

The jar of pebbles



Part 1

As Professor X entered the lecture hall, many of the students continued chatting noisily. When he reached the front of the hall, instead of calling for attention, the professor quietly placed his briefcase on the desk and then brought out from behind it a large, empty glass jar and a bag of pebbles. The room gradually fell silent as each of the students noticed what he was doing, and realized that this was no ordinary philosophy lecture. They watched curiously as he started dropping the pebbles carefully into the jar. When the glass was full of pebbles, he finally looked up at the students and asked them:

‘So, would you say that this jar is full?’

‘Yes,’ one of them answered.

‘Do you agree, Sabina?’ the professor asked.

‘Yes,’ replied Sabina.

‘Dan?’



‘Yeah, it’s full of pebbles.’

‘Mmmm, maybe, but you need to pay more attention to the actual question,’ said the professor.

He then reached behind the desk once more, and picked up a bag of dried peas. He poured the peas into the jar, and rolled the jar around. As the peas fell through the gaps between the pebbles, he continued to pour them in, until no more would fit.

‘So, would you say that the jar is full now?’ asked the professor.

‘Yes’, ‘Yup, it’s full now’, ‘Yeah’, the students answered.

‘OK ...’ said the professor.

He smiled as he took a bag of sand from behind the desk and poured it into the jar. Obviously, the sand ran through the pebbles and peas and filled all the remaining space in the jar.

‘So ..., is the jar full now?’ he asked.

‘Yes, it’s definitely full!’

‘Do you all agree?’

‘Yes!’

The class began to giggle as the professor reached behind the desk once more. This time he produced a can of beer, and the laughter increased as he opened the can and slowly poured the beer into the jar, letting it soak into the sand until no more would go in.

Part 2

When the laughter had died down, the professor began to speak.

‘OK, joking aside, I want you to see that this jar is like your life. Now, we’ve all got to do some work to earn money, but apart from that, in a free society you’re allowed to fill your life with pretty much whatever you want to.’



The pebbles represent the **big** things in your life, the really important things – your partner, your family, your friends, your health, your strongest passions. Sure, there are other things that seem really important, but the pebbles are the things which, even if you lose everything else, mean that your life can still be full and meaningful.

The peas are other things which are also important in your life – your job, your house, your car. But you don't **need** to have these things in order for life to be meaningful, and they're not as difficult to replace if you lose them. And the sand ... that's everything else in life – the small stuff. You can have great fun with it – watching TV, going on Facebook, playing video games. But, here's the lesson in this ...

If you look around, you'll notice that a lot of people's lives, and maybe your own, can easily get filled up with too much sand and too many peas. You mustn't let this happen, because if the jar's full of sand and peas, there's no space for the pebbles. You've got to keep an eye on how much time you're devoting to the small things in life, because if you're not careful, you won't have enough space for the big things that are most important in life. You should make sure you're spending enough time on the things that bring you real happiness – doing something special with your partner, playing with your children, seeing good friends. You can always **make** time to do all the other things you think you have to do, chores like cleaning the house, washing the car ... and you might decide you don't really have to do them as often as you think. So, take care of the pebbles first, and decide what your real priorities are in life – the rest is just sand.'

'What about the beer?' asked Kirsty ...