

Efficiency versus Effectiveness

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JOHN AND LISA HAD IT ALL.

After years working as a mechanic in the local Ford dealership, the couple finally saved enough money to let him open his own auto repair shop. The business prospered immediately, in part because of John's reputation as someone who could be trusted. John loved everything about the work—taking things apart and putting them back together, diagnosing problems, making something old seem new again. He even loved the time he spent with the customers.

The pace of his work was perfect for his personality. He could work long hours when he needed, but he also had the freedom to sit with his customers for long conversations. In fact, it wasn't long before his office became a gathering place for local workers on coffee break.

Despite the leisure pace of the work, the profits were substantial. John was very pleased with his work life.

Lisa, too.

She was vice president of the bank in their small town. Starting as a teller right out of high school, Lisa steadily climbed the ladder as she and John built their lives and careers together. It was no secret that the bank

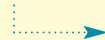
president was grooming Lisa to assume his role when he retired.

Like John, Lisa loved her work. Since she and John grew up in the town, nearly all her customers were familiar to her. While this sometimes made saying no to loan requests more complex, it also gave her a strong sense of place and a keen ability to understand the people she served.

Outside of their jobs Lisa and John were equally settled. Strong faith led them to active participation in their church and also caused them to be hard workers in community causes. If ever a couple seemed set for life it was John and Lisa.

Everything changed one year after the birth of their daughter when doctors discovered a tumor in her brain. The prognosis was guarded at best, and the doctors explained their recommended steps. At the end of all the emotion, the couple realized one of them was going to have to set their career aside and be their daughter's primary caregiver.

Which one quits? Why?



Scripture Passages

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 19:1-9

Mark 10:13-15

Study

From its earliest pages, Scripture teaches us people are more important than processes; how we get results is as important as getting them; effectiveness is more important than efficiency. Christians who work must reflect these principles if they are to accurately reflect the character of God to their coworkers. They also must constantly walk a fine line between efficiency and effectiveness. Sometimes the right choices aren't easily discerned, but often the problem isn't deciding which is right, but having the courage to make and stand by the right choice.

When it comes to managing our personal time, effectiveness almost always trumps efficiency. Consider the story of Martha and Mary. Read Luke 10:38-42. (For more information on these two women, you can also read about them in John 11 and 12.)

What can we tell about Martha from this account in Luke?

What can we tell about Mary from this account in Luke?

Which of the two women better fit your attitude toward life? Why?

What did Jesus mean when He said Mary had chosen "the better thing?"

What does this suggest to us about our priority in spending time with God?

Now read Luke 19:1-9, the story of Jesus' meeting with Zaccheus. What does this passage suggest about Jesus' views on effectiveness versus efficiency? Pay particular attention to the phrasing Jesus uses with Zaccheus: "Today I must..."

Turn to Mark 10:13-15 and read about Jesus and the children. Again, what does this suggest Jesus sees as a priority in time management?

Now compare that to what we learned in Study One of this series, "The Reason We Exist." Remember the reason we exist is to be in relationship with Him. And when He created woman it was because He saw it was not good for man to be alone. The priority of relationship over activity carries itself throughout Scripture, and thus should be the defining characteristic of any time management efforts we employ.

Listen to how Paul describes the battle between efficiency and effectiveness.

Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

As we read about the many individuals Paul lists at the beginning and end of his letters, we get a clear understanding when he says "making the most of our time"; he's referring to God's view of how we best spend our time.

While we may start our days earnestly hoping we can be faithful to the Lord, frequently the stuff of life crams itself down our throats, and we fail Him more than we honor Him. Then late at night, when the careening, chaotic pace of the paths of work and relationships relinquish their grips on our conscious actions, our thoughts turn back to God. It can be utterly discouraging in those moments to realize how little we've thought of Him in the course of the day.

Then maybe sometime during the week we finally find time to read His Word, and we are ever more astonished at just how holy He demands us to be, and how utterly unfit we are by ourselves for His service. How can we possibly fit this tent of unfaithfulness into the tent-bag of His call on our life?

One of the enemies of faithfulness is pace. Sometimes others dictate pace to us, as in tyrannical bosses, small children, extraordinary circumstances, or the consequences of wrong choices. Often, though, the reckless pace of our lives is our own fault, chasing after the windmill of plenty, prosperity, security, power, or a place of significance. A relentless pace condemns us to a focus on the moment, leaving little time for earthly, tangible relationships, let alone God. If the goal of our time management system is designed to cram more accomplishment into our day, then our focus is on tasks and not on the relationship that gives meaning to those tasks.

We must each look to the pace in our lives and govern it prudently. It strengthens not only our relationship with God, but with all those God has given us: family, friends and coworkers.

We cannot think of God in the shorter journeys of our life if we fail to consider His place in the longer journeys. Planning those longer journeys—like “where is God working and what’s my place in His wall” and “what do my children need to know about God” and “am I ready to give an answer when my coworker asks me the hard questions of faith”—those journeys require the planning and preparation done in quiet moments which refuse to yield to the world’s demand for activity.

Even as we recognize our continuing unworthiness, though, we must never stop yielding ourselves to obedience. The irony of “more fruit for the kingdom” is often that it demands we be less busy.

Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, both of which are found not in action but in relationship, and everything else, including our labors, will become acts that honor Him and matter eternally.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- God values relationship over activity.
- Jesus teaches us people are more important than processes and achievements.
- The pace of our life is often one of the most serious challenges to our spiritual journey.
- A hectic pace is also one of the most serious challenges to our earthly relationships.
- Seeking God’s priorities first (love God, love others, teach others about Him, tend His Creation—in that order) put our priorities in place.