

# Weekly Encouragement

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Ordering Our Life

By Rev. Peter Eng



*"And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14)*

John the Baptist prophesied that if they will not change, God will cut them off. They, the biological descendants of Abraham, will be replaced by new descendants of Abraham whom God himself will raise up. Scary stuff. National stuff. The people respond to John's preaching and want to know what to do to avert this disaster. But John's answer seems so personal and not at all national in scope. What can they do to avert national disaster?

Order their private life!

These people are spiritually responsive. They believe the message. They want to do something significant for God. Why should John give them prosaic teachings about ordering their private life?

In truth, John is addressing the core of Christian obedience to God. It is easier to be motivated to do the right thing when that is prominent, and visible to all. There is a place to abandon all and follow Christ, and to accomplish great things for God. But there is also a place to remain exactly where we are and order our life.

John calls the people to remain in their station. We might expect him to require the tax collectors to give up their business. We might expect him to require the soldiers (local Jewish soldiers enforcing Roman interests) to desist from soldiering for such unworthy masters and causes. These local soldiers often double as street thugs who extort. Surely, soldiering is wrong! Yet John calls on them to operate morally in their soldiering life without asking them to abandon soldiering.

There are times when it is right to rally to a larger cause. But very often, life is less dramatic—but no less meaningful. The right starting point for all of us is our private life.

As someone who served in church for the longest time, I had become so accustomed to a public faith that my private life with God was neglected. There was little time for me to exercise my faith as a private person. My persona became the priority and my person secondary. But God is patient and merciful. He teaches me that my person is more important to him than my persona.

John's teaching to the crowd, the tax collector and the soldier revolve around one theme: money. There are three areas in life that we consider private and keep our value system properly sheltered from the public: money, sex and power – the big three.

It is likely that your foibles involve money, sex or power. It is likely that you are very strong and principled in one or more of the three areas but weak in another.

And when there is a need to order your private life, you might share my weakness in procrastination. I put off ordering my private life as though it were some ideal to be achieved at a later time. In reality, ordering my private life is the urgent necessity requiring immediate attention. It will not wait another day, another hour.

My ordered private life is the framework on which God will bestow on me the blessing of service, or significance, and perhaps, even of success. God is not so cruel to me as I am to myself, wanting to hang loads on an unsound, flimsy private life.

Perhaps, you may also have some aspect of your private life that needs attention. Perhaps there is an issue with honesty or integrity concerning money. This is most often seen in the abuse of people for money, or the prioritization of money over people. Money and people are closely linked. If we take what we should not, or withhold what we ought not, that is a private life issue we need to resolve.

Sex is a powerful force. The pleasure of sex is complicated. The compelling lust of younger years transforms into a complicated desire for pleasure, for intimacy, for affirmation, and may even be linked to a power trip. We may need to resolve a private addiction to porn, or to a secret relationship, or to a world value of sex unworthy of a child of God.

In most instances, ordering our sex life is most difficult because it requires us to make public things we have kept private. While there is honor to the Christian who sets out to honor his money world (as in the case of Zacchaeus), there is shame when we set out to order our sex life (as in the woman who washed Jesus' feet). We may even need to bring someone alongside us to help us. Let not the difficulty of ordering

our sex life be the excuse to delay it any longer. Get right with God. Get help as needed.

The need to order the lust for power may seem more esoteric. Not many of us are in positions that wield power such as political office; military command; or such like. But power play is done at all levels. There is a powerful CEO who may be daily tempted to abuse his power. There is a mid-level manager who may be tempted to manipulate his subordinates for personal gain. There is a powerless person who schemes to manipulate his boss. Mind-games, our generation calls them. Perhaps that is one area we need to order.

John the Baptist responds to issues concerning the private life of money. He points his audience to ordering their private life when they expect him to give them a cause or a new goal. If we need to order our private life, that is indeed our goal. That is the urgent necessity on which all other aspects of our life hang. Return to the heart of God, repose in him, then are we ready to enter the fray of service.

**Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.**

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**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.