

## “Knowing your priorities”

*how to analyse the decisions you make,  
and how far your actions reflect what God really wants from you*



*Intro (10 min)* : As usual, the leader

- introduces the title of the workshop,
- tells the keynote story (it's in “Resources” at the end of these notes),
- then reads the first key verse (Zechariah 7:5) and plays Audio Clip 1. If you choose not to use the audio, and would rather do your own introduction, you should make these points:

- Zechariah was asked by the people of Bethel if they ought to continue a certain religious practice - fasting in the fifth month of the year - which had grown up as a traditional activity over the time of the exile, but had never been commanded by God. Zechariah is told by God that the people were just doing these things “for themselves” - not for God at all. It's possible for activities which seem outwardly holy to be self-serving.

- As a result, the agenda that was being followed *wasn't* God's. It was religious activity, but not what he had commanded!

- Why were they doing this? Because it was less demanding than what God really wanted (vv 8-10). It's possible for us to fob God off with an outward show of commitment that fools others (and maybe ourselves) into thinking that we're dedicated to doing God's will - when in fact our priorities are all wrong. In this session, we ask: where are we? How are we doing in terms of God's priorities?



*1. God's priorities for our lives (10 min)*

What does God most want from a human life? Divide into three smaller groups, and give each group one of these passages to look at: Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 28:17-20 . Ask them to find answers to these questions:

1. What does this passage say about God's priorities for the way we will live?
2. Are these priorities for *all* of us or *some* of us?
3. Are there other things that we *could* make priorities, which this passage is ruling out?

Now report back to one another. Can you complete this sentence in a way that includes all of these priorities?

*“What God most wants us to do with our lives is...”*



*2. Taking stock of where you are (10 min)*

Now ask people to use the “Living out the priorities” sheet (in the Resources section) to work out how well they think their lives reflect these key expectations. Say: this isn't an exercise in making ourselves feel bad – but we can get so involved in doing so many things with our time, that we follow a pattern based on everybody else's expectations, and never think clearly about how many of them really reflect what God wants from us.

As we discovered in our autumn studies of last year, we all have a different “shape” in discipleship, so we’ll all have different ways of expressing these priorities in the way we live them out. The important question here is *not* “Am I doing the same as everybody else?” but “Am I doing enough, in my own way, as the person I am, to let these priorities grow in my daily living?”



### 3. *Dreaming big dreams (10 min)*

Read together 2 Timothy 1:4-9. Timothy was a dedicated young Christian; he’d left home and worked faithfully with Paul so long that he could be trusted to look after the church in Ephesus, second biggest city of the Empire, in Paul’s absence. He had lots of ability. *Yet* there are signs in Paul’s writing here that Timothy wasn’t reaching his full potential...

1. Where does Paul give hints that Timothy might be achieving a little more than he was?
2. Does verse 7 suggest to you any reasons why Timothy might *not* be “fanning into flame the gift of God which was in him”? Do we have the same temptations today?
3. Is Paul trying to get Timothy to work harder... or is it something else?

Ask people to look back at the “Living out the priorities” sheet which they filled in, and assess (silently) where they feel there’s room for improvement. Spend a couple of minutes thinking individually about what steps you could take as an individual to move yourself forward.



### 4. *Planning your next year (10 min)*

Ask someone to read out 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Make the point: Paul knew that making progress involved *planning* and *discipline*. He wasn’t running aimlessly or “beating the air”, but consciously forging ahead towards goals which he had set himself.

We need to do the same! Give people the sheet headed “Three goals for my 2019”, and ask them to sketch in three decisions they might take which would set new goals for their growth in discipleship for the rest of this year. Stress that they aren’t committing themselves to any instant decisions; this is just an exploratory I-might-do-this exercise, and they may well want to think and pray more deeply at home before deciding before God on a fixed plan of action. *But* it will give them a chance to think for a few minutes, here and now, about what the possibilities might be.

After everyone has had a few minutes to think and write, pray together that God will lead you together into new resolves that will take you on further down the path of discipleship than ever before.



*Wrap-up (10 min):* Finally, the leader reads the second keynote verse (Romans 10:4) and plays the second audio clip. If not using this, please make these three points in closing:

- This verse sums up the fact that Jesus’ death has radically altered what we should be trying to do with our lives. We don’t have to keep all of the Old Testament law any longer to be right with God. Since Calvary, “the law is over” – *not* as a rule for our behaviour, but as a means of trying to please God

- This is all because of Jesus. He has brought us into a new freedom and a new status; he's made us kings and priests to God. Now life is not about trying vainly to keep God's law because we're scared of what will happen if we don't; instead our lives are focused on bringing pleasure to him, just because we love him.

- And Jesus did this for a purpose: "so that there may be *righteousness* for everyone who believes". God sees us as righteous because our sins are forgiven; but righteousness isn't only something you *have* – it's also something you *do*. And so our daily life becomes a confident, purposeful, joy-filled adventure in letting his "righteousness" show more and more in our lifestyle choices and actions.

It might be good to end this time in prayer, thanking God for the exciting possibility of living a life that expresses love to him, and praying for each other that God will enable you to move forward in your Christian experience as you live out the priorities you're establishing for the next part of your journey.

## Resources

### The keynote story.

Demosthenes, who lived in Athens 400 years before Jesus was born, had an unfortunate start in life. His father was wealthy, but he died while the boy was still young, and his three guardians squandered his inheritance of £8 million before he was old enough to stop them. So he had to make his own way in the world.

He decided to be a statesman and a lawyer, so that he could sue his guardians. The trouble was, both of those roles demanded a lot of public speaking – and Demosthenes was no good at it whatsoever. He had a terrible stammer, and a lisp. He was a poor physical specimen, too weak to go for gymnasium training like other young men. Furthermore, he was tempted to go out all day and waste his time, rather than getting down to serious study.

So he did something about it. He built himself an underground study, where he could practise without anybody watching him, and deliberately shaved half of his head so that he looked too strange to go out in public until his hair had grown back. He tried making speeches with his mouth full of pebbles, to train himself to speak more clearly. He trained himself to stand properly, and to act naturally, by constantly practising in front of a full-length mirror.

He strengthened his voice by going out to the seaside and shouting above the noise of the waves and the birds. He studied the speeches of great orators, and learned their secrets: repetition, simple effective language, delay and suspense. As a result, by the time he was 20 he was ready to take his ex-guardians to court.

There wasn't much of his fortune left, but he got it back. More importantly, all this dedication and focused effort made him one of the greatest orators of all time. Still today, almost two and a half millennia later, sixty-one of his speeches survive.

When you set firm goals for yourself, and apply yourself to reaching them, amazing things can result.

# Living out the priorities

*What do I do from week to week that shows this is a priority for me?*

*How would I score my current performance out of 10?*

**Doing justice**

**Loving mercy**

**Walking humbly  
with God**

**Loving God with  
heart, soul and mind**

**Loving my neighbour  
as myself**

**Making disciples**

# Three goals for my 2019

**What I'd like  
to improve**

**What I can  
start doing**

**Where I'd like  
to be by 2020**

1

**What I'd like  
to improve**

**What I can  
start doing**

**Where I'd like  
to be by 2020**

2

**What I'd like  
to improve**

**What I can  
start doing**

**Where I'd like  
to be by 2020**

3