

# Better Priorities

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, January 12th, 2025. 2025, yikes, right? You still writing it wrong on your checks, if you write checks? I remember doing that, oh, cross it off, oh, and you have to initial it, ugh.

So my thanks to Paul for providing his thought-provoking sermons while I was away. I hope you were challenged by them. I listened to them and enjoyed them. And you know, it didn't strike me until this week as I was thinking about it, but one of Paul's sermons was titled, The Common Man. And you remember it, probably. But I would actually say that Paul Hay is pretty uncommon. Is that fair? He's an uncommon man. So it's good to be back with you this morning.

I don't know about you, but aside from the fact that I work here, I'm your pastor, I am here today to be encouraged by my brothers and sisters. I'm here to learn more about the great love that God has for us.

And as you know, maybe you're still wrapping your head around this idea, we've just entered a brand new year, haven't we? And so I believe this is the perfect time to look back on the past and ask ourselves what we've learned from it, what we can learn from it.

[ 1 : 15 ] And it's also the perfect time to look ahead. And I prayed about that a minute ago. To ask ourselves if we're living the kind of lives that God wants for us, or if we could do better.

And that's our sermon series. So I read a quote from a well-known theologian and preacher named Charles Spurgeon, maybe you know his name, over my vacation.

And it really struck me. Spurgeon suggested that at the start of every new year, followers of Jesus should ask themselves, here it is, am I in all respects more like my master Jesus than I was a year ago?

That's challenging, right? It's pretty convicting. So I may unpack that essential concept for us more in the weeks ahead. I was talking to somebody this morning, and I don't name names, and they said, so Pastor Kent, you plan ahead.

And I said, oh, do I? So you plan ahead a lot, and you do series and things like that, and that was new to them. And so for them, they said, are you prompted by the Holy Spirit ever?

[ 2 : 26 ] Does the Spirit ever go, mm, not that, this. And do I get spiritually derailed onto a different line of thinking or thought or whatever?

And I said, I absolutely do. So don't ever think that when I'm in a series, if God suddenly says to me, mm, no, that's not what I have for you to share today, I won't.

I'll do whatever he is leading me in, or I'll weave it in so that you don't even realize I changed it. Ha ha. Sneaky. So the intent of me sharing this idea, this idea of, are we more like Jesus than we were a year ago, it's not to make us feel guilty.

Can you breathe this sigh of relief? It's not to make us feel like we failed. I'm not saying, oh, you're not better than you were a year ago. Tsk, tsk, tsk. But it's to encourage us to keep running this race that we're on, to keep seeking to deepen our relationship with God and his word.

So with this in mind, we are starting this new sermon series this morning that's appropriately titled, Better. Better. And through this series, we're going to look at four different areas of our lives where we may be able to make some simple changes, and we'll explore this together, simple changes to better experience God's fullness and blessing in our lives.

[ 3 : 52 ] Is that something that you would like? So we'll be looking at, over the course of the next four weeks, starting today, our priorities, our relationships, our choices, and then finally, our witness.

Better priorities. So, it's sermon illustration time. All of us have lots of little things in our lives that we like to fill up our time with, right?

So for me, it's hockey, reading, love listening to music every day. We go for dinner, go to a movie. There's hobbies that I have. So these things take up a lot of time, potentially, right? So now, what if I told you there are bigger priorities in your life that you want to focus on? And this is not a surprise. So let's say, I don't know, your spiritual growth, your church life is one. Your job is pretty important, if you have one.

[ 4 : 57 ] Family, relationships, marriage, that kind of thing. What are some other things? Let's see. Providing for your needs.

So there's lots of big priorities in our lives that take up space. And so, you can't even kind of really fit the bigger things in all the time when you put the smaller priorities first, right?

And it's like a meal when you have children eat your vegetables and then you can have dessert. No, I want dessert first and then vegetables later.

So, but, what if we didn't do it that way? We took out our big priorities, took them out, and put our big priorities first.

Place them in our time and in our schedule first. All the things that we needed to do, have to do, and then, hmm, what if then we added our little priorities after.

[ 6 : 09 ] The likes, oh look, there's still room left over. So, by ordering our priorities, big priorities first, I'm just going to disappear for a second, that's a great way to start.

Good illustration? Maybe I'll use it again, maybe I won't. So, there isn't much room once you add your little priorities, it's not much room left to add your important things after the fact.

The goal is to reverse that order and focus on your big priorities first, because with the large priorities placed, there's still room, as we saw there, for the small ones to fit in and around and still have room left over.

And the Bible speaks of this need to order our lives well. Because God knows that without keeping the main thing as the main thing, we tend to get lost in the lesser things.

Right? We get wrapped up in those things. And as we begin this new year, we must take an honest look at our lives and consider what priorities we have to put first.

[ 7 : 18 ] What are the things that matter most? Well, Jesus was very good at this. So, the Sermon on the Mount is likely Jesus' most famous sermon.

