

# **Better Priorities**

## **Better sermon series**

### **by Chris Famisaran**

Thank you, Ben. Let's give a hand to our band. I love our worship team. Thank you so much for all that you do. And also, of our many volunteers. Thank you as well. From our Sabbath school teachers, to our greeters, our deacons, our elders, and everybody else. Thank you for making this big ship continue to move forward.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, as we go forth into a new year, Lord, and as we tackle this new series called Better, be with us in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. By a show of hands, how many are so grateful that 2023 is done and dusted and goodbye, good riddance? Okay. We have a few. How many of you are longing for the past of, "Oh, I didn't get enough time in 2023?" One, two, three. All right. You know, it's a new year, time of anticipation. What does 2024 have in store for us? Last couple of years, I've kind of wondered, this is going to be the year. This is going to be awesome and great. And then the next thing you know, it just somehow gets out of control. Is that fair to say? Amen. All right. Lord, be with us. Which is true.

So today we're starting a new sermon series called Better. And I'm gonna be truthfully honest, I stole this idea from somebody else, okay? So I did not, the Lord did not say, well maybe the Lord impressed upon me upon this sermon, but yes, so I had some help on this as well. So I just wanna give credit to where it's due, okay? But better, when we think of better, we think, "Oh, well pastor, that sounds kinda legalistic." But truthfully, there are some things that we can do in our lives that we can to be better and be prioritized, be proactive, in order that we may know and seek God and know God better. And the truth is when God is at the center of our lives, somehow our lives are better. When we put priorities on ourselves and the things around us and what we want, sometimes life gets a little upside down. We may sometimes feel ourselves to get anxious and wondering what's gonna happen, but God is good. God is faithful.

Ron Fonir, I don't know if he's still the editor, director of the National Journal, but I remember reading a story many years ago. He had the wonderful opportunity to interview the last several presidents. One of them, George W. Bush, left a very,

very big impression upon him. And so at the time, well, George Bush would remember not just his staff people's names, but the families of the staff. He's always inquiring, getting to know who he was working with, and not just knowing them, but knowing who they are, what made them tick, and who were the priorities in their lives. And so one time, before even George W. Bush was even president, this was when he was still governor in Texas, he was always insistent that, "Hey, when we have interviews, let's get to the point, but also your families are important." He, in the summer of 1999, Fonir was able to schedule an uninterrupted interview in 1999 during the summer. So Bush calls Fonir, but then in the middle of the conversation, he interrupts Fonir. Actually, it was one of the first questions that, "What's all that noise in the background, Fonir?" Fonir responds, "I'm at the pool with my kid's governor," to which then, Governor Bush replies, "Then what are you doing answering your phone right now?" Well, the interview ended quickly, was quickly rescheduled. But it's interesting that to see that the priorities of Governor Bush at the time, recognized that Fonir had kids at home who were swimming. My first thought was who's watching those kids too. As a lifeguard it's like, ah, who's watching the kids. But more importantly, Governor Bush understood the time that this was an opportunity for him to be able to spend time, to have priorities.

Today we're gonna be talking more specifically about priorities. What are the biggest priorities in your life? Most important, middle, and then on the lower end. Today I'd like to go to a verse. Matthew chapter six, verse 33. Matthew chapter six, verse 33. All right, there are some Bibles in front of you as well. If you don't have a Bible and you're watching online, you can go ahead and quickly pause, go to the text. But I'd like to read this text here. I've lost a step when it comes to finding verses. I used to be much faster. All right, Matthew chapter 6 verse 33. All right, we all there? Okay, and to give broader context, this is when Jesus is talking about don't worry. Okay, Verse 33: "But seek first his what? His kingdom and his righteousness and all of these things will be given to you as well." What's interesting about this verse number one this idea of kingdom when we think of God's kingdom when you think of kingdom do you think of present tense as in now or future Somebody already gave the answer away it's both But it's true and often times I think especially growing up I when I heard the kingdom of God I always thought of heaven and when God would and Jesus, you know would take

