

Is God a Priority?

by Shane Idleman

Making God a priority in our lives requires recognizing the enemy's strategy, understanding the purpose of dreams and visions, and trusting in God's plan despite suffering.

Duration: 50:32

Scripture: Matthew 5:9, Matthew 6:24, John 14:6, Acts 4:31, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Spiritual Priorities", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of making God a priority in our lives, highlighting the need to prioritize our relationship with God over worldly distractions. It discusses the transformation that occurs when we truly surrender to God, like the Apostle Paul's conversion from persecutor to preacher. The sermon also touches on the significance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, being bold in sharing our faith, and being peacemakers in challenging situations.

Transcript

Acts chapter 9 verse 8. The title of the message is, is God a priority? And you might be surprised, but I have to ask this question of myself quite often. Is God a priority in my life? Because what happens is other things come in and they crowd out our relationship with God. And I believe, personally, that once you are saved, the enemy knows that and he's going to do whatever he can to remove God from your life as a priority.

Because if God goes on the afterburner and you put everything on the front burners, you know I'm talking about right at home, all the important stuff is right up here. I'll put the broccoli on the back burner that's, and hopefully it burns, I don't care. But you've got the, you've got the the chicken and the steak and everything right on the front burners.

It's a priority. And we have a tendency to put God on the back end of that, and we're going to learn from the life of Paul here what it looks like to make God a priority. So Acts chapter 9 verse 8, and if you haven't been with us the last few weeks or few months, go back and listen to the messages because the book of Acts is powerful.

It talks about the early church and how the Holy Spirit worked in the early church. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one. Let me stop right there.

This is the Apostle Paul, who hasn't changed his name yet to Paul. His name is Saul. And he just got knocked off of his beast, a horse, a donkey, a camel, whatever you want to debate that topic, you can debate it.

It doesn't matter to me. He was knocked off of something. He was riding towards Damascus.

That's why it's called the Damascus Road experience. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. And God said, no, I have other plans for you.

I'm going to knock you off of your beast. Literally a light shine so bright that it took out his eyes, his sight. He knew that this was Jesus Christ.

And he said, Lord, who are you? I am Jesus Christ who you're persecuting. How long will you keep fighting against me? He said, Lord, what do you want me to do? And that's where we're picking up. So Saul arose from the ground.

He was on the ground. And when his eyes were open, he saw no one. So he's blind.

But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight and neither ate nor drank. It's interesting.

Saul thought he was going to Damascus to persecute Christians. God changed his plans. Same city, different scenario.

Completely different scenario now. Instead of persecuting, he's going to be an apologist. An apologist is a person who gives others a reason for the hope that is within you.

You should be able to do that. And he was three days without sight and neither ate nor drank. Now, as much as I would like to turn this into a fasting sermon, I'm not going to.

You'll be thankful this morning. We might get to that some other time down the road. But he didn't eat.

He didn't drink. He didn't do anything. And if you meet Christ like that, you will probably not eat or drink either.

And it's speculation, but I think Paul was actually dealing with some regret. I mean, if you think about it, he just saw Stephen be killed and he participated. Now he's with all this zeal, with all this energy to go persecute Christians, and Jesus reveals himself.

That would be pretty depressing. Thinking about all that you were doing against him, and now you finally meet him. Now, there was a certain disciple there at Damascus.

Of course, God's timing. He puts Ananias. His name is Ananias.

And he said to him, the Lord said to him in a vision. Now, the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision. He spoke to Joseph to take Jesus away in a dream.

He's spoken to other people through the book of Acts through dreams and visions. Pharaoh. So this is an interesting topic.

He spoke to Ananias in a vision. Now, I haven't done hours and hours and hours in research on this, but from what I can remember, a vision is something that is before you. You see something.

Something opens up and you see it. That's different than a dream that happens while you're asleep. So somehow the Lord appears to Ananias, and he said, here I am, Lord.

So the Lord said to him, arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. Ask for him, for behold, he is praying. So Paul is praying right now.

I don't want to speculate a lot, but I'm sure he's praying, Lord, I am so sorry. Show me what you want to do. What is your will for my life? What is all this about? God, how can you use me? He's praying.

Confirm it with me, Lord. He's praying something. He's there praying.

And God told Ananias to go speak to Paul. And in a vision, he had seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hands on him so that he might receive his sight. This is interesting.