Would you agree with that? It certainly includes his most well-known and most familiar teaching. Even people who are not followers of Christ, and I've said this before over the years, they are familiar with lots of the teaching that's included in the Sermon on the Mount.

These are familiar words and themes. And in Matthew 6, Jesus turns to preaching and teaching about how we have the tendency to worry about things in our lives.

Do you worry about your life? So, maybe some of you can relate to this right now. I know I can sometimes. We're worried about paying the bills. We're worried about our children, little ones, big ones.

We're worried about our marriage or our relationships and our lives. And we may even be worried about what this new year holds for us, what lies ahead, because we are generally people who are afraid of what?

[ 8 : 25 ] The unknown. Ooh. It makes our knees knock. It makes our palms sweat. And Jesus states that trusting the Father is the only way to keep us from being paralyzed by anxiety.

He gives us the answer to worry in Matthew 6.33. And you know it, but you can look it up. Matthew 6.33, which says, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things, everything else, all our little priorities, will be given to you as well.

Jesus says, seek the Father and his will first. We must seek God first. Do you hear that language of priority? Jesus tells us that when we seek after, when we look for a life that pleases God, all the things that we have the tendency to worry about will, often miraculously, fall into place, will fall into the proper order.

So let's look at what this might look like in a practical way in our daily lives. When it comes to worries in our marriages, in our relationships, when we put Jesus first, we just might mature into more gracious, loving, and kind spouses, uncles, aunts, friends, grandchildren.

All those relationships, when we focus on Jesus first, tend to align better. and that may turn into, hopefully, a positive relationship.

[ 10 : 02 ] When it comes to our finances, perhaps focusing on God first may reveal to us how we spend on things that really don't matter.

When it comes to our children, young or old, we may find that by putting God first, it may make us more patient and understanding with them.

Does that sound possible? So as we think about these priorities, the question is, are you seeking after God? Is God at the center of all these things in your life?

Or, are you seeking after the smaller stones that don't matter as much? Is your attention and energy divided somehow? Someone once asked legendary coach Tom Landry, and if you're not a football person, I'm not really a football person, but I know who Tom Landry is.

Famous football coach. Someone asked him why he had been so successful as a coach. And Landry responded, well, in 1958, I did something everyone who has been successful must do.

[ 11 : 13 ] I determined my priorities for my life. God, family, and then football. Tom Landry got it right.

He knew that to succeed in our family, to succeed in our careers, in other areas of our lives, we must seek God first. How do we seek God?

What does that look like? Well, we seek Him. This shouldn't be a surprise. We seek Him like we seek anything else. We must spend time and energy pursuing Him.

God is not going anywhere. He never has. He is there when we seek Him. But seeking God takes time. It's not a sprint.

It's a marathon. Right? So we can't say, Lord, I want to be close to you. Boom, it's done. Like any relationship, we must invest time. We also seek God by knowing what it is that we're looking for.

[ 12 : 12 ] That's always a good place to start, right? When you're looking for something, what are you looking for that will help you prioritize? Because without knowing what we're looking for, will you ever know when you found it?

When I seek God, I'm looking to do things in my life that shape me into someone who looks more and more like Jesus Christ.

Loving, courageous, sacrificial. That's Jesus. The only way that we make the effort to seek God first is by deciding to love him more than anything else.

Seems simple, right? Should be easy? Is it easy? No, not usually. And it shouldn't surprise us at all that Jesus speaks to this.

Jesus makes this clear. In fact, there's a moment in the Gospels when the Pharisees and Sadducees try to trap Jesus by asking him a question about his priorities.

[ 13 : 19 ] As he travels along, he's cornered by a lawyer. Lawyers corner people, I can say that because I have a friend who's a lawyer. Asked him a tough question, right? And you probably know the question.

Here, let's hear the interaction, Matthew 23 verses 34 to 40. Matthew 22 verses 34 to 40. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question. Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the law? Here's the trap. Jesus replied, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, Jesus said. Love your neighbor as yourself. All of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

So did you catch that question that the man asked Jesus? He says, what is the greatest commandment? Just like the man who says, Lord, what must I do to enter the kingdom of heaven?

[ 14 : 29 ] Oh, that's easy. Sell everything you have. So this man could have easily asked Jesus, Jesus, what should I have as my greatest priority? That's really kind of what he's asking, but with his own agenda.

So Jesus quotes a command from the Old Testament when he tells the man to love God with all his heart and soul and mind. And this was Jesus' way of telling him to love God with everything, with everything he has, everything he is.

Love God. So, how can you tell when you love something or someone? children? Well, the easiest way probably to tell is that you talk about them all the time.

You talk about it all the time if it's a thing. Because they're always on your heart and in your mind.

When a couple falls in love, it can sometimes be a wee bit sickening how much they talk about each other, right?

