



THE EQUIPPED DISCIPLE

WELCOME

Session 3

A Study In
Purposeful Living

TYRANNY OF THE URGENT

The persistent struggle of choosing between that which is urgent but not so important and that which is important but not as urgent.

This hopefully is not a pep talk on priorities and use of time but an unmasking of why we make the choices we make.

Our Lives are a trail of unfinished tasks.

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James 4:14

**So teach us to number our days that we may
present to Thee a heart of wisdom.**

Psalm 90:12

See to it therefore that you conduct yourselves ever so carefully not as foolish but as wise people who make the best possible use of their time for these are evil days.

Ephesians 5:15,16

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The Scripture presents a clear picture of the brevity of life and exhorts us to be wise in light of that brevity - to use our time wisely and to not wander aimlessly or waste our efforts.

UNIQUENESS OF MAN

- ❖ **Only species aware of his mortality.**
- ❖ **Only species with a will not determined by instinct or the genetic code.**

As I read, ponder and speculate about people, their deeds & their destiny, I become more deeply convinced that it is our natural destiny to grow, to succeed, to prosper, and to find happiness while we are here.

-Jim Rohn

We go, and keep on going, until the object of the game seems to be to go, and keep on going.

We do and keep on doing until we do without knowing, without feeling.

Is there no time to stop and reflect?

Is there no time to stop?

Is there no time?

If we stopped, would we keep on going?

If we reflected, would we keep doing what we do?

For when what we have done and where we have gone is dissolved into oblivion or strung on the meaningless chain of half remembered this and that's

