

Narrowing Our Focus and Setting Boundaries



“YOU ASKED ME WHAT I THOUGHT. DON'T GET ANGRY because you don't like it. I think you already knew my opinion before you asked.”

The pastor of a large church near Cleveland had just answered a question posed to him by members of his congregation. He was addressing a crowd of workplace professionals, and an obviously pregnant insurance company representative had asked his opinion of child care.

His response: “If you choose to have children, and it's not a question of having enough money to feed, clothe and house the family, then one of you ought to be home when the kids are home. “

Angry, the woman turned to the human resource manager sitting to his right. “What do you think?”

Her response: “If you choose to have children, and it's not a question of having enough money to feed, clothe and house the family, then one of you ought to be home when the kids are home.”

Are they correct? Why or why not? →

Scripture Passages

Exodus 3:1-22

Exodus 4:1-31

Exodus 18:1-27

Galatians 2:1-10

Study

Christians are often besieged on many fronts. Work demands our attention. Family demands our attention. Rest demands our attention. The church demands our attention. Friends and relationships demand our attention. Our prayer and quiet times demand our attention.

The lawn, the house, the car, our community—all of these demand our attention as well. With so many demands, how can we possibly hope to narrow our focus in a way that leaves us open to God's daily direction? The answer sometimes comes from those around God places around us.

In the space below, list the demands people, institutions and circumstances make on your time. Now add to the list everyone and everything you feel is expecting something from you. For many of us a quick look back at last week's calendar will make these demands very clear.

Demands

People and things that you feel are expecting something from you

What thoughts run through your mind as you review this list?

What process do you follow in deciding who or what gets your attention?

In your reading of Exodus 3 and 4, what objections did Moses offer God when he was assigned the task of leading Israel out of Egypt?

How did God answer those objections? What one answer notes the most important source of support for Moses? What can we learn from that?

Since God promises to be with us, and in doing so equips us to meet the demands of His will on our lives, we know that we have all the tools to accomplish everything He wants us to accomplish. So where's the rub? Read chapter 18:5-16. Moses repeats a mistake he made before in Exodus 17:10-13. What is it?

Are you making the same mistake in your life? How?

Verses 17-27 of Exodus 18 are often used (with good reason) as arguments for delegating work. In your group conversation, though, spend most of your time discussing the source of the advice rather than the advice itself. What can we learn from this about the process of narrowing our focus? What sources of counsel can you find in your own life for narrowing your focus?

Consider your list, remembering that Jethro could offer advice because he was present in that part of Moses' world. Among each of the groups you see as expecting things of you, who witnesses those demands in a way that might enable them to help you winnow?

Will you commit in the coming days to approach these counselors?

Jesus was always busy, but one never gets the sense that He was hurried. Certainly His mission was more important than any on our lists, yet its urgency was not punctuated with a harried overtone. If our mission is to be His ambassadors, we should emulate His approach. Review one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and notice how often He went to a quiet place to seek His father's will and to be in His presence.

Author's note: The Holy Spirit needs to be identified in the course of this study as a source—in fact, our primary source—of counsel and guidance. While the focus is on the temporal support we can receive from others, it's important to remind ourselves that sitting silently before God as the Holy Spirit works in us is always an important part of any Christian's spiritual regimen.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- No man is an island. We need wise counselors to help us sort out our spiritual journeys.
- Just as He did with Moses, God promises to be with us. Jesus reinforced that promise in Matthew 28.
- Also like Moses, if God asks us to do something that's beyond our skills and abilities, He will also draw people to us who have the ability and desire to help us.
- Remembering that God is the author of results can help us stop over-committing.