
Acts 2 Journey Cohort

Pastor and Spouse Session

Priorities that Maximize Impact

“You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” Matthew 23:24, NIV

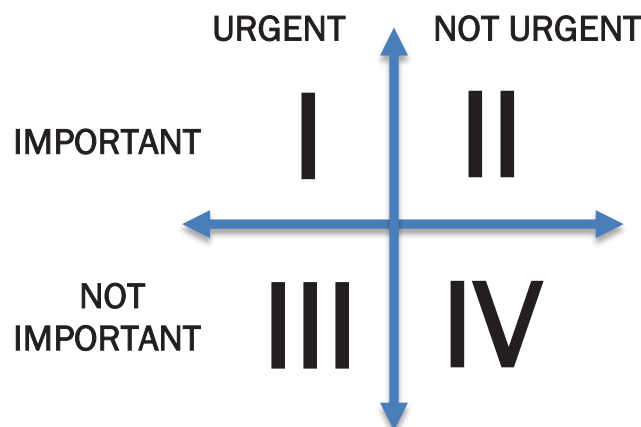
It only takes a few weeks in the pastor’s chair to figure out that there’s more work to be done than any calendar could possibly hold. The expectations placed on the office of pastor require a capacity that exceeds all of us. For the pastor, the question isn’t *how can I get it all done?* No, the real question we must ask is *which items on this enormous to do list are the most critical?*

Your priorities will determine your effectiveness, perhaps more than any other factor. Leadership expert, Ron McManus has said, “Show me how you spend your time and I’ll show you your potential as a leader.” His words underscore the importance of not just doing things right, but learning to do the right things.

Truth is, if you’re going to lead your local church to greater effectiveness, it’s likely that you will need to grow your own effectiveness as the leader. Often, at the end of an Acts 2 Journey, it’s the pastor that says, “No one has been changed by this journey more than me.” And that pastor usually is speaking of the changes that have come to his priorities and how he spends his available time.

FIRST THINGS

In 1989, Stephen Covey challenged leaders everywhere to manage their workloads according to their real priorities. In his best-selling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey identified leadership behaviors that could make a real difference in anyone’s life. In his Habit #3, he suggested that every activity could be evaluated according to both its urgency and its importance and placed on a four-quadrant grid (below).



So, tasks that are both urgent and important would be labeled Quadrant I or Q1 tasks while those that are also important but not really urgent would be Q2, and so forth. This assessment of all that keeps us busy would provide a means of discovering where we really need to be spending much of our time.

<p style="text-align: center;">QUADRANT 1 URGENT, IMPORTANT</p> <p>Any task that we MUST do and must be done SOON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday sermon preparation • Preparing and leading a ministry team meeting • Preparing a funeral service or wedding for a congregant • Returning priority phone calls <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Roughly 60% of time is spent here</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">QUADRANT 2 NOT URGENT, IMPORTANT</p> <p>Tasks or activities that have the greatest impact on our effectiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A date-night with your spouse • Attending your child’s special activities • Personal devotional time • Reading a good book • Investing time in friendships with other pastors • Developing your leadership team • Equipping people for ministry <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Finding time for these items is the secret that lets us invest ourselves in those things that will most contribute to success today and the life we long for tomorrow</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">QUADRANT 3 URGENT, NOT IMPORTANT</p> <p>Ministry tasks that keep us from our assignment to equip others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making every hospital call • Preparing a funeral service or wedding for a friend of a congregant • Running errands for others (not including spouse) • Resolving the church’s maintenance needs <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Roughly 30% of time is spent here</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">QUADRANT 4 NOT URGENT, NOT IMPORTANT</p> <p>Activities that provide relaxation but add nothing to our effectiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Television, video games • Unproductive busywork • Hobbies that you engage alone • Internet surfing or excessive social media activity <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Roughly 10% of time is spent here</i></p>

Q1 - As Covey said, there’s no denying the importance of Q1 activities in our daily or weekly schedule. There are simply some things that you must do and it is important that you are the one to do them. As a pastor, we can place tasks such as preparing Sunday’s sermon, leading a ministry team meeting or other required elements in this quadrant.