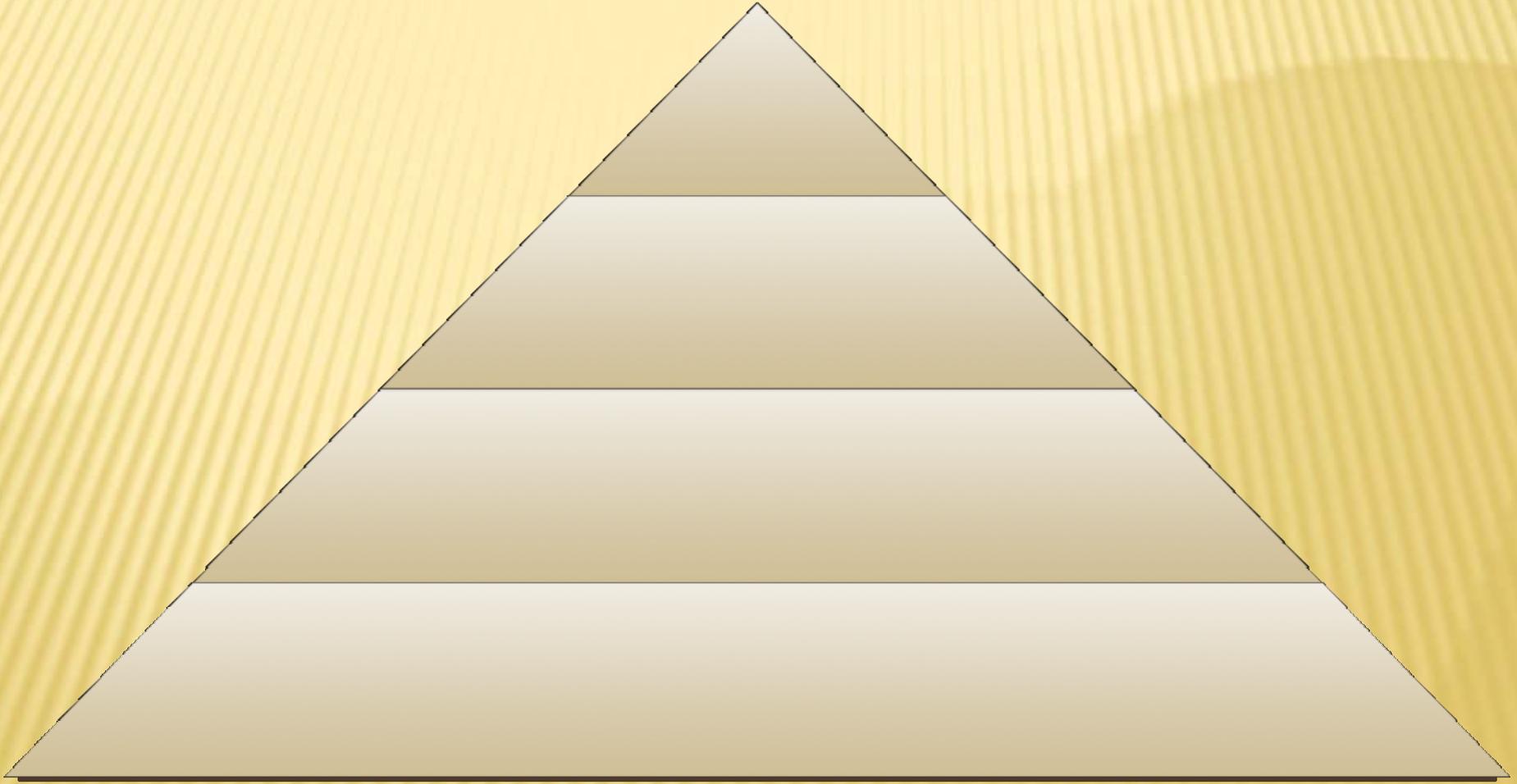
If there is no reflection

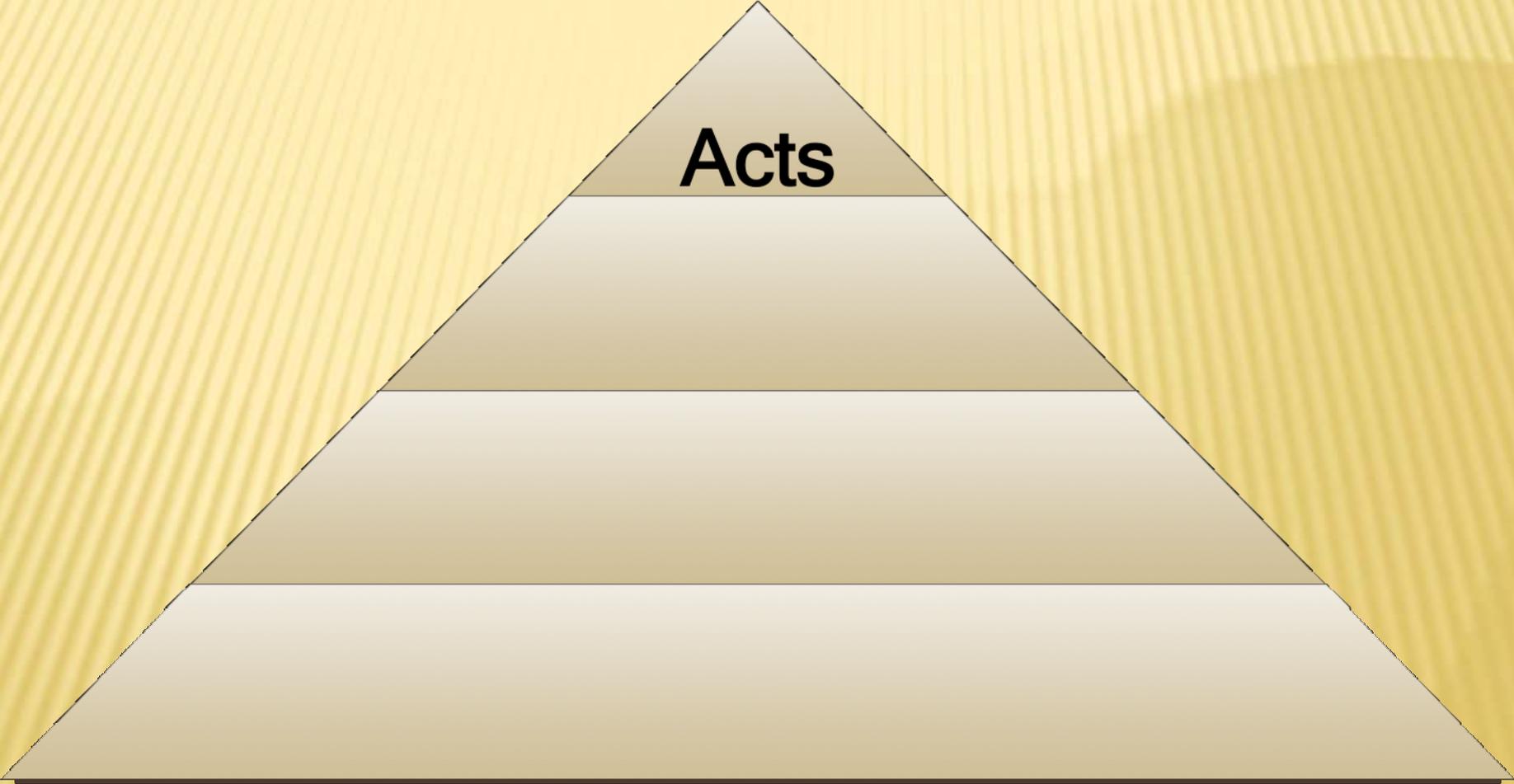
In all our doing have we done anything?