us all to be home and to live in his kingdom But as I came to know the book of Matthew and especially in Matthew's context The kingdom is not just something that we're looking to To the future, but the kingdom is now How are we living our lives are we living our lives as we would want to be living in heaven or The way that we're living our lives would that be acceptable to heaven And it really brings us into perspective what is God calling us to but seek first His kingdom and his righteousness The things that we're doing are we seeking God are we pursuing God? Right now are we pursuing God? I was originally in a right seeking But it just seems too passive to me pursuing as it's getting up and back and marching forward. Are we going after? Are we trying to find, look for, pursuing God? And there's many ways that we could do that. Obviously the first one is through prayer. We can talk to God anytime. We can talk to God as we're praying to, as we're driving to our next destination. Oftentimes, you know, when I leave my house to when I get to the church, sometimes I'll just be praying for people on the road. When I look around and I see people as they're driving, some people, they're just la-de-da-de-da on their way to their next destination. Some of them, you could tell they're anxious. Some, they may not say it, but you can see their body language, they're sad. And I'll just randomly pray for these people. As I'm driving by, I see people on the street just walking as well. Why not pray for them? But more importantly as well, as we're, as we're moving forward, it's always good. Are we not only praying and seeking the Lord out, but are we getting to know as we seek to pursue God? How are we getting to God? How are we getting to know God better? Another way of doing that is through God's word. Understanding because God reveals God's love and character and personality to us through the scriptures. There's so many stories of how God has done wonderful things in people's lives. And I also look to the Bible because it, I can identify with so many characters who, whether it was because of their unbelief or how they somehow misbehaved, you can identify with people and yet God still used them or worked through them and worked in their lives and maybe even delivered them from some great problem.

Now, the Sermon on the Mount as well is filled with so much wisdom on how we can improve our lives and live our lives better. Never worry about bills. How am I going to pay the rent this month, the mortgage? Oh, I remember this last summer. Highest electrical bill I've ever received. And to put it in context, we live in a town home. So it's not as high, but still, you know, three months of that, you're like,

mm-hmm. We didn't budget for this. We thought we had a good budget, but no. You know, are you worried about how this new year is going to unfold? And the truth is we have to trust the Lord, seek God. And if we're faithful and as we seek God, God will open doors and provide a way.

Now, let's go to another, another, Matthew 22, verses 34 through 40. Matthew 22, verses 34 through 40. So just flip a couple chapters over to the right. And here it's another story. We've talked about this before, but it's very important. So as we seek God, this is part of the seeking. We all there? Okay, let's go to verse 34 and we'll read through 40. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees because they were so sad, you see? Some of you will get that. The Pharisees got together and one of them, an expert in the law tested him with this question. Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? And Jesus replied, love the Lord your God with all of your what? Your heart with all of your soul. And with all of your mind, this is the first and greatest commandment. And then he follows up with the second one. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

So as you read this at first glance, you think, okay, this is really great. But then when you start to dig down a little deeper, okay? So the Pharisees realized that the Sadducees got shut out by Jesus or not shut out, but he silenced them. And then they thought, well, let's send somebody in to ask a very, very strongly worded question. Maybe hopefully, just hopefully, we'll stump him. And the question is teacher, what is the greatest? What if there's one thing I need to know? What is it? What is the greatest commandment in the law? And it's interesting how he says an expert in the law, if he's an expert, should he not know this question? He's testing him. All eyes are on Jesus wondering, just wondering, what is he going to say? And Jesus replies with something that they already should have known. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind. Three aspects of our lives, the heart deep down, which helps propel us to move forward. Our soul and our mind, who we are and what shapes us. The mind, depending on what you feed your mind, for instance. And I'm not just talking literally, but also like what you see, what you hear. These things affect how we think. Out of the mind come thoughts, which lead to, maybe not questions, but things we say. And what we say regularly over time, it's who we are. Who we become?

What are you spending your most time on in your daily lives? Is God even a factor in your life? And I hope and pray so. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind. And the second part is, love your neighbor as yourself. When you love your neighbor, as you treat them, are you treating them as you would treat yourself? Do you treat your neighbors with love and acceptance or defiance, with anger? Maybe they vex you. And you want to respond with something that is not necessarily what I think God would approve. And it's interesting how we think about how we treat our neighbors and we ask ourselves, how do we treat ourselves? Would God talk to us the way that we talk to ourselves? Food for thought.