God gives Ananias a vision that he needs to go speak with Paul, and he's giving Paul a vision that a man named Ananias is going to come meet with you. So let's not immediately walk away from this topic on dreams and visions. The purpose of dreams and visions, a couple things.

My stance is I'm cautiously careful because many people get weird over this. They get weird on dreams and visions and all these things, and what happens is we tend to throw the baby out with the bathwater. You know what that saying means? That you're giving the baby a bath and now the water's dirty.

Instead of just throwing out the water and holding the baby, we just go throw everything out. And that's what happens, I think, sometimes when we talk about the work of the Holy Spirit or the gifts of the Holy Spirit or all these things that are controversial, dreams and visions. Have you met those people? I've had a dream.

I had a vision every week, every week. Come on, guys. You haven't had a dream or vision every week, and God's doing all these things.

But I believe that God does speak to people through these means. I don't think this stopped, but I think we need to be careful. The main purpose of visions and dreams is to warn, is to confirm, and to direct sometimes.

Now, dreams and visions don't supersede the Word of God. They come underneath it. So everything must line up with Scripture.

If you have a dream or a vision to leave your spouse, okay, that's the wrong voice speaking to you. It must come under the truth of God's Word. It is actually under its authority.

Now, people would say, though, now that we have the Scriptures, we don't need things like this. And there's some validity to that. We know how to live godly and in righteousness and what God's will is.

But you're not gonna open up the Bible and read, oh, I'm supposed to go see a man named Saul today. It doesn't happen. The principle is there that God will guide and lead, but sometimes God uses visions and dreams, prophetic words, words of wisdom to come alongside and supplement and help Christians in their walk.

That's what they are for. So I don't know why people get so weird about them, and I don't know why people want to discount them. The Bible, if God wants to speak, He's going to speak through different areas.

And I've had a few, I've shared these with you in the past. I used to have a lot of dreams where I would walk out and I would just see a sea of people that I would be speaking to. Well, that made no sense 16 years ago.

Now it makes perfect sense. So it confirms God is, and it helped me get through some very difficult seasons in life knowing, okay, God, you showed me what your plan is for me. Some of you remember some time ago I had a very vivid dream that I was preaching to some convicts on some bleachers and also some priests.

I'm like, that is weird. That's odd. And I wrote it down.

About a year later, I end up meeting and talking to priests and sharing the gospel and showing the differences and talking about those differences. I would have never did that had I not had that written down in my journal. So it confirmed what was already God was going to do.

So that's often the purpose of those. However, I don't know if it's healthy to have dreams and visions every week, right? What does this mean? Well, I had water and then I was drowning. What does this mean? Then last week, I was dreaming that I was under an apple tree and one hit me on the head.

What does this mean? I don't see that in the Word of God. You should not live on them. You live on the Word of God.

It is bread to you. It is life to your spiritual soul. And then God will use different areas.

So I'm open but cautious. I'm careful. And I also try to use discernment in this area.

So that's what happened. He gave them both a vision because Ananias is not going to go to Paul on his own. And Paul might not receive somebody without knowing who they are.

So God confirmed his will. That's the word I was looking for. Confirmed his will.

Verse 13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man. Ananias is going, wait a minute.

You want me to go speak to the guy who wants to kill me? Wait a minute, God. Lord, wait a minute here. I've heard many things about this man.

He's done harm to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority in Damascus. He has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon your name.

But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. And we don't like that last verse, do we? I wish it said, And I will show him how many blessings he will receive for following me.

But it doesn't work that way. Often there's suffering that goes with following Christ. But before I go on, let me stop here for a minute.

Ananias said, basically, Lord, wait a minute here. Wait a minute here. Do you know who this person is? And I don't fault him in this because there's nothing wrong with asking questions.

If you have questions about God, if you have questions about God, there's nothing wrong with that. The difference is, are you a skeptic? Or are you genuinely asking the questions? Here's the difference. Somebody who has questions, they truly seek answers and they're trying to understand.

But the skeptic is a scoffer. Scoffer. Big difference.

At the college, people say, Where's your God now? Why doesn't he appear right now? Scoffing. You scoffer. Or somebody saying, I want to know more.

How does it work? And why doesn't he appear now? Why doesn't he? See the difference? There's nothing wrong with questioning. Because if I could question God, I would start with hell. I understand it.

I understand the reason, basically, a rebel gets his way and spends eternity separated from God. But there's things about that I don't understand. There's passages in the Old Testament I don't understand.