In all our going have we been anywhere?

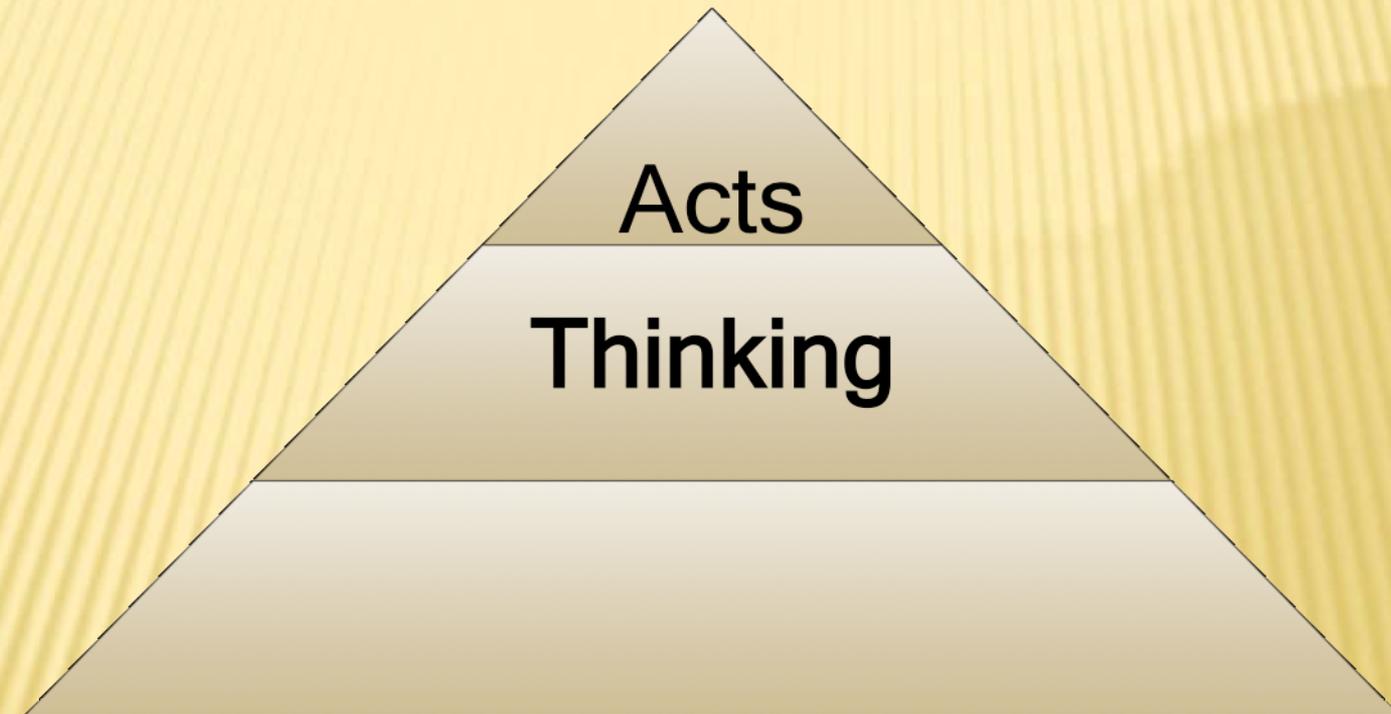
“We are warned not to waste our time, but we are being brought up to waste our lives.