And when you think about these two passages, they really sum up something that was super profound. We sometimes think, "Oh, this set of principles is out to ruin and make our lives horrible," especially as a child, okay? And what am I talking about? I'm talking about the 10 commandments, okay? Ten principles of life that will help to better your life.

When you think about the 10 commandments, is that something that comes up in your mind, or do you feel resentment and pressure and control? If we're faithful to God's commands, to love God with everything, and to not cheat on our spouse, to tell the truth, to not try to murder and hurt other people, are our lives going to be better? Absolutely.

So as we seek, as we pursue God, pursue and love God with everything, and love our neighbor as ourselves. As it says in verse 40, all of the law, all of the teachings, and everything that the prophet said, this is summing up what they have said. So seek God.

As we seek God, you know, when it comes to our marriages, are we worried about anything? As we place God first in our lives, is that going to help or hinder our marriage? If we're faithful to God and learning how to be a better loving, caring spouse, is that not going to help us in our marriage? Okay.

When it comes to finances, when we try to put that budget together, we may realize pretty quickly that the things that my debit card or the cash or my credit

card, as I'm swiping or as I'm paying the cash here, what am I focusing on? Is it honoring God or is it honoring what I want?

When it comes to our children, okay, as parents, we find that when we put God first, it helps us to become more patient and nurturing and helps us to better understand our kids. So as you seek, as you pursue God, is God the foundation? Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. Our love for God will inform how we see and move in this world.

And people will notice. People will see, "Hmm, that person is different. Why is this person at peace? Or even when things are challenging, they're still faithful. Why?" Well, let's go ahead and continue. Love God with everything that you have. Okay, love God with everything that you have. Because if we truly love God, God will place everything; God will help us to move forward and to have a better perspective.

Now, let's go ahead and go to 2 Corinthians 4, verse 18. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 18. Okay, are we all there? All right, so it says, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen." That's faith, amen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is not. My question for you, are your eyes on the prize?

As we move forward in life, anything that you want to accomplish, okay? You have to know where you're going and why you're doing it. Otherwise, is it going to be easy to accomplish that task? Yeah, if it's easy, but if it's something hard, if you want to climb Mount Everest, you see Mount Everest. Can you just go and climb Mount Everest? Not if you've done any significant climbing. So sometimes it takes years; at least you have to dedicate at least a year of your life just to accomplish one objective. And even when, let's say you get in shape and you get to base camp and you look up, you see the Lhotse face and you see, you're on the south side of the mountain, you see this beautiful mountain. You can't just walk up it, why? High altitude, you have to build up your blood cells and everything to be able to adjust, to make sure that you have enough air. And even as you go up higher and higher, we're not meant to live up there. You lose energy, you lose your strength. It takes time, it takes intentionality. You have to eat right, you have to train right. You have to make sure you get proper rest, and you have to listen to your body. And then you take your first load to camp one, come back down, go back up to camp two, three, and I think there's usually four camps. And then just

after maybe a month of acclimatizing, you go up to camp four. And then you have to leave usually around one or two o'clock in the morning, hopefully to get there by 2 p.m. Because if you're not up there by 2 p.m., that's the hard and fast rule, you should turn around. And as you're getting up there as well, sometimes you may carry oxygen, and those who are the strongest of the strongest say, "I don't need oxygen." And it's been accomplished. But it takes intentionality. You have to know why you're training. You can't just wake up and say, "Hey, I'm gonna eat a healthy breakfast, and then I'm gonna go climb Mount Everest." Not only that, it is freezing up there. Burr. I thought that would be awesome. And then I realized once I started to, once I lived in cold, cold, real cold, I realized as much as I love the mountains, I don't think I could ever do that now. I don't want to lose my fingers or toes.

Intentionality, taking time to train for Mount Everest is gonna require discipline to wake up, to get your rest, to eat right, and to put the time in of walking, and not just walking, but walking up steep things, stairs. And sometimes that can be monotonous. Like people who train for Mount Everest, for instance, they'll find a stadium and they'll walk up the stairs. How boring, isn't it, right?

But at the same time too, being intentional, being proactive will help us to be better prepared to take on the own Mount Everest of our lives. We're being able to see what we're striving for, accomplishing the race, the journey, is what helps us to stay on track. And sometimes things will happen, and we don't understand why things happen, but if we're faithful and we stick to the process, and if we truly trust God, God will be able to open doors, provide ways to help us accomplish what God has called us to do.

