismatic. But wait a second, what we have to do is we have to look again at Scripture. Scripture has to guide us. Would Scripture ever indicate to us that praying for financial things; asking God to supply our needs is carnal or secular or unspiritual? It's interesting this lady's saying we know lots of answers to our prayer, but it just seems like this area - she's admitting we don't really pray. We're not getting the kind of answers that we want, but we're not really even asking.

And I would say to somebody like that, well, you need to ask. Why would you not ask? Especially when she's emphasizing, well, look, it's not that we want luxuries. It's that we don't want my husband to be working 50 plus hours and now maybe even have to find a second job for us to make ends meet. I would say this, you definitely want to pray. I think they ought to be praying about - she didn't say anything about their giving, but I do know that Scripturally, I'm often drawn to the text that says there's one who gives more than he ought, and the thing is it seems that he only becomes all the more richer. Then you have somebody that withholds what they shouldn't withhold. And it tends only to their penury as the KJV says - poverty. And so I would say this, give sacrificially and then pray. Here's the reality.

In fact, I would encourage this woman. I've found great help and I know many have in our church, especially in the early days, often quoted from Isaiah 53. But in Isaiah 53, there are promises there about you pouring yourself out for the hungry; you giving to the needy, (chapter 58, not 53) Isaiah 58. And the promise there is this: that when you cry, God's going to say, "Here I am." And I have always found that to be a great argument in prayer. Lord, we've given. Lord, we've given. We've sought to be sacrificial. We've sought to pay our debts. We've sought to help the needy. We've sought to support the family. After all, if you don't support your family, what? Worse than an infidel. So, God wants you to support your family. God wants you to give to the needs of the needy. God wants you to pay your debt. I can show you texts that say all three of those. And so if you're doing what God wants you to do with the money and now you're

running out, you have every reason to come and say, Lord, You promised to supply all my need. You've promised. And You've promised that if I would be merciful, that when I cry, You'll say, "Here I am." And Jesus talking about storing up treasure in heaven. And see, I don't want to stretch this where it ought not to go, but listen. I think because of texts like Isaiah 58, I have reason to believe that this fits into the words that Jesus said. When He talks about storing up treasure in heaven - not storing up here.

So my mindset is this. I'm going to strive to not build empires here. I'm going to strive not to build up huge savings here. I'm going to strive not to build up huge retirement here, but rather I'm going to store it there. And then when I come to have needs here, I'm going to look and say, Lord, I stored it all there. I don't have anything here and I have a need over here. When I'm thinking about storing up treasure in heaven, I'm not just thinking about when I die, I'm going to go to heaven and there's going to be treasure there. Now, obviously, that is a primary emphasis of what Jesus is saying there in the Sermon on the Mount. But, I also believe that storing up treasure in heaven carries the reality that that's where my surplus is. That's where my supply is. And I'm storing it up there just kind of like putting it in the bank, but I'm storing it there. I'm giving it to the Lord. I'm trusting Him. Not just that there's going to be treasure there when I die and get there, but that there's treasure there to be drawn on anytime that I need it here. And like I say, I take that from promises like, "You'll call and I'll say, 'Here I am.'" I take it from the promises of God concerning finances, that both are a reality. That what I'm doing is I'm storing up and there's a promise in my storing up there that when I come to have need here, God's going to meet it. When it's a need, and He sees it as a need - not just when I want my standard of living increased. Not when it's something that He doesn't think I need, but I think I need.

See, that's one of the problems. We like to put it in the bank because see, then I can tap that when I think I have a need. Sometimes it has to do with trusting the Lord. If we give it all to Him, well, what if I'm in need and He doesn't give me. But you know what I have found is He always does. He always does. (incomplete thought) I have typically found, even when it's things that seem really practical - like that just makes sense that we should have that - He provides for it. Even though I had no funds there before that or very little. I mean, yes, I'm 52 years old and I live paycheck to paycheck. But, we are seeking to store up treasure in heaven, and I really have confidence that the Lord is going to provide whenever there's need, even if that's retirement. And the thing is, I can tell you this, that I've walked with the Lord for 26 years and He hasn't let me down once. He hasn't failed me. So I would say that to this lady.

One of the things that you don't want to do when you're in financial difficulty is stop giving. Now, look, I'm not saying, well how much did they give? I would just say this. Let the highly praised, highly commended Macedonians be your example when you're in straits. They gave liberally. They amazed even an apostle. I would say that. Go to 2 Corinthians 8-9. Right there in 8, you've got the example of the Macedonians. Let them be an example. Give something in the spirit of that. Take care of your family. Take care of your debt. And look to the Lord and call upon the Lord and ask the Lord to provide. She's admitting that she hasn't prayed because of this megachurch mindset that's been pressed upon her - something like the love of money is the

root of all evil, and sometimes we get it in our heads that money is the root of all evil. Well, we need money. There's a place for money so that dad can be with the family more. There is a place for that.

Any other thoughts on that?

(from the room) I think one thing that stood out as well is that she said that through this time and season in their life, that it's made her more like Christ; or at least, it's shown her and her husband their sin in their lives. And I think there's a certain aspect of thinking about just embracing the suffering. And I hope I don't sound apathetic in any way, but I think there's room to embrace it in some way where texts such as James and 1 Peter, and just seeing that our suffering makes us more like Christ. And it helps us not to settle in here on earth. And it really just fixes our mind on heaven, basically. That's just my thought.

Tim: Right. Embrace it. And there may be a place for that. Because the reality is working 50 hours - even though that might not be what you want, and you might want more time with dad being with the children, especially when they're at a certain age and you know having devotions and everything. But you know what? Working 50 or 60 hours a week is not bad. And it sounds to me like they are giving up some of the non-essentials in their life, and that they do actually have reasonable time. She said it feels like they're just existing, but perhaps that's because certain things, certain endeavors that they would like to have in their life that God's just now allowing them right now. Maybe they're putting too much of a high priority on. And very often, we do get into situations where things are tight. When our children were small, the amount Ruby had to spend on food was extremely tight. But you know, there are seasons like that. And certain Christians in certain countries, we might say there's lives like that.