- Eric Hoffer





Acts

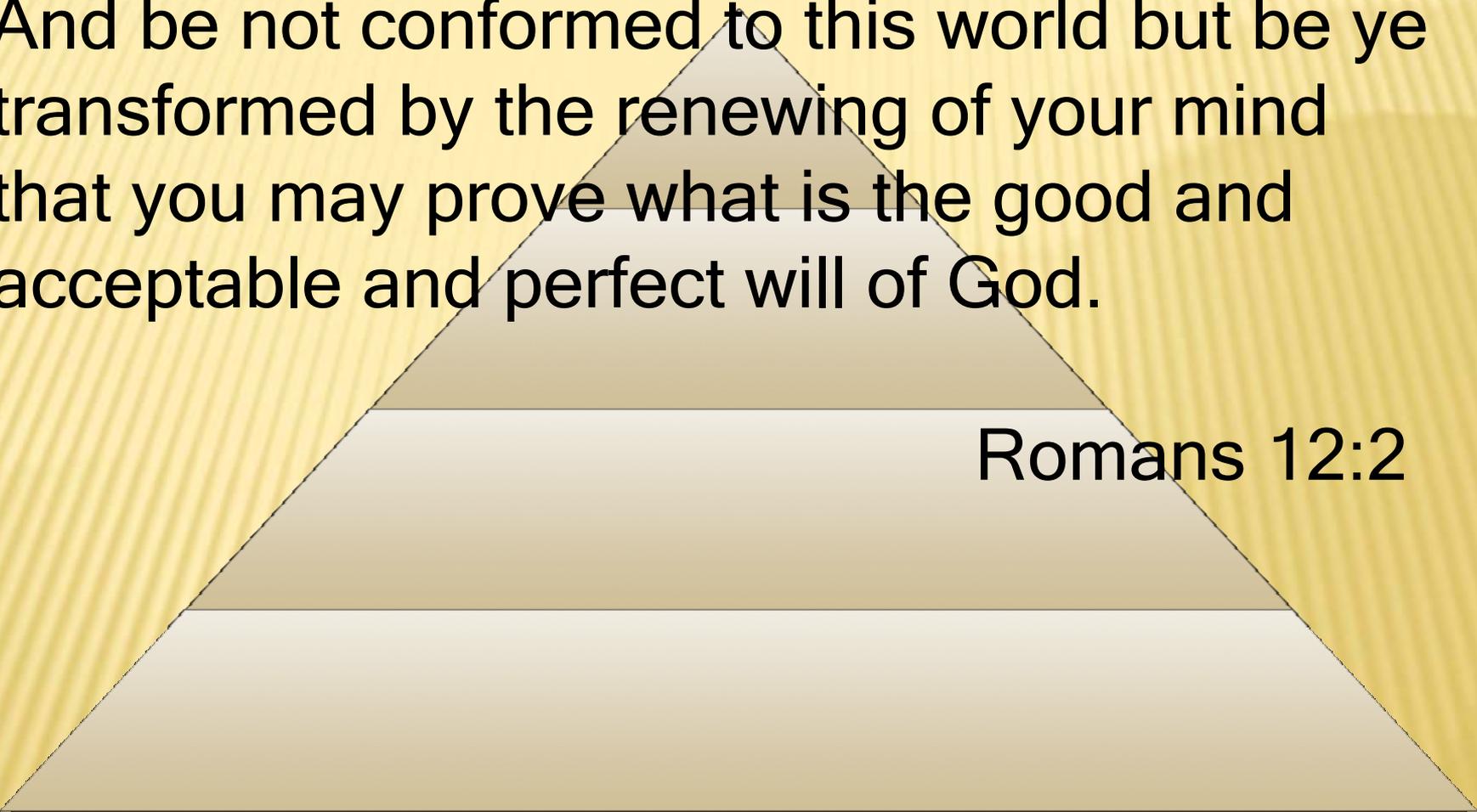


For as he thinks within himself so is he.

