But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Six Symptoms of Misplaced Priorities:

1. **Busyness** - The Activity Trap.

2. **Undue** stress and pressure.

3. Low grade **nagging guilt**.

4. **Financial** debt.

5. **Prayer-lessness** - "Leakage" in your devotional life.

6. **Excessive** behavior.
### An Overview of Biblical Priorities:

"The Twin Epistles"

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### Two Words Hold the Keys to Enjoying the Peace and Power Of a Prioritized Life:

**A. Your time**

10 The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:10-12 (NIV)

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NASB)
Application:

1. Give your first and best time to God.

2. 2PROAPT = 20 minutes a day
   - Pray
   - Preview
   - Read
   - Observe
   - Apply
   - Pray
   - Tell

3. New Christian = Mark (less than a chapter a day)
   Older Christian = James (2-3 paragraph max. a day)

B. Your money

   “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

   Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV)

Application: Four Commitments

1. Give the first portion of each paycheck to God.

2. Pay your bills next.

3. Live on the rest.

4. Get out of debt.
Discussion Questions:

1. What does the word “priority” mean? Why is it so important that we live a prioritized life?

2. What are some of the negative consequences of failing to live by God’s priorities? Which of the six symptoms could you identify with most closely?

3. Whose “best interest” does God have in mind when He teaches us to live according to Biblical priorities?

4. Why does our use of time and money most accurately reflect our real priorities?

5. Lasting change demands deep, prolonged thinking. When this week will you set aside some significant time to think through and discuss your priorities with a close friend?
Introduction:

**Three Reasons Why Most of Us Live With Two Sets of Priorities:**

1. **We are deceived.** We honestly don't see the discrepancy between what we think and say, and how we actually live.

2. **We are afraid.** Though we long to put "first things first," we simply do not believe that God will supply our needs if we give Him the first portion of our time, our lives, and our money.

3. **We have failed repeatedly.** Our sincere and honest efforts to put "first things first" in the past lasted only a short time and ended with frustration and disillusionment with ourselves.
So, what’s the “Missing Ingredient” to Living Out Our Priorities?

- It’s a rarely used word.
- It’s a fruit of the Spirit.
- It comes to us by grace.
- We admire it in others.
- It’s essential for putting "first things first."

❖ The Word = discipline / self control

*Definition*: Discipline is doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

- Discipline is the Spirit-empowered ability given by God's grace that allows us to say "no" to the quick fix and the easy road, and say "yes" to the harder but better way. Titus 2:11-12

- Discipline is a by-product of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Galatians 5:22-23

- We are commanded to live disciplined lives. 2 Peter 1:6

- Discipline is a process that is learned over time through training.

The *Dynamics of Biblical Discipline Can Be Summed Up in 2 Words*: delayed gratification

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

Hebrews 12:11 (NASB)
The Method of Developing Biblical Discipline Can Be Summed Up in 3 Words: **advance decision-making.**

- The Biblical Example – the Apostle Paul

  24Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but {only} one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.  25And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then {do it} to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.  26Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

  1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NASB)

- How Does It Work?

1. Advanced Decision Making **begins** with **clear-cut objectives**.

2. Advanced Decision Making is **reinforced** by **rewarding along the way**.

3. Advanced Decision Making becomes a personal **conviction** when you **ponder** the **consequences**.
Discussion Questions:

1. What does living by “two sets” of priorities produce in our emotional and spiritual lives?

2. List two common reasons why we tend to avoid dealing deeply with priority issues even when we know it’s important.

3. Define discipline. How does this definition differ from your thinking about “discipline” in the past? Why is it critical to see discipline in a positive light?

4. Share some specific examples of how “advanced decision-making” has helped you become disciplined. How does it make you feel when you’re disciplined?

5. Share one specific area (time, money, or relationships) that you believe God wants you to prioritize according to His design. Discuss what delayed gratification looks like and what advanced decision you will need to make.
As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

The Problem: Many start well, but few finish well.

The Answer: Biblical Accountability

- **Definition:** Biblical Accountability is enlisting the support of those who love me to help me keep my commitments to God.

- **Its Power:**

  9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

  Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)
The Need: Why accountability is essential for spiritual success

Five Reasons:

1. Because we never outgrow the need for personal accountability.

>Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NASB)

2. Because past successes are no guarantee of future faithfulness.

>For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 (NASB)
3. Because we constantly underestimate the power of our own sinful passions.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat to eat and drink and stood to play.” Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

1 Corinthians 10:6-11 (NASB)

4. Because we constantly overestimate our ability to handle temptation.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB)

5. Because we naively believe our struggles and temptations are unique.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)

Summary: “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry!”

