

**186. The Big Rocks**  
**A modified transcript**  
**By Arland Steen**

**Opening**

Today our topic is The Big Rocks. This is a word of wisdom that has the power to significantly over time improve your quality of life.

**Big Rocks Illustration**

Some years back I heard about an expert on time management who was speaking to a group of young business students, and to drive home a point, used an illustration I'm sure those students nor you will ever forget.

As this man stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers, he said, "Time for a quiz."

Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar and set it on a table in front of him.

Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

Everyone said yes.

Then he said, "Really?"

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing the pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks.

Then he smiled and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was on to him.

"Probably not," one of them answered. "Good," he replied.

And he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is the jar full?" "No!" the class shouted.

Once again, he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim.

Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!" "No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

**The Big Rocks of Life**

If you're like me, your days are like this Mason jar. They tend to fill up.

I remarked this to Barbara because I'm thinking back to when we had a much larger church, when I had two kids, and during a portion of that season I was going to The Kings College, I had an air business – all at once.

Now I'm just married, I have a much smaller church, I do wedding and because of our present situation my wife is not even with me half the time or more. Yet, I am just as busy now, it feels like it. I'm getting to bed late and I'm getting up earlier and my days are packed.

Demands, commitments, pressures, appointments and obligations all rush in to fill the hours of our days as we juggle our various roles and responsibilities.

That's why it's vital that when it comes to setting priorities, we put our "big rocks" in first. If you don't, you'll never get them in at all. What are the big rocks?

## **Devotions is a big rock**

James 4:8 (New King James): *<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

Some of us have been doing this for a long time. I've been having devotions for 53 years. I've read the Bible through ten to twelve times, the New Testament about the same and other parts hundreds or thousands of times and yet this week, something fresh came, like freshly-baked bread with butter on it. It came from heaven and it never gets old.

## **Daily Devotions is the Key to Life**

Spending quality time fellowshiping with God, praying and reading the Word is the key to walking in power. It's the key to life.

God made us to walk with Him. No matter we're doing; what we're involved in, we were made to walk with God every day. That's why I call it *Walking With Jesus Every Day Devotions*. It's the key to walking in wisdom. And, it's the key to making sound decisions. Yet it's usually one of the first things to get pushed out of our schedules. So, you have to come to the place where you see its importance and then make a quality decision that nothing is going to get in the way.

## **Disrupted Schedules**

I've discovered you have to make this decision too. We all face things that will disrupt our schedules I've learned that if my schedule is disrupted and I miss devotions not to sweat it because the same sun is going to rise the next day and I can get right back into it.

## **If you can't find the time for devotions**

I don't know how many times I've heard someone say, "Pastor, I really want to have a daily time with God but I just can't seem to find the time."

What they really mean is that they are trying to fit God into the cracks in their schedule. They haven't recognized the important truth:

If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.

## **Don't let the devil mess you up when you miss devotions**

Your time with God is one of the big rocks.

Put it first, Make it the highest priority. Everything else in your life will go more smoothly and you'll have more peace.

Don't let the devil mess you up in a related area. There have been days when I have missed devotions but the day went smooth. Then there have been days when I put my prayer, meditation and worship time in but nothing seemed to go right that day. What happened? Just forget it because you're putting the big rocks in and over time it will even out.

## **Tithing is a big rock**

Have you ever wished you could multiply your money? The wonderful news is God is able to do it.

It's all about the tithe which is the first ten-percent of all your increase (income).

This is like learning the ABC's in first grade. Tithing is like beginner's work.

## **God can multiply what you give Him**

Before God can multiply what you have, you have to give Him your tithe.

## **Illustrations of multiplication: Elijah and the widow: 1 Kings 17:1-16**

He multiplied oil and meal for a poor widow.

1 Kings 17:11 (New King James): <sup>10</sup> So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, 'Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.' <sup>11</sup> And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, 'Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' <sup>12</sup> So she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar, and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.'

That is a sad set of circumstances. That is the total vision she has for her life because of circumstances. Now, we're talking about multiplication.

1 Kings 17:13 (New King James): <sup>13</sup> And Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son.' <sup>14</sup> 'For thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.' <sup>15</sup> So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup> The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.

This little she had multiplied and never ran out. But why? Because she gave first to the Lord; in this case it happened to be a prophet of the Lord.