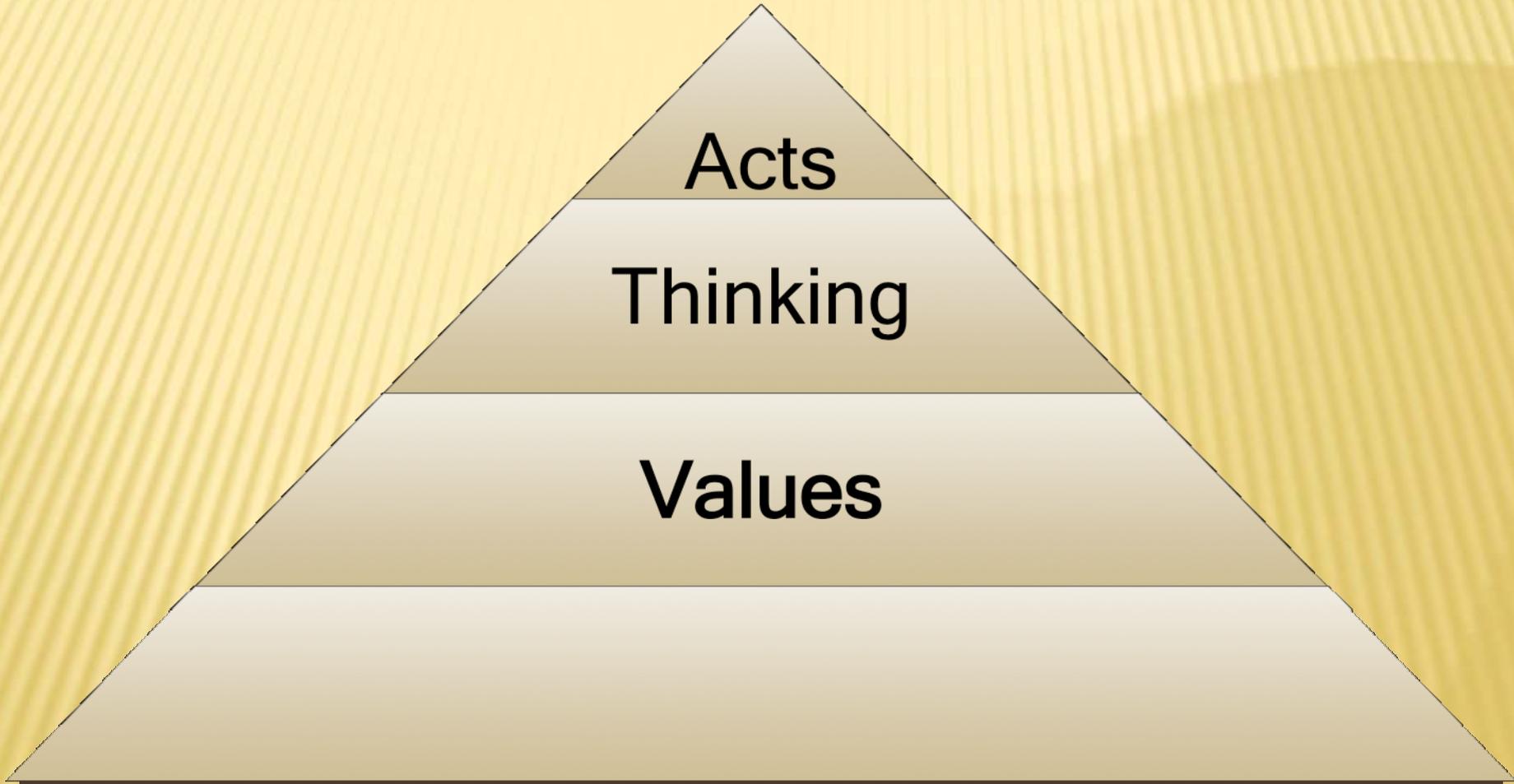
Proverbs 23:7

And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2



All permanent change takes place by altering your value system.



A pyramid diagram with four horizontal levels. The levels are labeled from top to bottom: Acts, Thinking, Values, and Truth System. The pyramid is centered on a yellow background with a subtle pattern of thin, parallel lines. A thin orange horizontal line is positioned above the pyramid.

Thinking

Values

Truth System

So, how do you alter your value system?

1. Reflection

“Most people don’t think in terms of minutes,” says Lakein. “They waste all the minutes. Nor do they think in terms of their whole life. They operate in the mid-range of hours or days. So they start over again every week and spend another chunk unrelated to their lifetime goals. They are doing a random walk through life, moving without getting anywhere.”

The real question is: What do we really want to do? If we do not know, sooner or later we will realize that, whatever it was, there isn’t enough time left to do it.

How do you alter your value system?

2. What is my truth system?

How do you alter your value system?

3. Set Smart Goals

Only 3 percent (3%) have written goals.

Without writing out your goals, it is no more than dreaming!

How do you alter your value system?

O
A
T
S

Objective

Activity

Time

Serious evaluation

How do you alter your value system?

4. Change who you hang with

Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals.

1 Cor. 15:33

The question is....

