

Priorities: How to Set Them Right

Good morning! We've reached the third and last part of our series I'm calling, "Energize!" I hope you've been energized these past 3 weeks. Say to the person next to you, "You look energized today!" Actually, some folks this morning are literally physically energized. You know why? Because we just started a new ministry called, "Energize Your Day!" Starting today and every Sunday, as long as they have the energy, my wife Bel and the Noces family, Jashmin, Christian, and Nayr, will prepare breakfast for you. Starting at 10:30 AM till 11:15 AM. This is for everyone who comes early like our volunteers and every one of you who will come early. Thus, you don't have to worry about your breakfast in the morning or you can bring your breakfast and share it with us. Anyway, this will give you energy in the morning and hopefully will make you feeling alive and awake especially during my message. Ok?

Is that enough motivation for everyone? I thought I'd start with that and follow it up with a few more motivators to make your day. So, let me show you a few of these. Perhaps, you've seen this before. These are motivational posters that sometimes you'll see in an office.

Motivator #1

Motivator #2

Motivator #3

Motivator #4

Motivator #5

The truth of the matter is motivational statements are good, but we all know they're not good enough. They're not enough to give us the real motivation that we need. I'm not knocking positive thinking. Positive thinking is ok as far as it goes. It just doesn't go far enough. There are some days I wake up and I feel

positively negative. What do you do on those days? Where do you find the motivation you need for life on those days? If you're going to refocus your priorities so that you have energy for living, so that you have a sense of purpose, so that you have an ability to focus on what's important, what does it take?

It starts broader than just your schedule. It starts where Jesus talks about in Matthew 6:33 *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* You want everything you need for everyday? You want to focus your priorities so that you have all that you need, all the fulfillment, all the time, all the energy that you need for everyday life? Jesus said here's how you do it. You **focus on God**. And you **make the kingdom of God your primary concern**.

That phrase "his kingdom" we should look at a little bit more closely. Suppose you get in an airplane tomorrow and the person next to you finds out you came to church today. They say, "You go to church. What is this phrase 'the kingdom of God'? I've heard people say it. What does that mean?" What would you say to that person?

Let me give you a definition you could give them. **The kingdom of God is where God's will is done.** That's what it's all about. A kingdom is where what the king wants to happen is what happens. So the kingdom of God is where God's will is done. God's will, God's plan, God's way – that's God's kingdom. You see, God's kingdom is the only kingdom that's going to last. All the other kingdoms we set up, they're not going to last. God's kingdom is going to last forever. The Magic Kingdom might get taken over at the next corporate buyout. But God's kingdom is going to last forever and ever. That's why it's worth investing our lives in it. It's what's going to last. That's why it's worth refocusing our priorities on God's kingdom.

But I want to remind you as we start out, to refocus our priorities means a lot more than just adding God into my schedule. Just making God an item on my to-do list.

Let me share a couple of to-do lists as an example of what I'm talking about. Let's say before you decide to focus on God your to-do list says something like this, "Pick up the cleaning. Meet with the boss at 11:00. Lunch with my best friend. Get the car washed." Then you decide to focus your whole life on God and the next day it says this, "Pick up the cleaning. Meet with the boss at 11:00. Have lunch with my best friend. Read the Bible. Get my car washed." That's not the way it works. You can't just wedge God into your schedule and think I've refocused my priorities.

Someone said it this way, "God doesn't just want to be a spoke on the wheel of your life." Just another spoke. You've got enough of those already. You know what, God wants to be the hub of the wheel. He wants to be at the center. He wants to be where all the energy comes from.

But there's a challenge to that. The challenge is in Matthew 3:2 (NCV). If God's going to be at the center, here's the challenge. You've got to "*Change your hearts and lives because the kingdom of heaven is near.*" God's kingdom is about making an inner change so that it is reflected in my outer life. If I don't change at all, I'm just rearranging my schedule. I'm not refocusing my life. And those are two entirely different things.

