



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

Routine, Priority, Ritual, Habit... or Stuck?

Mary's Perspective:

Sometimes our blog topics are the result of various pieces of daily life colliding. Consider this example... I have a friend who has recently made a significant job change. At the same time, I have a daughter who is beginning her first autumn as a college graduate. In addition, Bob and I have had multiple conversations about priorities. Observing these different strands has made me ponder. There are definitely days when I feel like routine provides a comfortable structure to my days, other times when I go through the motions out of habit, and still other days when I simply feel... well, stuck. I suspect I'm not alone in this.

So why do I have those "stuck" days? Analyzing the ebb and flow of my days and my weeks got me to thinking about others in my life. I was chatting with the friend who recently made a significant job change, and we were observing that a challenge of taking on a new role is leaving the old routine and formulating the new structure. Not to belabor the point, but when you change jobs, many facets of life change. Perhaps you get up at a different time because the commute is different (or, in today's work-from-home society, the commute is walking upstairs to the spare bedroom). The new job may require different working hours or availability, so tasks like grocery shopping and laundry are shifted. The calendar looks different than it has in the past. All of that can be exciting – or unsettling.

I think about the young adults in my life who move from the structure of being students to being workers, business owners, or job seekers. Time with my daughter is always fun, but rarely predictable. Without the routine of classes, she has a lot of flexibility in how she prioritizes her time. It's a great opportunity to clarify her values and what efforts make her heart sing. Being able to sleep in or indulge in a long afternoon walk reinforces the beauty of a looser schedule, but the lack of structure affords almost too many choices. Without some rituals in life, it may be difficult to focus on specific priorities.

This calls to mind the whole concept of priorities. I suspect, off the top of your head, you could tick off several things you consider important priorities. For example, eating multiple times per day, sleeping in a regular pattern, and hugging a loved one all are so important that I would set aside other tasks to make sure I accomplish them. Washing the dishes? Necessary, yes, but I'm easily distracted and the sink at this moment likely has at least a couple of cups that need to be washed. I even know some people who can put off grocery shopping for multiple days because they find other priorities! (Guess who I'm thinking of!)



How does this all tie together? Well, if your routines are supporting your priorities, then they are fruitful. But if your routine has really become more of a mindless path, then I challenge you to pay attention! Bob and I have written about ritual and habit before. Remember that habits don't tend to require much thought, while rituals are more mindful. If you are able to accomplish your priorities because your rituals support them, then you're in a good place. For example, if it is important to you that you pray regularly, and the ritual of liturgy of the hours helps you to pray regularly, then the routine of praying liturgy of the hours supports your priorities. No-brainer, right?

It's the "stuck" feeling that could use some attention. I heard a wise person once say that if you're stuck, you're a victim. There is power in choosing. If I'm feeling stuck in my job, I don't feel empowered to make a change. If I'm feeling stuck on the current path, it makes me question the routine that is keeping me on that path. Do I crave new adventures, but get up and follow the same routine every day without shaking things up? Is carving out quality time with my spouse a priority, but my routine consistently keeps me at work long hours? Do I value getting exercise every day, but maintain the routine of staying up late at night watching mind-numbing screens, thus inhibiting my drive to get up early and hit the gym? What is really causing me to feel stuck?

It is definitely a challenge to peel back the onion and analyze the source of our discontent. (More on discontent in an upcoming blog...) Perhaps today is a good day to pick just one priority, and consider what routines or habits are supporting that priority. Do your actions encourage your values? Would some tweak to your rituals elicit a better foundation for your priority? Once you figure that out, pick another priority and play the same game.

If we take it little by little, we have the power to emerge from feeling stuck and embrace becoming the change we want to see in the world. How will you choose to start today?

Bob's Perspective:

Although they share some common elements, when considering the premises of *routine*, *priority*, *ritual*, and *habit*, it can be observed that each of them have distinct differences in function.

Routine mindfully orders events, as in a schedule. A routine generally refers to tasks or chores that are executed at a regularly scheduled time for a particular purpose. For example, "every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, I wake up at 6am to get ready for work," or "I do the laundry every Tuesday evening." Routine can also be a regular string of events, such as: "every morning I wake up, say my prayers, take my vitamins, have a bite to eat,



take a shower, get dressed and start my day." In this case, we can see that this person has created a routine based on their personal priorities.

Priority mindfully orders events by degree of importance or function. Each of us prioritizes tasks and events by what makes our lives healthy, functional, and satisfying. Some people place a higher importance on exercise as opposed to watching TV and drinking beer. They see that keeping their body fit and healthy helps them to feel good and makes life satisfying. Others prioritize watching TV and drinking beer over exercising. They feel that kicking back and relaxing after a tough day calms their mind and (again) helps them to feel good and makes life satisfying. Whatever floats your boat!

Ritual mindfully orders acts or events to be regularly repeated in a specific and precise manner. This type of order often carries contemplative or religious connotations. Some examples of ritual would include liturgically based worship services, Tai Chi (or some other martial exercises), or any event or group of events ordered in such a way and regularly repeated so as to promote harmony, physical and spiritual well-being, and peace within the practitioner's universe.

Habit is generally not a mindful act. Rather, a habit is an act or behavior that is done without much (if any) thought process at all. While a person can develop good habits (such as developing discipline), the connotation here usually takes on a less than positive meaning.

All of this being said, most people reading this have already come to the conclusion that the lines can easily become blurred between these elements. To some, a morning routine of events may actually function as a ritual, if it brings a sense of well-being, harmony, etc. – and that can be a good thing. Conversely, a ritual done mindlessly can become nothing more than a habit. Priorities, when not mindfully and periodically examined or reassessed, can also be reduced to a mere habit as well. I would suggest that when this occurs, we begin to feel stuck (or in a rut). The key to all of this, again, is mindfulness. By mindfully creating and engaging in a periodic routine that examines our priorities and rituals (ok, I know how this sounds...gee whiz!) we can reduce the incidences of stuckness in our lives. Easier said than done, but definitely well worth doing.



A final thought from Mary:

If you have STUCK with us through this whole blog, congratulations! Bob creatively found a way to use all of the key words in his closing paragraph – but I think he even more creatively illustrated that some of this can simply be a game of semantics. Sitting in my office, we just argued about whether taking a multi vitamin each morning can be a habit (good connotation, not bad) or a ritual. Who cares? The point is taking the multi can result in good things for your body. The bigger point is that being mindful can keep us on track so that our priorities and values lead the way.