For a pastor, Q1 activities would likely include:

- Sunday sermon preparation
- Preparing and leading a ministry team meeting
- Preparing a funeral service or wedding for a congregant
- Returning priority phone calls
- Any task that you **MUST** do and must be done **SOON**

Q3 – This is the quadrant where we find some of the most exhausting parts of our week. Items here feel very urgent, but they aren't truly important or at least it's not important that we be the one to do them. As a pastor, you know that there are many tasks that your people want you to engage with them or for them and not all of them are contributors to your real assignment. It's probable that you've also been one to place a number of Q3 items on your schedule. For example, a number of pastors keep busy doing the ministry when our real assignment to is to equip our people for the work of ministry. In truth, if we will do most everything, our people will generally allow us to do so. For a pastor, Q3 activities might possibly include:

- Making every hospital call
- Preparing a funeral service or wedding for a friend of a congregant
- Running errands for others (not including spouse)
- Resolving the church's maintenance needs

Every time someone's sentence starts, "Pastor, could you..." we need to consider whether or not we're adding to Q3. This doesn't mean that what's needed isn't urgent—it likely will be. And, it may be quite important that someone accept the assignment, but that someone may not need to be you.

Q4 – This is the "escape room" of Covey's grid. Now, we don't mean that we try to escape from it, but many of us try to escape to those tasks that are truly neither urgent or important. These items add virtually nothing to our effectiveness. You might put a video game habit or your Netflix account here, or even some activity that's connected to ministry but is really eating up a lot of time and adding very little. For a pastor, Q4 activities might include:

- Television, video games
- Unproductive busywork
- Internet surfing or excessive social media activity

Q2 – We saved Q2 for last, because this is the place we need to bring into focus. Covey's ultimate point would be that while Q1 activities would always matter, it's likely the tasks we place in Q2 that have the greatest impact on our effectiveness and achieving the life we really want. For example, a date night with your spouse or a game night with your children is very important, but you may not treat such moments as urgent in that these relationships don't crumble just because you were too busy this week to spend an evening this way. Spending time with your family probably belongs in Q2, among your other important/not urgent activities, but it may be one of those activities that makes you most effective and gives you the life you really want in the future.

Spending quality time with God likely fits here too. If you skip your devotional time today, it's unlikely that anyone else will notice. Of course, neglecting any of these activities for very long and your need to give attention to these relationships might become more urgent.

Of course, there are other pieces of the pastoral assignment that fit in Q2. These are usually areas we wish we had more time for, but it's those other quadrants that manage to keep us from them. For a pastor, Q2 activities might include:

- A date-night with your spouse
- Attending your child's special activities
- Personal devotional time
- Reading a good book

Covey, and others who have expanded on his ideas, suggests that most people spend virtually all of their time in Q1, Q3, and Q4, and leave very little for Q2. See the problem?

Covey would go on to say that effective people learn how to move as much of the time their spending in Q3 over to Q2 as possible. Q1 demands matter and may not diminish and we may always need a bit of Q4, just to unwind a bit, but finding time for Q2 is the secret that lets us invest ourselves in those things that will most contribute to success today and the life we long for tomorrow.

THE 80/20 PRINCIPLE

Another way to understand this point can be found in the “Pareto Principle” or what some have called the “80/20 Principle.”

The 80/20 Principle teaches us that if we focus our attention on our most important activities, we gain the highest return on our effort. In fact, if we focus on the top 20 percent—the most important priorities—we will accomplish 80 percent of the results we desire. The principle can be applied to your everyday life to enable you to lead more effectively.

Take a look at this diagram on the right. The column on the left represents your to-do list. Accomplishing your first two priorities will give you 80 percent of your desired results. This occurs because you have made the list in the order of priority. Many of the lower ones are much less fruitful for the Kingdom. They’re not priorities you should focus on.

If you embrace the wrong priorities, this principle will work against you. Eighty percent of your effort will gain you 20 percent of the results and fruit you desire.

Priorities	Results
1	1
2	2
	3
3	4
4	5
5	6
6	7
7	8
8	
9	9
10	10

*“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”
Psalm 90:12, NIV*

EXAMPLES OF THE 80/20 PRINCIPLE

Time: Twenty percent of our time produces 80 percent of the results.

Counseling: Twenty percent of the people take up 80 percent of our time.

Work: Twenty percent of our effort gives us 80 percent of our satisfaction.

Ministries: Twenty percent of our ministries provide 80 percent of the fruit.

Leadership: Twenty percent of the people make 80 percent of the decisions.

Workers: Twenty percent of the members do 80 percent of the work.

Mentoring: Twenty percent of the influencers are where you should invest your time.