Are you driven by urgency or guided by importance?

The difference is a clear understanding and adherence to your values.



YOUR BEST FRIEND

Five minutes saved
every hour gives
you 25 more days
a year
in which to win!

IS YOUR TIME
WORKING?

Tyranny of the Urgent

Charles E. Hummel

Have you ever wished for a thirty-hour day? Surely this extra time would relieve the tremendous pressure under which we live. Our lives leave a trail of unfinished tasks. Unanswered letters, unvisited friends, unwritten articles, and unread books haunt quiet moments when we stop to evaluate. We desperately need relief.

But would a thirty-hour day really solve the problem? Wouldn't we soon be just as frustrated as we are now with our twenty-four allotment? A mother's work is never finished, and neither is that of any student, teacher, minister, or anyone else we know. Nor will the passage of time help us catch up. Children grow in number and age to require more of our time. Greater experience in profession and church brings more exacting assignments. So we find ourselves working more and enjoying it less.

JUMBLED PRIORITIES...

When we stop to evaluate, we realize that our dilemma goes deeper than a shortage of time; it is basically the problem of priorities. Hard work does not hurt us. We all know what it is to go full speed for long hours, totally involved in an important task. The resulting weariness is matched by a sense of achievement and joy. Not hard work, but doubt and misgiving, produce anxiety as we review a month or year and become oppressed by the pile of unfinished tasks. We sense uneasily that we may have failed to do the important. The winds of people's demands have driven us onto a reef of frustration. We confess, quite apart from our sins, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done."

Several years ago an experienced cotton mill manager said to me, "Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important." He didn't realize how hard his maxim hit. It often returns to haunt and rebuke me by raising the critical problem of priorities.

We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important. The problem is that the important task rarely must be done today or even this week. Extra hours of prayer and Bible study, a visit with the non-Christian friend, careful study of an important book: these projects can wait. But the urgent tasks call for instant action---endless demands pressure every hour and day.

A man's home is no longer his castle; it is no longer a place from urgent tasks because the telephone breaches the walls with imperious demands. The momentary appeal of these tasks seems irresistible and important, and they devour our energy. But in the light of time's perspective their deceptive prominence fades; with a sense of loss we recall the important task pushed aside. We realize we've become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.

CAN YOU ESCAPE.....?

Is there any escape from this pattern of living? The answer lies in the life of our Lord. On the night before He died, Jesus made an astonishing claim. In the great prayer of John 17 He said, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do" (verse 4).

How could Jesus use the word "finished"? His three-year ministry seemed all too short. A prostitute at Simon's banquet had found forgiveness and a new life, but many others still walked

the street without forgiveness and a new life. For every ten withered muscles that had flexed into health, a hundred remained impotent. Yet on that last night, with many useful tasks undone and urgent human needs unmet, the Lord had peace; He knew He had finished God's work.

The Gospel records show that Jesus worked hard. After describing a busy day Mark writes, "That evening at sundown, they brought to Him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered about the door. And He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons" (1:32-34).

On another occasion the demand of the ill and maimed caused Him to miss supper and to work so late that His family thought He was beside Himself (Mark 3:21). One day after a strenuous teaching session, Jesus and His disciples went out in a boat. Even a storm didn't awaken Him (Mark 4:37-38). What a picture of exhaustion.

Yet His life was never feverish; He had time for people. He could spend hours talking to one person, such as the Samaritan women at the well. His life showed a wonderful balance, a sense of timing. When His brothers wanted Him to go to Judea, He replied, "My time has not yet come" (John 7:6). Jesus did not ruin His gifts by haste. In *The Discipline and Culture of the Spiritual Life*, A.E. Whiteham observes; "Here in this Man is adequate purpose...inward rest, that gives an air of leisure to His crowded life: above all there is in this Man a secret and a power of dealing with the waste-products of life, the waste of pain, disappointment, enmity, death---turning to divine uses the abuses of man, transforming arid places of pain to fruitfulness, triumphing at last in death and making a short life of thirty years or so, abruptly cut off, to be a 'finished' life. We cannot admire the poise and beauty of this human life, and then ignore the things that made it."

WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS...

What was the secret of Jesus' work? We find a clue following Mark's account of Jesus' busy day. Mark observes that "...in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35). Here is the secret of Jesus' life and work for God: *He prayerfully waited for His Father's instructions* and for the strength to follow them. Jesus had no divinely-drawn blueprint; He discerned the Father's will day by day in a life of prayer. By this means He warded off the urgent and accomplished the important.

