

Read also Proverbs 3:9-10. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

What do you value most? What is most important to you? You may not easily be able to answer that, but one person can, Ric Elias, who was on US Airway Flight 1549 when it crashed into the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. That event, as the plane descended and he believed he was going to die, led to an immediate assessment of what matters most.

Imagine yourself in such a situation. What would you identify as the thing that you think most valuable? What do you most want to do or accomplish?

You may not find yourself plummeting to the sea which instantly clarifies what is important. And, perhaps you already know your core value. If you don't, you can thank Mr. Elias for going through such an event for you, and sharing his own discoveries. Sometimes it takes something dramatic to cause you to reflect. To find out what is most important to you, Mr. Elias offers the following questions:

1. What keeps you awake, causes anxiety, or worries you at night?
2. What possessions besides family and pets would you pack in your car if you could only keep a carload of your possessions?
3. What would you want highlighted about your life?
 - a. Your work?
 - b. Possessions?
 - c. Your character?
 - d. Your love for family?
 - e. Choice of recreational activities?
 - f. Your commitment to the community?
4. Pretend you are going to a high school reunion and listen to yourself talk. What did you share with the people you sat with? Do the right things matter?

Today's Scripture asks us the same questions. What is the defining center or priority of your life?

READ Mark 12:41-44:

Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

What is the poor widow's priority? (Giving money to the church)

How do you know that is her priority? (She gave all she had to live on.)

Let's do not try to reason out whether or not she should have done this. Let's stay in the realm of the question: What do you value most?

What you value most shows largely in your actions.

A man named Paul Maconochie grew up in the church but dropped out as a teenager. In his late teen years, his mother asked him to go to hear a guest speaker at their church, so he did. The speaker talked about the gift of the Holy Spirit. His mum (this was in England), was changed.

All this man's life, his Mum was chronically depressed. She was detached emotionally. So she went forward and asked this preacher to pray for her. Nothing happened that night. But, the next morning, she woke up changed—she had peace and joy. She thought “Wow!” And the sense of joy grew. She starting singing and laughing with so much joy she could hardly handle it.

Her son saw the vivid difference. What is going on? He was so impacted by her change that he returned to church at age eighteen.

He got hungry to read the Bible. He made it a priority. But he noticed the difference between his church experience and the impact the Holy Spirit seemed to have in Scripture. So he began a venture to make his faith a priority, and put God first.

He began praying and asked God how to live in and through the Holy Spirit. One day he read, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” (Col 3:15) A modern translation might be, “Let it blow the whistle on what you do.”

Paul was single. He had graduated from college and was teaching middle school. He and a buddy who also taught at the school shared a house. They liked to go out on Friday night, buy beer and a bucket of fried chicken, and come home to watch guy movies half the night. After some time, he began feeling ill at ease, not so peaceful. So with time he realized God was telling him to go to bed earlier. He thought that was odd, but he was serious about his commitment to God. So he did it. He gave up beer, chicken, and movies.

His friends made fun of him—called him a “lightweight.” But, he found himself waking up early on Saturdays and spending time with Jesus in the Word and he began going deeper in Jesus. He began hearing more of God's speaking and teaching him.

A few years later, after he married, he and his wife Elly took another “journey of faith.” He worked at a large church and the church provided them with a nice house. But they began feeling too comfortable, not really living by faith as they had committed to do. So together as a family they committed to giving all their income away for a season and just trust God to provide.

You might think this is presumptuous, but they wanted to recommit to a life of faith. They prayed about it, studied the Bible, and asked wise friends. Then they went for it.

Paul writes,

As the new school year started we went on a spiritual journey for a few months where each time we got our pay check, we gave it straight back to the church.

I would like to say that this was an easy time, but it was not. We spent a lot of time worrying about where the money was going to come from for the next meal, the next expense, the next electricity bill. . . . We prayed a lot together about our needs. The only people who did not worry were the children, even though they understood what we were doing. . . . We learned that we needed to become more like children to enter the Kingdom of God.

We continued up until the end of the Christmas vacation, when we felt the Lord prompted us that it was time to stop. . . . We had not missed a single meal or a single bill. Some of the provision had been mysterious (money appeared in bank accounts), some had been miraculous (people spontaneously volunteering to pay for things for us in stores . . .) and some had been common-place (kind folks from the church leaving a bag of vegetables . . .), but . . . we had every meal and every bill, including utilities, electricity, gas and repairs for our cars . . . paid for. . . .

The stories are great to tell after the event, but at the time it was a real struggle. Every day we would wake up anxious about how things would work out. But for me, there came a point where this began to change. **I began to realize that God means what He says when He names Himself as our provider.** As we kept on asking, seeking and knocking, a stronghold was beginning to come down in my mind. My knowledge of God's generosity and faithfulness was beginning to move from my head to my heart.

I have never really worried about money very much ever since. I have a level of peace and authority in that area that comes from faith that has been forged in the fire.¹

We all know that if the woman gave everything, and all she had was two coins, she was not making it anyway. So perhaps she had assessed her life and wondered *does God really mean what he says? Perhaps I should try and live accordingly.*

Maybe she made a similar commitment based on Scripture. She might have found this verse:

God created humans in his own image God blessed them and said "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." (Gen 1:27a, 28a, 29)

She believed in God's commitment, and also God's intent that creation's only comfort is in his care and promise, because God created us and loves us, and called all his creation "good."

She might have believed this verse:

¹ Paul Maconochie, "Pulling Down Strongholds – An Example," <https://3dmovements.com/pulling-down-strongholds-an-example/>, accessed November 15, 2017.

“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.”
(Prov 3:9-10)

The battle within us is that of wanting to be independent of Jesus having a say over us, or having to be obeyed by giving our first and our best to him. The battle is the need for the respect of other people, who value success and possessions, and looking good, and having our own agenda.

In God’s eyes in this story, small is great. Jesus has tremendous respect for this poor widow who obviously showed dependence on God and understands belonging to God.

Do you think Jesus would have not taken care of her? If you don’t think Jesus would have taken care of her, you have room to grow in your faith. Perhaps you should reassess your priorities. Perhaps you should reassign what you put first. You might find that the things you worry about change. You might be liberated by taking a new view of the collection plate.

What are your priorities?

AMEN