Most of us when we try to refocus our lives, here's what we do. We just add new stuff in. We say, "I'm going to refocus my life. I have a busy life but I'm adding God in. I'm adding church in. I'm adding ministry in." You know what that makes us? It doesn't make us focused. It makes us tired. Because you've already got a busy life.

In order for you and I to refocus our lives we've got to go back and start before our schedule. There's something that needs to happen even before we work out our schedule to make this whole thing work. It's not adding in more stuff. It's what the Bible calls *a change of heart*. That's where it starts. It means change the way you think and act. A change of heart. Something happens inside. We've all experienced this at one time or another in our lives. A change of heart is like flipping a switch inside where all of a sudden you begin to see things differently. You have a new power to live a different way of life.

It happens when suppose there's a temptation that's overwhelming you and you feel like it's something that's going to overwhelm you the rest of my life. But one day something happens in your heart. It's like a switch gets flipped. And all of a sudden you realize, I can say no to that temptation. I will say no to that temptation. That's a change of heart. That's what I'm talking about.

Or it might be that you feel angry at someone. It seems like forever. But one day you wake up and you realize, "I don't know what happened but I think I can let that go now. I think I can forgive them."

All of those are what the Bible calls *a change of heart*. If you and I are going to be able to refocus our priorities in a way that we can enjoy the kind of life that God wants us to enjoy, the Bible says that's part of what happens. So my question is: What makes this happen? If I'm going to reprioritize my life by changing the way I think and act I've got to figure this out.

Now, what makes this change of heart thing happen?

There are four factors that make it happen. I'm going to share them with you and I'm not going to number them because I don't want you to think they're in some certain order. They happen in all different kinds of order in our lives. Sort of like a recipe. These are **the ingredients that go into a change of heart.**

Starting with the first one that none of us like...

1. I experience pain.

It could be relational pain or physical pain or financial pain or emotional pain – all kinds of pain in life. Here’s what happens. First, none of us like to change. We’re comfortable where we are.

The Bible talks about this in 2 Corinthians 7:10 *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.”* God uses sorrow or pain to help us turn away from what is destructive – sin – and to seek what is the greatest in our life – salvation. You see, human nature is that if we don’t feel pain we keep going in the same direction. So this verse says we need sometimes to turn away in a different direction.

The next verse talks about how God uses pain in our lives in a different way. Psalm 119:71 *“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”* It’s like me who was away from the Lord for ten years and then troubles and problems came which forced me to pick up the Bible again and read some principles from God. If afflictions never came into my life I wouldn’t have learned.

I want to be real clear about this. The pain is not good. What is good is what God does in our lives through the pain. He gets us out of a destructive lifestyle. He leads us into eternal life. That’s what He does in our lives.

Some of you have gone through surgery. I myself had one many years ago. Last week, Merbin just had it. I hope it’s no longer sore, right, Merbin? Now, before the surgery, what did you feel? There’s the feeling of pain, right? The pain is a sign that something has to change, something has to be taken out. In a way, the pain is a good thing because the bad thing is taken out. If not for the pain, you’ll be truly in a bad situation and you won’t even know it till it kills you. So, pain is good because it makes you better.

Folks, one of the ingredients that God uses in all of our lives to help us have a change of heart for the better is pain in our lives. A second ingredient is

2. I believe that God wants what's best for me.

Do you believe that? Or do you believe that God's sitting up in heaven thinking of ways to make you miserable? Or maybe for a lot more of us, that God's sitting up in heaven not caring whether you're miserable or not? The Bible says that God wants what's best in your life.

Isaiah 48:17 *"I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way that you should go."*

Now, I've got to admit, I've got a little bit of a problem with that phrase "what's best for you." I remember when I was a kid and my parents said to me; this is what's best for you. That never meant anything good, did it, when they said that? It was always going to be something not fun, always going to be something you didn't want to do. Like taking medicine syrup with a bitter taste. That was during my time. Nowadays, children can have it with strawberry flavor or lemon flavor or grape flavor. So when we read or hear "What's best for you", there's something in us that says, "That's what God's going to do. It's not going to be any fun, no joy in it."