Lazarus's death illustrates this principle. What could have been more important than the urgent message from Mary and Martha, "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (John 11:3)? John records the Lord's response in these paradoxical words: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was" (verses 5-6). What was the urgent need? Obviously it was to prevent the death of this beloved brother. But the important thing from God's point of view was to raise Lazarus from the dead. So Lazarus was allowed to die. Later Jesus revived him as a sign of His magnificent claim, "I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in Me though he die, yet shall he live" (verse 25).

We may wonder why our Lord's ministry was so short, why it could not have lasted another five or ten years, why so many wretched sufferers were left in their misery. Scripture gives not answer to these questions, and we leave them in the mystery of God's purposes. But we do know that Jesus' prayerful waiting for God's instructions freed Him from the tyranny of the urgent. It gave Him a sense of direction, set a steady pace and enabled Him to do every task *God*

assigned. And on the last night He could say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

DEPENDENCE MAKES YOU FREE...

Freedom from the tyranny of the urgent is found in the example and promise of our Lord. At the end of a vigorous debate with the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Jesus said to those who believed in Him: "If you continue in My Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free... Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:31-36).

Many of us have experienced Christ's deliverance from the penalty of sin. Are we letting Him free us from the tyranny of the urgent? He points the way: "If you continue in My Word." This is the way to freedom. Through prayerful meditation on God's Word we gain His perspective.

P.T. Forsyth once said, "The worst sin is prayerlessness." We usually think of murder, adultery, or theft as among the worst. But the root of all sin is self-sufficiency---independence from God. When we fail to wait prayerfully for God's guidance and strength we are saying, with our actions, if not our lips, that we do not need Him. How much of our service is characterized by "going it alone"?

The opposite of such independence is prayer in which we acknowledge our need for God's instruction and supply. Concerning a dependent relationship with God, Donald Baillie says: "Jesus lived His life in complete dependence upon God, as we all ought to live our lives. But such dependence does not destroy human personality. Man is never so truly and fully personal as when he is living in complete dependence upon God. This is how personality comes into its own. This is humanity at its most personal."

Prayerful waiting on God is indispensable to effective service. Like the time-out in a football game, it enables us to catch our breath and fix new strategy. As we wait for directions, the Lord frees us from the tyranny of the urgent. He shows us the truth about Himself, ourselves, and our tasks. He impresses on our minds the assignments He want us to undertake. The need itself is not the call; the call must come from the God who knows our limitation. "The Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13-14). It is not God who loads us until we bend or crack with an ulcer, nervous breakdown, heart attack, or stroke. These come from our inner compulsions coupled with the pressure of circumstances.

EVALUATE...

The modern businessman recognizes this principle of taking time out for evaluation. When Greenwalt was president of DuPont, he said, "One minute spent in planning saves three or four minutes in execution." Many salesmen have revolutionized their profits by setting aside Friday afternoon to plan carefully the major activities for the coming week. If an executive is too busy to stop and plan, he may find himself replaced by another man who takes time to plan. If the Christian is too busy to stop, take spiritual inventory, and receive his assignments from God, he becomes a slave to the tyranny of the urgent. He may work day and night to achieve much that seems significant to himself and others, but he will not finish the work God has for him to do.

A quiet time of meditation and prayer at the start of the day refocuses our relationship with God. Recommit yourself to His will as you think of the hours that follow. In these unhurried

moments list in order of priority the tasks to be done, taking into account commitments already made. A competent general always draws up his battle plan before he engages the enemy; he does not postpone basic decisions until the firing starts. But he is also prepared to change his plans if an emergency demands it. So try to implement the plans you have made before the day's battle against the clock begins. But be open to any emergency interruption or unexpected person who may call.

You may also find it necessary to resist the temptation to accept an engagement when the invitation first comes over the telephone. No matter how clear the calendar may look at the moment, ask for a day or two to pray for guidance before committing yourself. Surprisingly the engagement often appears less important after the pleading voice has become silent. If you can withstand the urgency of the initial moment, you will be in a better position to weigh the cost and discern whether the task is God's will for you.