People ask, well, how could God allow this to happen? I don't understand everything. Because also, if you understood everything, I don't think he'd be God. And this is what actually about this debate.

I hope I remember this. I didn't write it down for tonight. But let's assume, I mean, I hope we can all agree that we don't know everything that there is to know in the universe, correct? Okay, good.

At least we're on the same page. Personally, I'll be conservative. But I don't even think we know 1% of everything that goes on in the universe.

So that means we don't know 99% of everything that is out there to know. So who are we to question God? We're going to say to the Creator, why have you done this? Instead of humble ourselves and bow our knee before him and say, Lord, I don't know why, but I'm trusting you. That's faith.

Faith is exercising and understanding God. Faith is the substance of things not seen. It's the evidence of things hoped for.

That's why faith is so important. Trusting God. Why, God, why? I asked, why me? I was comfortable in construction.

I had weekends off. Get home at four o'clock, day's over. Man, Lord, why me? Why did you, there's so many questions.

Why, why, why, why, why? And sometimes we will not have answers. But I just want to encourage you, there's nothing wrong with taking questions to God. Come to me.

Let us reason together. Why is my parent getting sick? Why is my son or daughter this? Why did I lose that person? Why, God, are you allowing this? Why? It's okay. It's okay to ask questions.

And this is the point in Paul's life where God became a priority to Paul. He was a religious leader. He loved religion, but he didn't have a relationship.

That's the difference. Here's the thing you need to remember about Paul. He had a, he had religion, but he didn't have relationship.

How many of you have religion, but not a relationship with God? You go through the formalities, but there's not a relationship. So once Paul experienced God, everything became a priority. God became a priority.

And also we see here true conversion changes the heart. It was Saul, now he's Paul. He was persecuting Christians, now he loves Christians.

He was legalistic and rigid and hard, now he's broken and humbled before God. So a true conversion, when God truly changes you and you are truly genuinely born again, there's a change of heart that takes place. If there's not, there's nothing wrong with saying, Lord, examine me.

Paul said, examine yourself. Do you not know you? Do you not know yourself? Is Jesus Christ in you? So that's a good question to ask. Do I know Christ? Is he really in me? Do I have this change of heart that the Bible talks about? Is God a priority? That's one thing you can't run away from.

If you've truly been converted, you will love God, you will love his word, and he is a priority. Now, not a perfect priority, right? I still put him on the back sometimes. And Lord, help me with that.

And I work on that. But there's a change in the heart where you love the word of God. You love God and his word.

He's a priority. A.W. Tozer said, the Holy Spirit never enters a man and then lets him live like the world. You can be sure of that.

The Holy Spirit never enters you and lets you live like the world. You can be sure of that. Now, some of you might go, okay, you just lost me.

Holy Ghost, Spirit, what? Well, God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit resides in a believer. Once a person believes they are a child of God, the Holy Spirit resides in them, and they are guaranteed, the Holy Spirit seals them.

Now I have the character and nature of God residing in me. I want to do what's good, but I also have evil present. I want to love God, but I also have the flesh that says, no, you don't.

I want to do things for God, but the flesh says, no, you don't. So we have this struggle within. So when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not going to let you live like the world.

The world is the mindset. Here's what the world is. You might be thinking, what's wrong with my car or my house? None of those things.

The world, I actually should have used the word cosmos in the Greek language. It is a world's mindset. So in case you didn't catch this, the world is hell bent on rejecting God.

Let's just get that out of the way. The world hates God. So the world's mindset.

So as we're living in the world, we're enjoying the things of the world. Everything about the world, when we are saved, and now I have the Holy Spirit residing in me, even though the world is pulling on me, right? It's pulling on me. I still want to love God.

The Holy Spirit's not going to let me love the world and love God. And what happens is when you start to love the world and say, okay, God, you're no longer a priority. I'm loving the things of the world.

You quench and you grieve the spirit within you. And the things of God are lost. There's no passion for the things of God.

There's no purpose. You're pretty miserable, actually. A Christian caught on this side is a miserable person to be around.

They're angry. Why am I angry? They're bitter. They're unforgiving.

Why, why, why? Because they're living in the wrong house. They're living like the world. So let's talk about that for a minute.

How can a loving God allow suffering? That last verse we talked about. I will show you how many things you must suffer for my name's sake. He's going to show Paul.