### **Illustration of multiplication: Jesus feeding the five thousand: John 6:1-14**

He multiplied fish and loaves on a couple of Galilean hillsides.

But when was Jesus able to multiply this little boy's lunch? After it was given to Him.

Embodied in this account are two very important principles.

1. Something must be blessed before it can be multiplied.

Romans 11:16 (New King James): <sup>16</sup> For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and, if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Before your money can multiply it has to be blessed. In other words, it has to be given to the Lord *first* because He is the only One who has the power to bless the tithe.

Hebrews 7:8 (New King James): <sup>8</sup> Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

2. Only what is given away can be multiplied.

In our example, the disciples had the fish and loaves and it had been blessed but if they had simply eaten it themselves, it would have remained five loaves and two fish and not enough to feed 20,000 with twelve baskets full to boot.

If you wait until you've written checks for all your bills to see if you have enough money left over to tithe, you never will. Putting the tithe last, you'll never become a consistent tither and experience the blessings and abundance God wants to bring you.

The most prosperous people I know write their tithe check first. They don't do it this way because they're prosperous. They're prospering because they do it this way.

They've learned the important lesson everyone who wants to experience "all sufficiency in all things," (1 Cor 9:8) should remember:

If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.

### **The difference between the tithe and an offering**

There's a difference between tithing and giving an offering. The tithe is ten-percent of all your increase – salary, gifts and so on. It's something you *return* to the Lord because God says it is His. An offering is not something you return but something you *give* to the Lord out of your heart. It is what you give beyond the first ten-percent.

Get out your tithe and offering envelopes. We have two envelopes for giving because of what I'm teaching today. Notice the wording is different. The blue envelope reads *Returning My Tithe To God*. There's only one place for you to indicate the amount because there are no choices in the amount. God set it at ten-percent.

The offering envelope reads *Giving My Offering To God*. Notice there are several options for giving an offering. You can also give different amounts.

Both the tithe and offering should be given with cheerfulness. This allows Jesus the opportunity to multiply your finances. When you give gifts to people you do it with joy because your heart is moving you to give to them. That's how it is supposed to be when returning and giving to the Lord.

One other thing, if you don't see your finances multiply it may be because those who tithe are giving little or nothing over and above the tithe.

I believe tithing is *returning* to God that which He has said is His. Returning the tithe to Him is what causes that which is ours to be blessed. You can't give that which doesn't really belong to you. The first-fruits are the Lord's. The rest is yours. It is from yours that you *give* what the Bible refers to as an offering.

Tithing isn't really giving – it's returning. It is bringing back to the Lord what is already His.

## **Church is a big rock**

Ephesians 2:19 (Living Bible): <sup>19</sup> *You are a member of God's very own family ... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.*

This verse reveals to us:

- That the church is a family

Some families are large, some are small; some are strong, some are weak. Operating as a family is a great distinction between the way they operated in the OT (laws) and the way we operate in the NT (relationships).

- That God expects you to be a member of a church family.

You can't play football if you don't belong to a team; or be a bee and not belong to a hive; you may be born but until someone takes you home, you're not part of a family. Fitting and flowing in a local church is a Scriptural principle and one of the basic ways you enable God to meet your needs. If you are not part of a local church, the walk you experience with Jesus will be marginally successful at best and you will be unable to produce lasting fruit.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (New King James): <sup>24</sup> *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,* <sup>25</sup> *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- That a Christian without a church family is an orphan.

Many American Christians are "church hoppers." Anywhere else in the world, being a believer is synonymous with being connected to a local body of believers - you rarely find a lone-ranger Christian in other countries. Many American Christians, however, hop from one church to another without any identity, accountability or commitment. This is a direct expression of America's rampant individualism. They have not been taught that the Christian life involves more than just *believing* - it also includes *belonging*. We grow in Christ by being in relationship to other Christians.

If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.

Other things will always try to keep you from placing these three big rocks into your life first.

Did Jesus ever tell His disciples to “put the big rocks in first?”

As a matter of fact, He did, in a way:

Matthew 6:33 (New King James): <sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Devotions puts the kingdom of God first in your day;

Tithing puts the kingdom of God first in your finances;

Church puts the kingdom of God first in your lifestyle.