And trust me, I have been there, I've been the culprit, I've been the recipient of eye rolls. And when someone really loves their sports team, and they bring it up all the time, right?

[ 15 : 40 ] They want to talk about it, they get excited about it, and I am there too. So, but the same thing should be true of us if God is truly our priority in our lives.

We're here this morning because God is a priority to us. Is he the priority for us? When we love God with all that we have, we should not be able to stop talking about him.

Do you talk about God all the time to the point where people roll their eyes? God should be a regular topic of our conversations. We should look for reasons to bring him up.

Maybe it makes people uncomfortable. That's okay. Maybe it makes you seem like a weirdo. That's okay. Because if God is your priority, people should be hearing about it.

So, sometimes sermon illustrations can be tricky when the subject is present. She is not now. I wasn't sure if she would be. So, you can tell her that I said all this. It's fine.

[ 16 : 45 ] I love Michelle with my whole heart. I love to talk to her. I love to brag about her. I'm always looking for reasons to bring her up, to pump her tires, as they say, and make her encouraged and feel good.

And because I love her and we're a team, I also want to do everything I can to meet her needs and make her life easier and more enjoyable.

And I would say this in front of her and she would agree. This is what I try to do. And this stems back to some advice my dad gave me many, many, many, many, many, many years ago before I ever got married.

He said, take care of the other person's needs and you will never want for anything in your marriage. And pretty good advice.

Seems to be working. So my love for Michelle makes everything that I do in life more meaningful because generally speaking, things that I do have her in mind.

[ 17 : 46 ] So I look for things that I can do to strengthen the love that we share rather than hindering it. I recognize when I'm being selfish and I try not to be selfish.

Sometimes it's unavoidable, right? Loving God with all our heart and soul and mind, as scripture just told us, helps us realize that every part of our life is incredibly meaningful.

How we live our lives must reflect how we love God. Right? Does that make sense? This means that how we handle our career is meaningful because it says something about our relationship with Jesus, believe it or not.

This means that how we parent our children reflects the state of our relationship to our heavenly father. Our love for God should be the motivation and inspiration we have every day, all year long. we want to look back, I want to and I hope you do too, I want to look back 365 and change-ish days from now and recognize all the ways that I, that you, love God with all that we have.

[ 19 : 08 ] This is what I've found, that God actually meets our needs in our lives most fully when we prioritize his needs in our hearts.

That is the result of love. When you love someone, you want to care for them, you want to build relationship with them, you want to meet their needs.

So notice how Jesus ends this conversation that he has. He tells the man that the first and greatest commandment is to what? Love God.

But the second, Jesus said, is just like it. We are to love our neighbor. So it seems that unless we get loving God right first, we have no hope of loving our neighbor well.

Does that make sense? God clearly lays out the priority for us in that passage. And he even says in verse 40, all of the laws and prophets depend on getting these first two right.

[ 20 : 11 ] All these things will be added to you. Because loving God well, loving our neighbors well, are the big rocks. The rest are small stones.

And we cannot get them out of order or our lives will feel disordered. Focus on the eternal. So one easy way to know where to put our energies and resources this year is by asking this simple question.

is this thing temporary or eternal? To spend our time focusing on serving others means that we are focusing on their eternal souls.

Spending our time on focusing on temporary things means we're focusing on things that we'll never be able to take with us in the first place. Which one is better?

I'm a pastor, you know what I'm going to say. I would argue it's the eternal, right? The Apostle Paul understood this important distinction when he wrote to the early church in Corinth.

[ 21 : 24 ] He says in 2 Corinthians 4.18, you can look it up or I will read it for us. 2 Corinthians 4.18, So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen since what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.

The things that we can see will pass away one day including 100% of us. But the things that are unseen will go on forever.

In my experience, it's the things that are seen that are often easiest to spend our time and attention on, right? Because why? They're more obvious to us.

They're more tangible. They're instant gratification things generally. So, that means it will take a more intentional effort for us to give ourselves over to the things of God.

And by doing that we'll ensure that we're living for the more permanent, for the more eternal things of the world and of our lives. So, as we go through this series and get into a new year, I want to encourage you to think about these things.

[ 22 : 37 ] I want you to bring them to God in prayer. So, these are the things to think and pray about as you see on that slide. What in your life could be reordered?

And I don't mean from Amazon. What in your life could be reprioritized? Could be recognized as a big stone that needs to be moved to the top.

Make sure that the things that receive your time, your energy, your attention, your affection, are the things that will last. Take a moment to pray and ask God to show you the big rocks in your life.

And help you to place those on your heart and on your schedule first. first. The little stones need to come next. And when you prioritize the big things first, huh, there always seems to be room for the secondary.

As we've been reminded this morning, if our priorities are centered around God, everything, my friends, everything has a way of working out.

[ 23 : 49 ] Amen.