And boy, if I had the list, we're going to get to it. Shipwrecks, stoning, was beaten up, was clubbed. Many things happened to Paul, suffering for Christ's name.

Now, how can a loving God allow suffering? Well, that would be a whole sermon on its own, wouldn't it? But let's talk about that for a minute. If God were to remove all suffering, and it's just blessings, then we wouldn't know a lot of things that we know today. We'd become very weak.

If it's all about bless me, bless. Have you ever given a kid everything? Oh boy, you want to get away from that child. By the time they're five or six, it's just mess.

Mine, mine, mine. Throwing things, wanting everything. They control the whole house at six years old because they were given everything.

And I don't quite, that'd be another question. Why suffering? Why? But here's a few things we can glean from Scripture. There is redemption through suffering.

Christ had to suffer on the cross to redeem people. There was suffering that had to take place. Here's what else happens through suffering.

Humility. I am humbled when I suffer. But people can become bitter or they become better.

That's why I say that often. Because when suffering comes, when suffering comes, it can humble you to such a degree, more than anything else. I've never seen anything humble somebody more than suffering.

It humbles you. It breaks the pride out of you. Because the pride doesn't want to come out easy, does it? But if God says, let me humble you.

Let me, let me, some suffering, some pain, some anguish. You thought you were all that in a bag of chips. I don't know where that comes from.

I should look it up. But it comes somewhere. But you think, and then suffering comes.

In this perfect world, you thought you were the bomb for the young adults. You thought you were the man. You thought everything was great.

Look at me. And then everything falls apart. Suffering.

It humbles us. It humbles us. And actually, for books I'm preaching that I read, that they say you shouldn't even dare go into the pulpit until you've been humbled, and you've suffered, and you've been broken.

Because how can you help broken people if you yourself have not went through brokenness and humility and suffering? There's humility. You're actually, you draw closer to God through suffering. The hard, difficult things, you draw closer to God.

And it's funny. I was sharing with a man yesterday that looking back on my life 25 years ago, when I was in hell here, literally, as far as what I was going through, now I wouldn't trade any of it. Shane, would you go back and change all that? No, no, no, no, no.

Praise God for that. I met Morgan, have beautiful kids. And God called me to plant a church.

And that's what he used that, he used that to break me, to draw me closer to him, to see what his will is to surrender my life. And then he worked through that. But you have to be careful because this is where many people get mad at God.

I'm pretty sure that most atheists are mad at God. You can tell when you talk about God. They hate him.

They despise him. They're mad at God. And of course, the question is, what are you mad at if he doesn't exist? But that's where you have to be careful with pain.

Because you can become very bitter. You can become mad at God. How could he, how could he allow these things? But be careful because suffering is a wonderful gift if we point it in the right direction.

Also, suffering brings clarity and conviction. The more I suffer, you should see the things that are written about me on Facebook sometimes. That's not suffering compared to what's happening in Iraq and Syria and different things.

But the more you suffer, the more your convictions get stronger. The more you get clarity on things. Because it's like building muscle.

Suffering is building faith. And you have conviction on certain things. You have direction because of the suffering.

And finally, redirection through suffering. God often redirects. Because you're walking this way, right? I was in my 20s.

I thought, yeah, I'm walking this way. Boom, God's suffering. Now, okay, thank you, Lord.

What do you want? So God uses suffering to redirect. Because we won't listen when everything's going good, will you? If you've got the house and the vehicle and \$10,000 a month, everything's going great. You're ready to hit Vegas and Havasu and Laughlin all in the same week.

Everything's going good. You're not going to change direction. You're not going to talk, God, I'll get to you later when I get back, when I get time.

But he takes that job from you. And your wife leaves a note on the sink that she's not coming back. Well, there's a change of plans real quick, isn't there? God will use that suffering to redirect.

Because we don't. As much as we think, I'll just follow God with all my heart on my own. No, you won't.

We can't. Because by default, we'll go towards what's easiest, what's more comfortable. So God uses suffering to keep us close to the shepherd.

It's like a story, I think I told it, the marriage. I give a marriage series once. I think that's the most popular series ever.

And we'll hear from people all over on that. I told a story about a shepherd. And I've got a book on the 23rd Psalm and read some shepherding things.

And it appears to be true that when there's a wandering sheep, and he's going to wander to the coyotes and the wolves, sometimes that shepherd will break the leg, the leg of the lamb. We're like, how cruel. What he does, though, is he splints that leg and carries the lamb around for weeks until it's healed.

