

Discerning the Difference Between Urgent and Important

On a recent episode of [My Ministry Breakthrough](#), [Eastern Hills Community Church](#) Pastor Phil EuBank spoke of the maturing of his leadership as learning to discern the important from the urgent. ([You can listen to the whole podcast episode here.](#))

Understanding this difference, between what is urgent and what is important, is a crucial facet of successful pastoral leadership. Here is the simple principle:

Not everything urgent is important. Not everything important is urgent.

In the day-to-day work of pastoral leadership, most of the urgent requests, tasks or conversations are **not organizationally important**. And similarly, most of the important requests, tasks or conversations are **not immediately urgent**. Those things that are both urgent and important do exist, but they are **rare and easily recognizable**. They are moments of shepherding through sudden tragedy or celebrating in a surprising victory.

When everything is both important and urgent, ministry is hard. In fact, it is nearly impossible to sustain. This is true for you, and for your team.

It remains then that **knowing the difference between what is urgent and what is important creates margin and produces perspective for every leader in the organization.**

Failing to steward the urgent and the important can also disguise, or even mute, the work of God in a particular moment or situation. There is something to be said about not being immediately responsive to every urgent request presented to the pastor.

The best example of this comes from Jesus in John 11. Upon hearing that Lazarus was sick, Jesus' immediate response was **nothing**. He stuck around for two more days. Luke even tells us that: ***“Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So... he stayed two more days in the place where he was.”***

Brian Dembowczyk of The Gospel Project [captures Jesus' discernment](#) between the urgent and the important in this way:

“Had we written the script, we would have settled for so much less, wouldn't we have? Our version would have had Jesus rushing to Lazarus' side to heal him followed by a festive party of some sort. And we would have missed so much more that Jesus actually gave to His beloved friends. Jesus gave His friends a great gift when He allowed Lazarus to die. He gave them the gift of advancing their faith and drawing them that much closer to eternal life in Him, the Son of God.”

Even if it didn't make sense in human terms, Jesus knew the powerful difference in responding to what is urgent and what is important.

In most cases:

...urgent requests **reflect personal preference.**

...important needs **protect organizational clarity.**

...urgent challenges **request responsive appeasement.**

...important issues **require collaborative agreement.**

...urgent tasks **captivate within ministry silos.**

...important initiatives **motivate across ministry goals.**

...urgent needs **come with a moving story.**

...important moments **bring Christ-honoring glory.**

The mature pastor sees the urgent request that is not organizationally important as an opportunity to develop other leaders through empowering delegation.

The mature pastor sees the important need that is not immediately urgent as an opportunity to take the time to seek God and wise counsel through collaborative determination.

As you face another week of to-do lists, programmatic activity, and pastoral needs, what is seemingly urgent that you should hand-off, and what is truly important that you should fix your mind-on?

> [Read more from Bryan.](#)