In addition to your daily quiet time, set aside one hour a week for spiritual inventory. Write an evaluation of the past, record anything God may be teaching you, and plan objectives for the future. Also try to reserve most of one day each month for a similar inventory of longer range. Often you will fail. Ironically, the busier you get the more you need this time of inventory, but the less you seem to be able to take it. You become like the fanatic, who, when unsure of his direction, doubles his speed. And frenetic service for God can become an escape from God. But when you prayerfully take inventory and plan your days, it provides fresh perspective on your work.

CONTINUE THE EFFORT...

Over the years the greatest continuing struggle in the Christian life is the effort to make adequate time for daily waiting on God, weekly inventory, and monthly planning. Because this time for receiving marching orders is so important, Satan will do everything he can to squeeze it out. Yet we know from experience that only by this means can we escape the tyranny of the urgent. This is how Jesus succeeded. He did not finish all the urgent tasks in Palestine or all the things He would have liked to do, but He did finish the work which God gave Him to do. The only alternative to frustration is to be sure that we are doing what God wants. Nothing substitutes for knowing that this day, this hour, in this place we are doing the will of the Father. Then and only then can we think of all the other unfinished tasks with equanimity and leave them with God.

Sometime ago Simba bullets killed a young man, Dr Paul Carson. In the providence of God, his life's work was finished. Most of us will live longer and die more quietly, but when the end comes, what could give us greater joy than being sure that we have finished the work God gave us to do? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ makes this fulfillment possible. He has promised deliverance from the sin and the power to serve God in the tasks of His choice. The way is clear. If we continue in the Word of our Lord, we are truly His disciples. And He will free us from the tyranny of the urgent, free us to do the important, which is the will of God.

A Discussion of Tyranny of the Urgent

It seems to me that perfection of means and confusion of goals seem to characterize our age.

-Albert Einstein

The good is often the enemy of the best.

-Unknown

1. Define the word “urgent” as used in the *Tyranny of the Urgent*.

2. Define the word “important” as used in the *Tyranny of the Urgent*.

3. In the space below, jot down the thoughts that most impressed you from your reading of *Tyranny of the Urgent*.

Discussion Questions for *Freedom from Tyranny of the Urgent*

1. List the two or three most important goals in your life for the next six months to a year.
2. When did you last take at least a full hour to check your direction and take your bearings?
3. What aspect of the kingdom of God is most meaningful to you at present?
4. Have you ever been in the position of Martha and Mary as they sent an urgent request to Jesus and received no answer?
5. In what way has your new life in Christ changed your outlook in an important area of life?
6. In what way do you feel the Holy Spirit is guiding you to discern and do the will of God?
7. Explain the difference between *efficient* and *effective*. Give an example.
8. To what extent do you feel that your priorities need to be reordered at this point?
9. What parallels do you see between the use of time and the use of money—between spending hours and spending dollars?
10. To what extent are you taking into account the difference between quantity and quality time in relationships?
11. How does the contrast between people and things open a window into your activities?
12. For an important activity that needs more priority, where can you find the additional time?
13. Do you recognize a “basic satisfaction” (sense of achievement) that you gain in certain tasks you really enjoy? If so, list some of those tasks.
14. To what extent are you likely to do “impulse spending” of energy on unscheduled activities?
15. What place does a “time out” have in your schedule? If it has not been your habit, do you feel ready to try it during the next couple of weeks? If so, write down the time you will set aside.

You may print and distribute these discussion questions for individual or group use.



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16. What impresses you most about Bonhoeffer's comments on meditation and Scripture?
17. In what area of your own life have you heard Jesus' call to "go . . . sell . . . give . . . come . . . follow"?
18. How would you explain to someone the importance of Christ's resurrection in your life?
19. To what extent are you living in the past or future in some area of your life?
20. How can you learn from Brother Lawrence's "practice of the presence of God" in the ordinary tasks you face today?
21. How have the Scriptures been equipping you for Christian life and service? List certain passages that have been meaningful lately.
22. What principles of biblical interpretation do you find most helpful?
23. What is the chief benefit of praying the Psalms? Consider using those quoted here as a basis for your prayer during this next week.
24. What light does Father Andrew's statement throw on the way you have been seeking answers to your prayers?
25. What activities of "genuine recreation" would you most like to pursue?
26. List three ways (even if small ones) in which you can create and use leisure time in your life right now.
27. At present do you feel the passage of time to be more a tyrant or a friend?
28. List several occasions when your inner time was very different from your outer time. What were the causes?

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