But get this. God made you. He created you. He created you to live a fulfilled, abundant life. He knows the best for you. God is not out to make us miserable.

The Bible says *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:32) This verse reminds us God sent Jesus Christ, His own Son to give His life on the cross. If God did that, do you think He's going to deny you joy in your life right now? I know He doesn't work in our lives like we'd want Him to. I know He doesn't give us all the candy we want, all the things we ask for immediately

when we want it. That's because He knows it would make our stomachs sick. He has a better life for you and me.

To think that God would send Jesus and now deny you the kind of joy and fulfillment that you want in life, that doesn't make logical sense. He's willing to sacrifice His life for us. That's how much He loves us. That's how much God wants what is best in every one of our lives.

Folks, if I've got a change of heart with this incredible life that God's offering to all of us, I'm going to have to have some pain to wake me up. But it's also going to take believing that God really does want what's best for me. That's part of it.

Now, there's a third part of this change of heart that happens in all of us. That is...

3. I know God's truth.

Truth is one of the ingredients. Proverbs 15:14 (NLT) talks about that when it says, *"A wise man is hungry for truth, while the mocker feeds on trash."* That's the difference – truth or trash. Which one is it going to be in our lives? Truth is all around us and trash is all around us, would you agree with that? Both of them are all around us. But the difference between the two is this, Truth is something you have to go out and find. You have to go after it. Trash just gets dumped on you all day long. You don't even have to ask for it. It just gets dumped on you. That's the difference.

Here's the danger. When we're in pain, when we're hurting, we'll do just about anything to get out of pain. A starving person will eat out of a trash can because they're starving. When you and I are in pain we don't distinguish very well between truth and trash. If I don't have any truth in my life I'll take the trash because it's going to get me out. Do you ever wonder why people believe some of the goofy things they believe? Because they're hurting. They're in pain. If I've

got a steak sitting over here and a trash can sitting over here it's a pretty easy choice. But if all I see is the trash can and I'm hurting I'm going to go into the garbage heap. That's why it's so important for you and me to get truth into our lives. It doesn't automatically come.

When I talk about trash a lot of us think entertainment. We think about movies, we think FB reels. But there's a lot of kinds of trash in life. Some of the trash that comes into our life is when we're in a hurry and we ask for advice or we don't even ask for it. Have you noticed you can get a lot of advice without even asking for it? It just comes our way. If you're going through a hurting time somebody walks up to you and says, "You've got to start looking out for number one. You have to look out for yourself in this circumstance." I want to stand before you and say that's trash! That will hurt you. Because God made us to serve other people. God made us not to live selfish lives. I'm not talking about being co-dependent. I'm talking about being a Jesus kind of servant. And Jesus Christ came and said, "I didn't come to be served. I came to serve other people." That's how God made us. If you get caught up in selfishness it's going to take you down a road that leads to destruction. God knows that. You know it too.

Here's another trash statement. You're going through a tough time and you're wondering what decision to make and they say, "Whatever decision you make, God wants you happy. That's what God wants." That may sound ok on the surface, but in the end it's trash. Because what it really says is I can do whatever I want because I think that's what's going to make me happy and that's what God wants. God wants you happy but He also wants you holy. He wants you to be the kind of person He made you to be. Have you noticed – I've found this in my life – that what I think is going to make me happy, doesn't make me happy. In fact, it takes me in the wrong direction.

There's a lot of kinds of trash out there in this world. Even in your own mind. Do you ever, even in your own mind, get some trash being tempted to sin. You think, "Even if I commit that sin, God's going to forgive me later." We all think those kinds of things. That kind of trash comes into our mind all the time, into our lives all the time. If I don't have some truth in my life, I'm going to go after the trash.