And he puts the lamb down. The lamb stays right by him. No more wandering.

No more going off to wolves and coyotes. Have you ever seen a coyote take something? I have. Remember, I told you guys, November was a year.

I was out in the desert walking with my little new puppy, about this big, white. And I hear, next thing I know, coyote's got it in his mouth and it's gone. Gone.

I mean, I talk about a shock. I'm like, did that just happen? I can't do anything. Where's my 30 hot six? We'll fix this real quick.

But it's just gone. And she wouldn't listen to stay right here, stay right here, stay right here. So be careful.

God will use suffering to draw you closer to him. Verse 17, Ananias went his way and entered the house. And laying his hands on him, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has, I'm sorry, who appeared to you on the road as you came has sent me to you that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Uh-oh. Trying to get off this topic, guys, but every week. So was Paul a Christian when God knocked him off his beast on the road to Damascus? He said, Lord, what do you want me to do? He's broken before God.

He's blind. He's waiting on God. But he wasn't filled with the spirit.

Oh, goodness, Shane, where are you going with this one? What's going on here? Well, very simple. Let's keep reading for a minute. So three days later, Ananias shows up.

He prays for him. His eyes are open and he's filled with the Holy Spirit. His sight was returned.

He arose and was baptized. Notice he didn't even wait a week or a month. When's your next baptism? He did it right then.

Get me down to the Jordan River. Well, I don't know. Damascus would probably be a different river.

But let's just say he went down to water somewhere and was baptized. Now, that's a good introduction to April 2nd. If you need to get baptized, don't wait.

Get signed up for it. Let's baptize you because it's a step of obedience. So Paul believed three days earlier.

He was healed and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, what happened here? In case I wish I had time to really talk about this more, but being filled with the Holy Spirit, what happens when I just explain a person repents? They believe they have God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. But it goes back to that question.

Does the Holy Spirit have all of you? You have all the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit have all of you? Now, with this, with Paul, it does appear that this is a second event that happened three days after conversion. He's a believer.

He's got the Holy Spirit, but he was not empowered for ministry yet. John Piper said this, I think the essence of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, and I would use the word filled with the Holy Spirit, but he used the word baptized with the Holy Spirit, is when a person who is already a believer receives extraordinary spiritual power for Christ-exalting ministry. Now, you'll remember back when we started in the book of Acts, when Jesus said, listen, guys, I know you're believers.

I breathe on you. The Holy Spirit received the Holy Spirit. You guys are excited.

You want to do things. You've seen me now. I'm my resurrected body.

500 witnesses. I've eaten with you. We did communion.

Yay, we're excited. He said, don't go. He said, go and wait until you are clothed with power, until you receive power.

So it does beg the question this morning, do you have that power? Are you truly filled with the Holy Spirit? This desire to reach others, this desire for boldness to proclaim God's truth, or does all of that sound boring? The reason it sounds boring and the things of the world enticing is because that's probably what you're filled with. Whatever you're filled with, you're hungry for. Spiritual hunger works opposite of food hunger.

Food hunger, you get hungry when you're empty. Spiritual hunger, the more you get full of the things of God, the more hungry you are for the things of God. So if you are dying spiritually, if you don't have a hunger for the things of God, that's why.

But Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. And then verse 20. And then after his vacation, what? Who's following along? Immediately, immediately.

He believed he was baptized. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, he went out and preached Christ to everybody.

He went down the road. Do you know who Jesus Christ is? Who is he? He's the man who died on the cross back in Jerusalem. Haven't you heard? And he would go out and he would debate the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the religious leaders.

He would debate them on all these issues because he meant the risen Savior. Immediately, he preached Christ in the synagogues. That he is the Son of God.

Everything in the Christian faith hinges on this. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Christianity is relational.

This is a God reaching down, relating to his people. Shane, that's not true. The Muslims would say the same thing.

No, they wouldn't. They would say that God reveals his will, but not himself. Buddha.

Karma. Hindu. Many gods.

Works, works, works, works. Man has to somehow reach up to God who's somewhere. Christianity is the only religion, and I don't even call it religion.

It's a relationship. It's the truth. The way, the truth, the life.

Nobody comes to the Father except through Christ. It's the only belief system that has God as relational, coming down, revealing himself to man, and wanting a relationship with man. It's the only belief system.

Christ is the Son of God. This is an interesting quote from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He died, I think, in the 1980s.