BIG ROCKS

Yet another way to illustrate this point is with the “Parable of the Big Rocks.” This idea, also from Stephen Covey, provides a powerful visual portrayal of the challenge of managing our busy schedules.

The premise is simple: Your life has big rocks and little rocks. The size represents the importance and, essentially, what should be prioritized. They all have to fit into a jar.

Pour the little rocks in first and you can get them all in the jar, but you won't be able to fit the big rocks in. Put the big rocks in first, though, and then the little rocks will naturally fall into the remaining space allotted.

Bottom line: You can fit nearly everything in, provided you take care of the most important stuff first.

As pastors, we will surely get more rocks in the bowl by starting with the big rocks, but we still may not fit all our rocks in there. So, wouldn't it be even more critical that we make every effort to prioritize what's truly important?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF PRIORITIES

What Was Jesus' Priority? Mark 1:35–38, NIV

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed, “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

What Is the Christian's Priority? Luke 10:38–42, NIV

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

What Was the Priority of the Apostles? Acts 6:2–4, NIV

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

In each of the above cases, we see that to choose a priority means one must choose against something else. Jesus' all-night prayer times meant sleep would be abandoned. Mary's choice to sit at Jesus' feet meant she wasn't available to engage Martha's to do list, and the apostles' decision to prioritize prayer and their focus on biblical teaching meant that someone else would be needed to handle the conflict at hand. When you live according to priorities, every “yes” means there will be the need for at least one “no.”

A PASTOR'S PRIORITIES

So, the key question we must resolve is *what are the priorities that will make the impact we seek?* Whether we call them Q2 tasks, the Big Rocks, or the 20% that makes an 80% difference, identifying these priorities is the first step toward reorienting our days and weeks around their potential.

In the Acts 2 Journey, we know that there are three priorities that must take the “front burner” places of the pastor’s focus. Perhaps you’re already wondering how you can squeeze any more rocks into your fishbowl—especially if they’re big ones. We’ll get to the “how” in a moment, but it is absolutely imperative that we know what it will take from us to see our church and our own efforts to lead it move to greater levels of effectiveness.

Let’s consider the three priorities suggested by these questions:

1. Where are we going?

There’s an adage that says, “We only need a leader if we’re going somewhere.” Indeed, we can stay put without much assistance. A good manager can probably help us get the most out of our current ways, but a journey with a new destination demands the presence of a leader.

At the very outset of the Acts 2 Journey, we will begin seeking that destination, and the pastor doesn’t need to find the answers on his own. As you’ll see, we’ll engage the team you’ve chosen to help with that and even with drawing the map to get there, but then someone will be called upon to lead. That’s you!

To reach that desired new day, you’ll need your best energy to announce the vision and keep it in clear focus for those you lead. You’ll consistently call your people to dream of that destination with you and give their best to pursuing it. You’ll encourage us, challenge us, direct us, and support us. Others will lend their voice to the effort, but the pastor is the chief oracle of the new vision we will pursue together.

One of the goals of the Acts 2 Journey is to engage your team and help equip them to contribute to your church’s future in greater ways than ever before, but no one else can fill the role of the vision’s primary voice for your church. Indeed, your efforts here will become some of the most important efforts you make.

2. What truth will guide us?

It will also continue to be your role to guide us into biblical truth. Like the priority expressed by the apostles in Acts 6, much of your time must be given to prayer and the proclamation of biblical truth. Others may provide pulpit support at times, but you will be the one lifting our eyes to the needs around us and teaching us the values that will shape us for the future God has placed before us.

Now, of these three assignments, it’s likely that this one is already a major part of your efforts and firmly planted on your Q1 list. So there may be “nothing new” here. Still, now that we’re going somewhere, there may need to be a greater intentionality in your presentation of God’s truth than before. Status quo may have been behind us, but now every encounter with God’s Word should feel like another step in the right direction or tool that we’ll need for the work. Tying the pulpit to the journey ahead will be essential to your efforts and we’ll help you refine such an assignment in sessions yet ahead.

3. Who will help us get there?

This third priority is likely the one that will make the greatest difference. It's clearly a Q2 item that many pastors and local churches have yet to find time to bring it into clear focus. Many of us find our schedules so busy with the enormous demands of "doing" ministry that we have little available time for the one priority that could bring our lives into balance and exponentially multiply both our capacity and our impact—*developing our people*.