Tim Hatchel, once wrote many years ago, I think it was in an outside magazine. He wrote about tree skiing. You know how people will just ski through trees or snowboard? I had an uncle who literally broke his leg skiing, and I thought, I don't ever wanna do that. Now that I know how to snowboard, it's kind of intriguing. So be careful. As you go through the trees, you can't be looking at the trees, okay? That seems kind of backward, but the truth is, as you're skiing, the key of course is not hitting the trees. You have to see through the trees. You have to look forward and see where are you headed? And as you head, your eyes literally help train you to see and to move around the trees.

In the Cathedral of Milan, there are three inscriptions on the arches. One over one carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath is a legend. It says, "All that which pleases is but for a moment." Things here on earth are not going to last forever. And then on, there's a sculpted cross, and there are the words, "All that which troubles us is but for a moment." This pain in everything is not going to last forever. And then under the great central entrance to the main aisle is this inscription. The only, that only is important, which is eternal. The thing that is most important is eternal. And when we take these three things, it helps us to put in perspective that we don't have to be worried. We don't have to be worried about the challenges that are happening. "Oh, I got a flat tire or the radiator went out." Yes, that may be expensive, but it doesn't have to define your existence. Amen.

Now, sometimes we wonder, things just are not going right. And maybe perhaps maybe we need to be proactive. How do you prioritize things? One of the things that I've learned over the years: the day before or the night before your next big day, write down maybe the three biggest things you have to accomplish today. And if you don't accomplish all three, maybe you get two or maybe even just one. There's still the next day to get things done. Amen.

Be proactive, think about maybe highlight. What is most important? What's a medium importance and what I can get done that I can get to that later in the week? Prioritize; it takes intentionality. Okay, you'll prioritize and get things done, fulfill what is most important to you. As well, you'll focus on what's most important to you.

One of the things that I have a question for y'all is how are you going to minister for the Lord this year? If there's a passion in your heart for something that you want to share with others, and mine's like, for instance, photography ministry would love to have a photographer to help document our church life here. If you'd like to serve as a deacon or a deacon, sorry, a deaconess, just a deacon. We all have our deacons here. If there's a ministry that you want to start or to join in 2024, please come talk to one of us who are leaders in the church, and we'd love to be able to help you empower you and educate and equip you on that ministry. As we land the plane, as we reflect this week, are there any areas of your life that

need to be reprioritized? In your relationship with God, is God even a priority in your life? And I'm not saying that you have to now just turn your whole world upside down. It might be, "Hey, I'd like to learn how to pray better." And that might start out with a 30-second prayer, maybe three minutes. And as you build up and you grow, pretty soon you're gonna realize, when did I stop praying? Because we should always be in prayer, amen?

Now, when you're driving, please keep your eyes open. You don't want to cause an accident. But in the areas of your life as well, other areas of your life, what's most important to you? And as you think about that, take time again to reflect, prioritize, where you can make positive changes in your life, but then actually go do it. Then take action; that's the key word, action. Don't just reflect and say, "Oh, it would be great if I could do this. It would be great if I could have this." Talk is talk, thought is thought. It takes intentionality. And it means you're gonna have to prioritize and maybe even reprioritize. But the biggest thing is number one, may God be the biggest priority in your life. Next to that, your spouse and your family and your friends and those around you and the things that God has called you to pursue in this wonderful great journey of life.

So may God bless you. Think about that. Reflect on it. Marinate. And then maybe, just maybe, prioritize right down what you feel God has impressed upon you to go forth and do and accomplish in 2024.

Father in heaven, Lord, it's a fresh start. May you lead and guide us. Above all, God, may you be our biggest priority. But other areas of our life, Lord, perhaps we are sometimes maybe even floundering. Help us to prioritize the things that are most important to you to help us to accomplish them. That we may grow and be better faithful stewards for you. And above all, Lord, may Downey church as we go forth, as we walk on Lakewood and as we go throughout different parts of the city and also where we live, where we work, where we go to school and the things where we interact. Lord, help us to be faithful witnesses for you. And always, Lord, constantly be in our hearts. Help us to love you with everything that we got and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In Jesus' name, everybody said amen.

Grace and peace, everyone.