You hear the word false prophet often, don't you? False prophet, false prophet. The false prophet is a man who has no straight gate or narrow way in his gospel. He has nothing which is offensive to the natural man he pleases everyone.

And that's true. A false proclaimer of God's truth will stand at the pulpit and make the broad road narrow and the narrow road broad. The path is easy.

Everybody can know God. All paths lead to God. Let's just come, let's all come together.

Let's just please everybody. That's a false proclaimer of a false gospel. Because Jesus said, strive to enter, strive to enter.

That word is agonizo. It's a striving against what your flesh doesn't want. You're fighting against the flesh.

Strive to enter the narrow gate for broad is the way to destruction. Narrow is the gate. Jesus said, I am the only way, the only truth, the only life.

Nobody comes to the Father except through me. That's pretty narrow, is it not? That's why you can't say, oh, he's just a good teacher at the college. They told me he's just a good teacher.

Really? He's just a good teacher. He's a lunatic. Isn't he not, right? You know, C.S. Lewis, he's a lunatic.

He's a liar or he's the Lord Jesus Christ. You can't just say he's a good teacher. If that's all he was, he's a terrible teacher.

Partake of me. I am the son of God. I am that I am.

I was before Abraham. All these claims are ridiculous if he was just a good teacher. So you have to remove that option.

Who is he today? Lunatic, liar, or he's the Lord. There really is no other option out there. So that's what Paul did.

He was proclaiming Christ as the son of God. And the people saw the conversion. They say, wait, wait a minute.

He was Saul, now he's Paul. He was mean and angry, now he's gentle. He was an arrogant Pharisee, now he's a humble Christian.

They saw the difference. And people should see the difference in you and I. There should be a difference and a distinction. The world is hungry for a difference.

The world is hungry, and I'm tired of Christians wanting to be just like the world. I gotta look just like the world. No, you don't.

It's the difference and the distinction that draws people to Christ in you. It's not the similarities of the world. It's the difference.

Now, you don't get weird about it, right? But you love people, but there's a difference and there's a distinction. And then it said, but Saul increased all the more in strength. So he would preach and witness and increase in spiritual strength.

Preach and witness and increase in spiritual strength. The reason some of you are dying in this area, or you have no spiritual strength, you couldn't pick up a five pound dumbbell, is because you're not engaging in ministry. You're not going out and meeting people.

You're not going out into the hospital homes. You're not, Lord, how can I? I mean, we had so many opportunities to go to the college and pass these out, and very few people who wanted to do it. I mean, maybe, what, eight or nine out of the church's size? My goodness, folks.

This is a wonderful opportunity. You can talk to students. But see, the reason we don't want to do is because we've been starving ourselves on other areas of service.

So if you're not being, you're not serving, a lot of people say, well, when I retire, then I'll do, no, no. That doesn't work that way. Start now, start serving God.

What do you want me to do? And from that, you'll do the next thing. It builds up spiritual strength. I can't explain it.

Somebody asked me yesterday, are you taking tomorrow morning off, meaning today, so you can rest for the debate? I said, no, no, no. If I could go straight from here to the debate, I would, because this fills me up with God's Spirit. I'm ready to debate the Word of God and to talk about the truth of God's Word, because from the first service and the worship and the prayer, spiritual strength is increasing, not declining.

So it says, Paul, increase in strength. So do you feel weak? God, I'm not doing anything for you. I feel spiritually weak.

Well, I've got six addresses we can give you after the service. And you can go visit these people and talk to them, pray with them. Grace Resources, they're always looking for people to serve lunch and dinner or different things there.

There's always areas of service. But your flesh, guess what? It's just like my flesh. It's real comfortable just to sit at home and watch that TV.

Oh, this is comfortable, that's right. But you will die spiritually. If you're not doing things for God, you will not, actually, one area, one way of being filled with the Spirit is you start doing things for God.

And I give the analogy often of the big, you know the big lake up north off the 395, Mono Lake, right? Have you ever caught a fish there? Have you seen anybody fishing in that lake? Brine shrimp, that's all that's there. It smells terrible. And it's got the beautiful Sierra, Nevada, Owens River flowing right into it with a lot, living trout, living, just wonder, you could drink right out of that stream, living into a dead, running into a dead lake.

There's no outlet. There's no outlet. That's what happens when lakes get corrupted and corroded, there's no outlet.