So how do you get truth in your life? You've got to go after it. You've got to want it. Proverbs 2:3-5 *"Indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."*

So here's my question: What are you doing to make an investment in the truth right now in your life? How are you investing in getting the truth into your life? How about spending a few minutes in the Bible every day? Taking five or ten minutes at the beginning of the day to read five or ten verses out of the Bible. That's an investment in the truth that will pay incredible dividends the rest of your life. Because when troubles come you'll have some truth to hold on to to get you through the tough times. Or it could be joining a Bible study. That could be a way to invest in the truth, joining a small group and studying the Bible together. It could be getting together with a group of people at work to talk about the truth. It doesn't have to be people who go to church. All kinds of people are looking for the truth and what God has to say about the truth. It could be making a decision in your family spending some together and reading the Bible together. There's a lot of ways to make an investment in the truth. But the question is what are you doing to make an investment in the truth? It's incredibly important.

Why is the truth so important? John 8:32 *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* That's what Jesus taught us. What does the truth set you

free from? Eating trash for one thing. The truth sets you free to say no to things. The truth sets you free to say, I could live in a different way. The truth sets you free from shame and from guilt. The truth sets you free to live the fulfilled abundant life that God made every one of us to live. That's what the truth is all about. It's not meant to put us in little boxes. God gave us this truth to set us free. But that freedom comes when we do the fourth thing, the fourth ingredient in what the Bible teaches...

4. I do what God says.

I have to do it. Matthew 3:8 (NLT) *"Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God."* That's the choice we're talking about, this decision that I'm going to do it now. When we act, that's when the change happens. But really it took all the other things to get us to that point. I had to go through some pain to wake me up to the fact that I had to change. I had to believe that God wants what's best to even listen to God. I had to get some truth in my life in order to want to do it. Then I was ready to act.

You know the amazing thing? Sometimes all those three things can be in place in our lives and we still don't act. I've got the pain. I believe God wants what's best. I know the truth but I never get over the top of the hill and act on what I know. I keep getting to the top of that hill again and again and again but I never act on it.

Take note of these words "one thing." When I talk about acting on what God has said to do I'm talking about one thing. There's no way you can do everything that God wants you to do the rest of your life today. It's overwhelming. All that God asks us to do is to do one thing at a time, not all things at the same time. When you and I pick the one thing, then that's livable. I can get a handle on that and decide to do that. Then the next thing and then the next.

I don't know what it is for you. That one thing maybe, I confess my sin to another person or that one thing could be I forgive another person or I ask forgiveness from another person. That one thing maybe, I'm going to let go of control, trying to control the circumstance. Or the one thing might be I stop a bad habit or I start a good habit. Or maybe the one thing is I need to confess to a friend that I'm struggling with pornography on the Internet. Maybe the one thing is I need to confess to my best friend I've been flirting with somebody else at the office. Not my husband/wife. I'm enjoying it way too much. Something's wrong and I need to tell somebody. As long as you hold it a secret in your heart it's going to get worse and worse. God says, tell somebody else and they'll pray for you.

There's a lot of "one things" that we could choose from in life. But in all the choices that we could make my question is this, Why not today? Why not make that choice today? Ask God for the strength to take that step today. It's going to happen someday. God's going to keep talking to you about this one thing.

But, perhaps, the one thing God wants you to do is to commit your life to Jesus. You're familiar with Jesus, you're familiar with church, but you never made Jesus as your Lord and Savior. It means he was never a priority in your life. He's just one of the spoke in your wheel, not the hub of the wheel. But today, if you want to make a real heart change, you need to surrender your life to Jesus. You need to believe in your heart that he died for your sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead. If you do that today, then he will give you the best that he could ever give. Eternal life in heaven and abundant life on earth. An earthly life that is full of joy and hope despite the struggles and problems you encounter.

Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Folks, to set your priorities right, you've got to focus on God. Make his kingdom your priority and he will add all the other things in your life.