Effective leadership development is the missing ingredient in thousands of congregations across our nation. We pour much of ourselves and our resources into our efforts to grow ministries, and we hope that the people involved will grow alongside. Sadly, they often don't and that failure stunts the potential growth of our ministries as well.

In truth, the call to develop people is fundamental to the unique nature of the Church itself. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (and to us) that certain leadership gifts had been placed in the Church *for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* (Eph. 4:12).

As the leaders who fill those roles today, we cannot afford to miss the critical nature of this critical assignment. Through His Church, Christ has established a very different way of doing things and means of fulfilling His mission. Remember...

The New Testament Miracle of Access

- **Remember, You're Not Moses!**

As pastors, we are not to lead like Moses did, though often our congregations may think that we should. Moses went up the mountain alone to meet with God while the people waited below for him to return with God's plan. The ancient leader stood between God and His people, a pattern that the priesthood of the Levites would ultimately serve. But this Old Testament form of leadership was not intended to continue with the dawn of the New Testament Church.

- **The Curtain Was Torn**

Through His death, Christ broke down the separation that had once required a priest. Now people were given access to God's throne themselves. The priesthood of Christ eliminated the need for human intermediaries and established a priesthood of believers that gives the local church exponential potential.

- **Your People Make Your Church's Greatest Impact**

Frankly, if Sunday is the biggest day of the week for our local congregation, we may not be fulfilling our potential as a New Testament Church. Our biggest days should be Mondays thru Saturdays when our congregations are scattered throughout our communities, impacting the lives of the people they encounter. Sunday is a day to celebrate such impact, to encourage each other, to practice our serving on one another, and to equip ourselves for another week of impact ahead.

The New Testament Promise of Power

- ***“The Spirit of the Lord came upon him”***
In the days of Moses and throughout the stories of the Old Testament era, it wasn't just the priests who enjoyed a unique relationship with God. God placed His Spirit upon key individuals in critical moments of time in order to accomplish His purpose. These judges, prophets, and even some future kings led God's people by the Spirit of God placed especially upon them for their purpose.
- ***“I will pour out my Spirit ON ALL FLESH!”***
The Church itself was launched with the promise that His power would be *poured out on all flesh!*
It's noteworthy that on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was not poured out solely on the apostles, but ***they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*** (Acts 2:4). Everyone who had gathered in that place on the Day of Pentecost received the promise and were made ready to be launched into the worldwide mission before them.
The power to fulfill Christ's mission is intended for every believer. Not only has the curtain that separated us from God's presence been torn down, but the power to fulfill Christ's purpose has been promised and will be liberally shared with every believer.
- ***“Greater things you will do...”***
When we move the priority of developing leaders into the center focus of our lens, we make it possible for the fuller picture to enlarge. Growing people nearly always will bring growth to ministries, but our efforts to grow ministries can often exhaust people rather than grow them. Intentionally developing your people for their purposes and the leaders who will help you unlocks a door that your own efforts of doing ministry will never even touch.
- **A new type of biblical leader**
This priesthood of the believer sets the Church apart for its extraordinary work. Christ intends to raise up an army of Spirit-empowered believers in every community and the task before us as pastors is to equip that army for their God-given assignment. Until we acknowledge our true roles and begin focusing our energies on developing our people for the ministries God intends for them, we will likely not discover the true potential of our congregations.

YEAH, BUT HOW?

In a future session, we will discuss the specific pieces of a strategy for developing leaders, but our first step must be to make room for this Q2 assignment as our priority. The following steps can begin to prepare you for a new future as you lead your congregation:

1. _____ OR AGONIZE.

Make a decision to become more intentional in your leadership efforts. Strengthen your organizational actions. Use tools like Covey's quadrant grid or others you find helpful in bringing useful structure to your days and weeks. Start by placing your current tasks into Covey's grid and begin identifying some of the Q3 and Q4 items that may need to go.

2. _____ DON'T STAGNATE.

Determining where we stand in relation to our goal is very important. To move to the next level of leadership we must evaluate our current situation. Here you'll want to start identifying some of the Q2 items that need more attention and effort in your ministry leadership. Ask yourself questions like these:

Requirements: WHAT IS _____ OF ME?

When you feel overwhelmed by obligations, stop and sort out your "must dos" from your "choose to dos." Our obligations in life are the biggest priorities we have, but more often than not, you will find that you really do not have to do many things. You choose to do them. Simply ask: What must I do? What is truly required of me?