You've got streams of living water coming in and there's nothing but death because there's no outlet. You have to have that outlet. You have to get, and you have to tell your flesh, you know what, I'm not even listening to you today.

I'm going to turn off the TV. I don't care that the Baseball World Series is on. I don't care that this is on.

I'm going to turn off and I'm going to do something for you, God, and you will be built up spiritually. I mean, God does, it's a dangerous prayer. Lord, use me however you want to use me today.

I want to be used by you. I'll just be shopping at Trader Joe's. Excuse me, sir.

Yes? Could you help me? What do you need? And here's an opportunity. And then you're, and I was at the post office the other day and somebody, I was too shy to say anything, but I need help on my marriage. Can we, is there anybody you can help me with? And post office, I mean, everywhere you go, it's everywhere if you're open.

But what do we do? I'm in a hurry. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Leave me alone, leave me alone.

I get, whew, I get home now. Now I'm going, let me watch TV for three hours. And then what happens tomorrow? Repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat.

We come to church. Boy, Shane really made me feel convicted. I'm going to start, I'm going to start tomorrow.

Then next week and next month. And so you have to fight the flesh. You have to say, I'm going to do something.

And I'm going to start today. Just pray that prayer. Lord, how can you use me today? Show me.

And you'll see, where's the car there? And then somebody's looking at their tire going, how am I going to change this? There you go. There, I mean, most people I invite to church are because of areas of things like that where you stay and you help and you minister to people. Now, unless you think I'm up here being perfect, please don't make that mistake.

I don't listen many times myself. You just keep trying. I'm busy.

But you've got to fight that urge to be lazy is what it is. It's spiritually lazy. We're being spiritually lazy when God is calling us to do something and we're not doing it.

Boy, I'll get off that before everybody wants to walk out. Verse 23. Now, after many days passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.

Wait a minute. Paul was a Jew. He was a religious leader.

Now the Jews want to kill him. Why? Because he's proclaiming the Gospel that Jesus is the Messiah, that you kill the Messiah. So all the praises went to, now we want to kill you.

They wanted to kill him because of this. But their plot became known to Saul and they watched the gates day and night to kill him. And then the disciples took him by night and led him down through the wall in a large basket.

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples. Wait a minute. We heard about you.

We know this is a trick. You're just going to come in and take us to jail. We know about you.

You're not going to be part of our group. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and how he had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

So he was with them at Jerusalem coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly. Boy, we can't avoid that word either.

All throughout the book of Acts. So he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and disputed against the Hellenists. The Hellenists were just Greek speaking Jews.

So instead of taking their mother tongue, they spoke Greek. So they were the Greek speaking Jews and they more looked like the culture of the Greek people. They weren't Jews who were set apart.

So now both groups hate him. The world hates him and religious people hate him. And that will happen to you as well.

The carnal Christian hates my kind of message. Oh boy, do they hate it. I'm called a fear monger, hellfire and brimstone preacher, mean, negative, because they're convicted.

But the person who wants to change loves it because they're, oh, I feel I'm having my relationship with God again. I love that. I'm back with him.

And the religious people hate it as well because you're calling out their religiosity, their pride and their arrogance and their stubbornness. I have been doing this 30 years. You have religion but not a relationship.

So both groups hated Paul and they attempted to kill him as well. And when the brethren found out they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. But let's back up to a minute.

I don't want to miss what Barnabas did here. Barnabas went and grabbed Paul, introduced him to the disciples. And it reminded me that someone has to be the peacemaker.

Okay, guys, somebody has to be the peacemaker. But pride gets in there and says, no, not me. Because we think this is, we think, no, we think this is real spiritual.

That's actually unbiblical. The Bible encourages us to be peacemakers. So what happens in marriage problems, do you have one spouse doing this? And what's the other one doing? Being the peacemaker? No, no, no.

The other one's like this too. So days go by and weeks go by and months go by and years go by and nobody wants a peacemaker. I'm not going to say I'm wrong.

I'm not saying you have to say you're wrong but you have to be the peacemaker. See, somebody has to, that's biblical. Paul said, be at peace with all men.

When you start to go to somebody and humble yourself and say, I want to be the peacemaker. I don't want this to keep going on. You are filled with the Spirit.

You are walking according to God's ways when you humble yourself and become the peacemaker. Now, I'm sure somebody's going to ask, well, what about, why can't other religions, why can't all you guys just come together and sing Kumbaya? Kumbaya, my lord. Right? You know that song? Holly, don't make me feel silly up here.

