

# POWER OF PRIORITY SERIES: FOCUSING YOUR PASSION

**PURPOSE CONNECTS US TO OUR REASON FOR LIVING. PASSION IS THE POWER TO LIVE OUT OUR PURPOSE. PRIORITIES FOCUS OUR PASSION, AND ORDER OUR DAYS AND DECADES TO ACCOMPLISH OUR PURPOSE.**

The dictionary definition of a priority is

that which is granted or assigned precedence in time, order or importance; that which goes first and so demands our full attention.”

A distinction is in order here. There are daily priorities, and there are life-priorities. Each day brings a number of important “to do’s.” Today my priorities are to work on this blog, go to the bank, meet with a friend for lunch, clean the gutters (why be happy when you can be a homeowner) and walk four miles. Tomorrow my priorities are to mow the lawn, make four phone calls, and work on a syllabus. Daily priorities change with the day.

Life-priorities are our “to do” list for the years, decades and possibly a lifetime. Life-priorities provide a coherent framework within which to focus and organize our investment of passion’s energy. So, our life-priority is our personalized contribution to our generation, shaped and informed by our purpose, and empowered by our passion.

A life-priority is akin to what is often called a life-mission. Webster’s Dictionary defines mission as a sending out to perform a special duty.”

A life mission is a personalized, special duty that serves as one’s singular focus and unique contribution over the years and decades, and in some cases over a lifetime. Life-priorities can also be understood as life-goals, which are valued outcomes or desired states around which we structure our investment of energy and attention over long periods.

**WHATEVER WE CALL IT, A LIFE-GOAL, LIFE-MISSION OR LIFE PRIORITY, IT IS WHAT WE DO OVER THE YEARS WITH PASSION AND ENERGY TO MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE IN AREAS THAT DEEPLY MATTER TO US IN LIGHT OF OUR PURPOSE.**

Priorities focus and release the energy of passion in two ways, (1) goal striving and, (2) personalized, life-focus. The Power of Goal Striving.

Remember our telic orientation? Human beings are created to stretch and strive toward worthwhile ends. If our passion is to be expressed in constructive engagement with the world, it needs a target, a worthy goal. Daily priorities provide this. University of Chicago researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi states,

The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile."

We are at our best when we give our all in pursuit of challenging and worthy goals.

The Power of Personalized Focus. Comedienne Lily Tomlin famously quipped,

I always wanted to be somebody, but maybe I should have been a little more specific."

The French have a word for this "more specific somebody" Lilly aspired to be. She was expressing her desire to find her *métier*. The word is derived from the Latin *ministerium* meaning a minister or one who serves. My *métier* is the unique and valued service that I offer the world because of who I am and how God created me. It is that for which I am uniquely suited, the distinctive contribution I make to my generation that flows out of my deep identity.

**MY MÉTIER RESIDES AT THE INTERSECTION OF MY DEEP IDENTITY—MY CORE VALUES, LIFE EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, PERSONALITY, SKILLS, ABILITIES, GIFTING, ALL THAT MAKES ME WHO I AM—AND THE GREATEST NEEDS OF MY GENERATION.**

It is a place of convergence and unique calling. In the words of author Frederick Buechner,

"Your calling is the place where your deepest joys and the world's greatest needs cross."

**MY MÉTIER IS THE INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK THROUGH WHICH I FOCUS AND DISCIPLINE MY DAYS. IT IS ME DOING WHAT ONLY I CAN DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE THAT ONLY I CAN MAKE—MY SIGNATURE CONTRIBUTION TO MY GENERATION, AND PERHAPS BEYOND.**

A young Ted Williams walked the streets of San Diego squeezing a rubber ball to strengthen his forearms. He was likely the only person in San Diego—or the planet—doing this. Why? Because his *métier* was to express his physical talent on the baseball field and one day not only play professional baseball, but also become its greatest hitter. Novelist John Updike wrote of the Hall of Fame player that as a young boy he exhibited "the hard blue glow of high purpose." We can quibble as to whether playing baseball qualifies as "high purpose" or meets, in Beuchner's words, "the world's greatest needs"—as a baseball fan I think it might come close. But you get the idea.

Closer to Beuchner's idea of convergence is the example of David Livingstone (as in Dr. Livingstone I presume). At the age of ten, Livingstone began teaching himself foreign languages by candle light in preparation for the day he would fulfill his *métier* as a missionary-explorer. Lest I give you the impression that our *métier* becomes obvious at an early age, remember that Moses did not find his calling until the age of eighty. William Wilberforce found his—the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of Manners in Great Britain—in his 20's.

**THIS ISSUE ISN'T AGE. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE HAVE CLARITY AROUND OUR UNIQUE CALLING AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD.**

Do we know what that “something” is for which you will joyfully give everything?  
As the saying goes,

"Blessed is the man who knows why he was born."

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