

SEVEN PRIORITIES OF LIFE

PRIORITIES OF LIFE SERIES

BY ALAN DRAKE

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Seven Priorities of Life

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SEVEN PRIORITIES OF LIFE

It happened years ago when I was in my 20's. I was on a long cross-country bus trip. I was traveling from my home in Dallas, Texas, to participate in a classical guitar master class in Charlevoix, Michigan. I had a lot of time to think while I rode the bus through several states, staring out at the wheat fields that we passed along the highways.

At some point, I began to think about all of the activities in my life, and all of the different areas of my life. Was it all just a random collection of activities? Or was it all meant to work together somehow? Did some activities matter more than others? Was I giving my time to things that would really matter in the long term, or was I wasting my life, giving too much time and energy to things that really would never profit me and never amount to anything of real, lasting value?

I knew that I wanted my life to count. I wanted to make the most of it. I didn't want to come to the end of my life, look back, and have deep regrets about wasting huge chunks of my life. I didn't want to come to the end of my time on earth and realize with deep regret that I had blown it; that I had missed out on the one chance I had to live my life to its fullest potential, fulfilling—and even surpassing—all of my hopes and dreams, making an impact that would not only be as rewarding as possible for myself, but would enrich the lives and experiences of many, many others as well.

And so, I took some time to list all of the activities in my life. I needed to determine if I was making the best use of my time. I needed to find out which activities needed more of my time, focus and attention, and which activities might need to be allowed to drop off of my schedule and out of my life.

As my list of activities grew, categories began to emerge. It became evident that almost all of my activities fell neatly into just a few categories. I narrowed the categories to just seven. Then, as I focused on trying to figure out what activities were the most important, I compared categories to determine their relative long-term importance to my life.

I was able to neatly prioritize these seven categories based on their relative importance. Since that time, decades ago, these priorities have never wavered in their relative importance in my life.

This was my thought process.

God has to come first. He made us. He wrote the rules of life. To understand God is to understand life. Seeing life from God's perspective brings understanding. Knowing and understanding Him is paramount. This is reinforced by Scripture, in which it is written, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3 NKJV) and "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment." (Mark 12:30 NKJV)

Second in importance has to be my own character and behavior. Ultimately, my life is a product of my choices. In the end, when I am called upon to give an account for my life and the way I lived it, the total responsibility will rest with me. It's best that I realize that now and apply that realization to the choices I make. And since my choices flow out of my own character and personality, I must focus seriously on becoming the best person that I can be—the person that I would most admire. It is absolutely vital for me to take responsibility for my own behavior and be effective in developing my own character because this will directly affect every other area of my life. As Jesus said, "first take the

log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5 ESV).

After the area of character, there are still several significant areas of life, but the most important involve other people. As Jesus said, "And the second [commandment] is . . . 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:39 ESV). In considering relationships with people, family members have to come before others in priority because I was made directly responsible for them by birth or by marriage. Being connected with someone through birth or through marriage mandates a stronger commitment and greater responsibility. For example, when Jesus was dying on the cross, he took time to instruct John to make sure that his mother was cared for (See John 19:26-27). "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8 ESV).

After family, come relationships and interactions with other people. This includes friends, authority figures like employers, spiritual leaders and government officials, and interactions with acquaintances and others.

After people, the last three main areas of responsibility are health, work and finances, in that order. Health comes before work because you must take care of your own health in order to effectively work. If you lose your health, you won't be able to adequately fulfill work responsibilities.

Finally, there are responsibilities for finances and possessions. These are important responsibilities, but they are not the primary focuses of life. They do not give meaning to life, or provide any sense of purpose, like work does. They serve a more supportive role. They make sure that adequate resources exist to fulfill the more important responsibilities of life.

So, there you have it! The way I see it, all of the responsibilities and activities in our lives fit into these seven general categories. When those activities and responsibilities are prioritized, this is what takes shape:

1. God, including matters relating to spirituality and eternity. This category deals with understanding and relating to God, and life in the eternal, supernatural, spiritual realm.

2. Character, which includes character development and discovery of identity—who I truly am—my gifts, personality strengths, as well as responsibility for my behavior, attitudes, motives, choices and even my thoughts.

3. Family, which includes responsibilities in marriage, parenting and other family relationships.

4. Friends, Acquaintances, and Authorities. This is a very broad category that deals with all personal interactions and relationships outside of the family. This includes everything from casual encounters with strangers, as well as relationships with acquaintances, friends and authority figures. I believe that if we view every encounter as having possibilities for positive breakthrough we will come closer to realizing the full potential of all personal interactions with acquaintances, friends, authority figures and even complete strangers.

5. Health, which includes all aspects of physical health, including diet, exercise and stress issues. Our health must be maintained in order for us to fully experience all that life holds for us.

6. Work, Purpose, and Destiny. This includes all activity that gives purpose to our lives and reasons to wake up each morning. This includes work, hobbies, causes, and creative, artistic endeavors.

7. Finances and Possessions. This category deals with issues of money, houses, vehicles and all other material possessions; not as goals to strive for, but as resources to be wisely used to provide support for us as we strive to fulfill more important goals and responsibilities.

If you take time to really think about it, you too may find that everything in your life fits into these areas. I do . . . and I did. I took time to really think about it.

These seven priorities of life, as I see things, are also the seven main categories of personal responsibility.

But what do you think? Do you agree? Disagree? More importantly, have you taken time to stop, put the busy-ness of life on hold, and really think about the value of the various activities in your life? That may be most important thing to come out of you reading this article. I urge you to be thoughtful about your life! Are you taking the best route for your journey? Or do adjustments need to be made? Each minute that goes by is more valuable than we know! Invest wisely, my friend!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Drake is an educator by profession, with over 25 years of experience in public education. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Dallas Baptist University and a Master's degree in Educational Administration from East Texas State University.

Alan is an engaging speaker and teacher. He has taught courses and led workshops, meetings and conference sessions in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. He currently resides in Dallas, Texas, USA.

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