

God's Priorities

To get into God's Priorities you really need to look at the story of the Jar of Life first (included with these notes) and then read the encounter of Jesus with Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42

This story helps us understand our lives a bit better

The Jar represents our life which we fill with many things so much so we sometimes have difficulty recognising our priorities. In the story the different priorities of our lives are represented by the Stones, the Pebbles, the Sand and the Water. What happens in the story helps us to recognise the need for priorities

Stones are the "Must Haves" of life - the key things that make up our lives - without them our life just wouldn't be the same - we'd be drastically different. Stones differ in shape and size so do "Must Haves" and change during our life and between people. It's fairly easy to work out Must Haves for babies or toddlers - harder the older you get. Without our "must haves" our lives would be empty - almost like a great big hole was there.

Pebbles are the "Nice to Haves" of life - things that make life more enjoyable, or comfortable or exciting. To be honest though they are a bit of a luxury - not essential - even if we think we can't do without them. The problem is that because we think we can't do without them they are often confused with "Must Haves". Things like going to a gym or playing golf or keeping up with the latest fashions or having a brand new car or the biggest tv or the nicest garden or holidays abroad or just keeping up with what others do. If you lost any of them, life may perhaps be different but it would go on - it would still have meaning

The Dry Sand is the "clutter" in our lives. Clutter is the stuff that steals our time - the time fillers that we don't think about because we enjoy doing them - the things we do cos we do them. The problem with clutter is that we don't always recognise it's clutter until there's a problem and we can't do something important because the clutter has taken the time away. Just like the second jar couldn't fit in pebbles or stones once it was filled with sand. The result is we get super stressed because we "don't have enough time in the day"

And the drink of water? Always make time to chill out with a friend for a drink!

How we fill our lives is up to us but it's particularly important for those wanting to be imitators of Christ. Some fill their lives with must haves and end up being kill joys on anything else, others fill it with clutter and have no time for anything more important, whilst yet others fill it with nice to haves and have no time for the must haves. Most of us though are somewhere in between these extremes but what should our priorities be?

What are God's priorities? Here we have guidance from when Jesus met Martha and Mary recorded in Luke 10:38-42. It's so easy to get distracted by the pressures of everyday living and this encounter with Martha and Mary shows what is important to God.

Both Martha and Mary were followers of Jesus and recognised that Jesus was the Son of God - as they said when Jesus raised Lazarus

Martha however got distracted by the practicalities - the "Nice to Have" things you do when you have guests. Hospitality would have been no mean feat - it wasn't just Jesus as guest but all those who were with Him. Time pressures caused by distractions caused Martha stress and upset, getting her somewhat irritated, so much so she came to Jesus to complain.

The result being Jesus gently corrected Martha. Martha is so like most of us - it's so easy to get distracted by everyday pressures

Mary was focused on her "Must Have" - focused only on Jesus He had Mary's total attention - she just sat at His feet. Mary recognised the #1 "Must Have" is her relationship with God and most importantly - Jesus approved.

And us? Can we get guidance from the Jar of Life and the account of Martha and Mary?

We have signed up to 3 Christian "Must Haves" or stones - the 3 Es. Engaging more deeply with Jesus - underpins everything else we do. Enabling others to meet Jesus - finding ways to introduce folk to Jesus. Enriching our community - getting involved with folk where they are

We also have our "Nice to Have"s - our pebbles. Our pebbles are the things we do, whether individually or as a fellowship, - whether daily, weekly or over the year. We offer a lot of activities. For Youth and Children we offer things like Toddler groups, WLTD, SODA, Sunday groups, Messy Church, Hope and Light, Jolt, J2 and J3, Base, Aftershock, Embrace, Holiday Club and DTI. For the fellowship, mums, dads and 3rd Gen there is Angel Tree, Eco-church, Genesis Project, Life Dronfield, Over 50s mens group, ExtraOrdinary Women, Jolly Crafters, Art Club, Ukulele group, House Groups, Prayer Triplets, Cafe Church, Table Tennis, 5-a-Side football, Men's Weekend, Coffee Pot and Place of Welcome - and I'm sure I've missed some. Things change - changing or stopping an activity would NOT make a hole in our Christian lives. Reality is we have so much going on - it's so easy to miss the "must haves"

Christians are like everyone else we load up our lives with "Clutter" - like Sand in the story - the petty stuff. Clutter will be different for each of us - mine is playing on my ipad. Others might binge watch tv. Yet others might be the time spent on social media or selfies. They have one thing in common - they are all time stealers and get in the way of the more important things.

Jesus knows we need help to get our priorities right and thankfully we are not alone because He has kept His promise and we have the Holy Spirit to work with us

".... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:26 NIVUK

And we maybe even get help for more opportunities to chill out with a friend and have a drink

Questions

1. Have you thought about your priorities at all? Does the idea of Must Haves, Nice to Haves, and, Clutter help you? If it doesn't help discuss other ways in your group.
2. Which of your activities are really clutter and get in the way of imitating Jesus? Discuss as a group and identify ways to control clutter.
3. Are there any activities you now recognise as Must Haves? Discuss in the group how you can focus more on the Must Haves.

JAR OF LIFE – All age version

This is a story about a class of children with their teacher and helpers on a day-trip to a beach.

Once the class got to the beach the teacher split the class into 3 smaller groups with their helpers. To each group the teacher gave a small bucket for their exploring. One group was asked to find stones from the beach to fill their bucket. Another group was asked to fill their bucket with smaller pebbles and the third group was asked to fill their bucket with dry sand. Off they went to see what they could see, filled their buckets and returned them to their helper. The teacher thanked everyone and they continued exploring.

Back at school the next day the children noticed that the 3 buckets they'd filled were on the teacher's desk along with two large glass jars and a glass of water. The children wondered what the teacher was going to do - this would be a very odd lesson and they couldn't help whispering to each other about what was going on.

The teacher quietened the class down, thanked them again for their help on the beach, and took one of the large glass jars and called the children to come around their table. "I'm going to ask you to tell me when the glass jar is full," said the teacher. Easy thought the children as they got closer to watch what was going to happen.

The teacher took the bucket of stones and gently dropped stones into the glass jar. Eventually the teacher couldn't get any more stones in. The teacher paused and the children shouted "Easy. The jar is full".

"Hmmm. OK" said the teacher and took the bucket of pebbles. He added a handful of pebbles to the top of the jar and gently tapped and shook the jar. The pebbles settled into the jar filling up the spaces between the stones. The teacher did the same again until no more pebbles could fit into the jar. The teacher waited for a reaction until one child said "It's really full now". The rest of the class agreed.

The teacher wasn't finished though. Without saying a word, the teacher pulled over the bucket of dry sand. They took a handful of sand and trickled it into the top of the jar as they gently tapped and shook the jar. The sand went into the jar filling all the spaces left by the pebbles. The teacher repeated this until no more sand could fit. The children were gobsmacked! One brave child spoke up and said "Wow! It's absolutely full now nothing else can go in - there's no room."

The teacher picked up the glass of water but instead of drinking it as the children expected the teacher poured the drink into the jar. The water soaked into the sand. The children were completely silent with amazement. What was the teacher doing? You would have heard a pin drop.

The teacher paused.

Before the children could ask any questions, the teacher took the second jar and filled it with the sand. Jaws dropping - the children were even more baffled about what was going on. What would the teacher say or do next?

The teacher then asked one of the children to pop a pebble or two or a stone into the jar. It was impossible.

The children couldn't help whispering again. How would the teacher make sense of it all?