Results: WHAT GIVES THE GREATEST _____?

When sorting out priorities, ask the question: What gives me the greatest results? You should spend most of your time working in the area of your greatest strength. A wise man wastes no energy on pursuits for which he is not fitted. Find your gifts and capitalize your time using it. What activities achieve the most results when you do them?

Reward: WHAT GIVES ME THE GREATEST _____?

Finally, as you sort through personal priorities, look for the element of personal fulfillment. God provides deep satisfaction when you do what He has gifted and called you to do. Nothing is easier than neglecting the things you don't want to do. As you draw closer to your God-given mission, you will experience deeper fulfillment. Where do you find your greatest rewards?

3. _____ YOUR PRIORITIES.

Control your day or your day will control you! Put those big rocks (Q2) on your calendar first. Don't fill your day completing the requests of others. The issue is not prioritizing your schedule, but scheduling your priorities.

Now we've already seen that one of your key priorities is already on your Q1 list—preparing to proclaim the biblical truth your people need. Yes, that's a big rock too, so clear the space you need for it as well, but be sure to put some time for your Q2 items on your schedule before adding any other Q1 elements.

4. ADD YOUR _____.

Now add the Q1 items—those "medium-sized" rocks—to your fishbowl. Move those urgent things that others could do to your Q3 pile for the time being. We'll deal with them shortly.

5. _____ YOUR PRIORITIES WITH NEW DECISIONS.

When you look at those Q3 items, consider a decision-making strategy developed by time management consultant Rory Vaden:

- Automate it.
Example—setting up on-line bill pay may not seem a good use of time but if you took 2 hours to do it today, but it would save you 30 minutes per month. After 4 months you will break even. Every month after that you multiply time. ROTI—return on time invested. Just like earning interest on your savings. If I can't automate it can I...
- Delegate it.
Give yourself and others permission to be a bit imperfect. Development of people today becomes delegation tomorrow. Train someone today to do what you were doing and now you have time for something else. Many resist that by saying, "it's faster for me to do it today." True, but not in the long term. Consider the 30X rule. The Training Time Calculation. You may spend up to 30 times the length of time it takes you to do a task to train someone else.
 - 5 mins/day to complete the task X30 =150 mins training time invested.
 - 5 mins/day on the task X 250 workdays/yr.=1250 mins/yr.
 - 150 mins of training is a gain of 1100 mins divided by 150 = 733% return on time invested. How much is your time worth? Based on 50 hours per week if your income is \$40k your hourly rate is \$16.67. \$75,000 hourly rate is \$31.25
- Concentrate.
Must I do this task now, or can I do this task later? If you decide that the task can be done later,
- Procrastinate, on purpose (POP).
Don't procrastinate forever, but POP it until one of the other strategies can be used to deal with it. If it remains undone for a prolonged period, maybe you can (and should) eliminate it. If you procrastinate by putting off something simply because you don't feel like doing it, that's probably not good, but POP because other priorities take precedence can be helpful.

6. LEARN HOW TO SAY _____.

When we know what our priorities are, and understand our vision and the strategies that will get us there, it becomes much easier to determine when to say "yes" and when to say "no." When a task would not further your goal, you need to just say "no," but the way you say "no" then becomes just as important as deciding to say it.

- SAY NO TO THE _____, NOT TO THE _____.
Make sure the person knows that you're not rejecting them. You're simply saying no to what they want you to do. Affirm their idea, but explain that it doesn't fit in with the things that you need to accomplish.

- RESPOND WITH THE _____ OF THE PERSON ASKING IN FOCUS.
Make sure the person knows that you're not choosing to neglect what they believe to be important, but help them see that you want to do what is truly best for them and their situation. Help them see that if you can't give them your best attention, such constraints would actually prevent you from doing the kind of work they deserve.
- DEFER _____. COME UP WITH AN _____.
Think of a way that helps the individual complete the task themselves. Express confidence in their ability to do so, or maybe help the individual find someone who can assist. This will aid the individual in learning to solve his or her own challenges.

If we are going to successfully lead change in our local church, we must fully commit ourselves to the true nature of our pastoral assignment and begin to re-prioritize our efforts to fulfill the items He has assigned to us. Yes, this is a journey—one that will likely take some time, but one we must absolutely pursue. When we give ourselves to the true priorities that Christ intends for those who lead His Church, the true potential of our congregation—and each individual within it—begins to emerge.