1 Corinthians 10:14 (NASB)
The Means: “How To” develop accountability in relationships:

- It begins at home.
- In an atmosphere of love.
- It must be voluntary and by permission.
- It must be specific, not generic.
- It must be regular, not sporadic.
- No more than 4 people.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what area of your life have you recently made a commitment to God?

2. From what you learned today, how could you get help in keeping this commitment?

3. Why is accountability so essential for all of us?

4. What specific steps will you take to become accountable so you can be a finisher?
Review: Biblical Priorities “Pop Quiz”

To what degree have you taken specific steps in the following areas?

(1 = none;  2 = little;  3 = started and doing okay;  4 = making good progress;  5 = vigorously pursuing)

☐ Objectives: Moving from vague ideas to specific decisions about the kind of person I want to become and what I want to accomplish.

☐ Priorities: Ordering my life in such a way that the important and eternal are not forfeited by the "pressing" and the "urgent."

☐ Schedule: Determining specifically how and when I will place the important and eternal in my daily life.

☐ Discipline: Doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done (i.e. choosing to habitually delay gratification of short-term pleasures in order to more fully enjoy long-term success).

☐ Accountability: Enlisting the support of those who love me to help me keep my commitments to God.
Jesus' Warning #1:

In our pursuit of "seeking first" His righteousness there is the…

…danger of *duplicity*.

Matthew 5 Overview

- **The reward and character of His true followers**
  - 5:3-12

- **Salt and light** – be worthy examples
  - 5:13-16

- **Relationship of this new teaching to the Law of Moses**
  - 5:17-20

True Righteousness

(Matthew 5:20)

- **“You have heard it said...**
  - External
  - Doing
  - Duty
  - Performance
  - Guilt
  - Letter
  - Head

- **but I say to you...**
  - Internal
  - Being
  - Devotion
  - Relationship
  - Grace
  - Spirit
  - Heart
### Application of Matthew 5:20 to...

- Murder – 5:21-26
- Adultery – 5:27-30
- Divorce – 5:31-32
- Oaths – 5:33-37
- Retribution – 5:38-41
- Enemies – 5:43-48

### Summary:

Jesus condemns external righteousness (spiritual activities) when it does not flow from internal relationship with God.

### Jesus' Warning #2:

In our pursuit of "seeking first" His righteousness there is also the...

...danger of deception.  

Matthew 6:1-18

- Giving – Key Issue = motive Matthew 6:1-4
- Prayer– Key Issue = discernment Matthew 6:5-8
- Fasting – Key Issue = perspective Matthew 6:16-18
Summary: Spiritual disciplines are essential but become dangerous when they become means to gain the reward of men rather than deepen our relationship with God.

Application: Secrecy is God’s method of keeping our motives pure.

Discussion Questions:

1. In brief, summarize the two principles taught today with regard to discipline in our spiritual lives: the principles of distortion and deception.

2. How is it that even our efforts to draw near to God can sometimes be destructive to our relationship with God?

3. What aspect of this message hit "closest to home" with you? Why?

4. Discuss the balance needed with regard to our will and effort, God's grace, accountability and maintaining pure motives as they relate to "seeking first" His righteousness in your life right now?
**Introduction:** Are you “clearing cobwebs” or “killing spiders”?

The root problem in priority living according to Jesus is **materialism**.

Matthew 6:1-18

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Matthew 6:22-23 (NIV)

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

**Summary:** Do not allow the pursuit of **material things** to thwart your **spiritual development**.
Question: How can we live in a material world without becoming materialistic?

24“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. 25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

Matthew 6:24-27 (NIV)

28“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”

Matthew 6:28-32 (NIV)

33“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:33-34 (NIV)
The Symptom: Anxiety is the mark of a life preoccupied with material things.

The Explanation: Stop your preoccupation with material things because...

1. It’s short-sighted – Matthew 6:25b
2. It’s illogical – Matthew 6:28-30
3. It’s unprofitable – Matthew 6:27
4. It’s disgraceful to God – Matthew 6:30-32

The Promise: Matthew 6:33-34

If you will pursue knowing Christ and making Him known as your first priority, He will meet all your material needs.
Application: Questions to Ponder

- Are you "spending" or "investing" your life?

- Is your life making a significant difference in the lives of others?

- Do you live under "pressure" or under "priorities"?

- Do your time, talent, and treasure reflect that pursuing Christ and making Him known is your #1 priority?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think materialism is such a battleground for the priorities in our lives?

2. What aspect of this message did you most personally relate to? Why?

3. What is the relationship of worry and materialism?

4. Share what making Christ as "King" in your life looks like. What specific actions will it involve?