Right? Why can't we? Because it's not peacemaking for the sake of peacemaking. We're supposed to be united with the truth. United with God, with the scriptures, with the Holy Spirit, unity and faith.

So when I'm united with God, sometimes I can't be united with others that don't believe who God said he is. So if there's a false religion out there, how can I be united with them? Because if I'm united with them, I'm divided with God. So true, genuine unity, because I hear this a lot.

Why can't all the churches from every type of religion just come together, Shane? Well, if they acknowledge the one true and living God, don't see you, there you go. Again, you're being narrow-minded. You're being narrow-minded.

Well, Jesus said he's the only way. So if they say he's not the only way, how can I be part of that group? So this area of unity is important. It's unity with the Holy Spirit, unity with faith in Christ, unity with the Father.

That's true unity. And then those who are also united with that come alongside of you. And that's where you get unity, the biblical unity.

Now, I better clarify boldness, since we're gonna be leaving here in a minute. Boldness is not loud and arrogant. Boldness is not loud.

Boy, Shane sure is loud and bold. That's not necessarily bold. Bold, the definition of bold is this, confidence, courage, and willing to act.

So when you talk about your faith, you can talk like this. I appreciate your heart, but here's where you missed it. I understand, but here's where you missed it.

I have to stand up for the truth. And you're bold, you're confident, you're not willing to bend. But what most people do, they get into arguments at work.

Yeah, Jesus this, this and that. Oh yeah, you're right. Yeah, I'm sorry.

And we're just timid. So boldness is the opposite of timidity, right? Because who wants controversy at work? I'm the only person that probably wants controversy at work, right? Wherever I go, you know. But most places, Northrop or wherever you're, Lockheed and different, I remember McDonnell Douglas, you know, all those things out there when I was growing up.

At workplaces, it's hard nowadays that you can't talk about certain things. And there's a sense to not be bold, but I believe that God wants us to be confident and courageous wherever he has put us. So let me sum it up.

I wanna help you with apologetics and proving that Jesus Christ, Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is Lord. Apologetics is giving a defense for what you believe.

You have to give a defense for what you believe. That's what it is. 1 Peter 3.15 tells us to be prepared, always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks why we believe what we believe and do it with gentleness and respect.

We often wanna cut off that last half, huh? Gentle, no, no, no. But gentleness and respect and understanding. A couple things as we conclude.

Know what the Bible says. Know what the Bible says. Many people don't know what the Bible says.

But when you know what it says, you read it each year, you try to get through it, and you know how to answer questions. You know what the character and nature of God is. You know how to respond to difficult things.

Also, pray for direction and clarification. As you're reading, as you're studying, pray, God, show me, give me clarity, give me direction, show me what this means. Show me how to understand this and that.

Also, though, limit who you read and what you watch. God should be the priority. God should be the priority.

Okay, be very careful in this area. Limit what you watch. Because if we start watching all these things, right? I just had a lady.

She's probably never coming back again because it was a whole Catholic thing because I don't elevate Mary. But she was praying, and she had a genuine concern. I've heard this come out more that the earth is actually flat because of YouTube videos.

And it's because if you're watching those things, you know, and then apparently George Bush took out the Twin Towers, and apparently John F. Kennedy was not assassinated by who we thought, the Russians. I mean, it's like, what is going on here, guys? I mean, if this leads you away from God, and you get caught up in all these conspiracy theories, I don't know anything about God, but I can tell you all this ridiculous stuff. Be careful because I see it more.

Like, where do you get that from? Well, this YouTube. You gotta watch it. I'm not gonna watch.

Number one, you don't know who's producing them. Their name's not on anything. They're like, anonymous? Come on, wake up.

We know everything about everything but God. When was the last time you studied God and want to know his character, his nature? So get in his word. Pray for direction.

Limit who you read and what you watch. Does it build me up spiritually or does it tear me down? Also, read, read, and read some more. Read according to your passion because people, you know, they might say, well, Shane, not everybody has the passion or calling that you do.

Right, but you have a passion or calling. God's given you a passion for something, right? Read those things. Read so you can give every person a reason for the hope that is within you.

And this is the big problem in the church. We say, I don't have time. I don't have time.

Yes, you do. You don't have hunger. That's the problem.

It's not time because we make time for everything we want to make time for. The problem is we don't have a hunger for God. And if you were so hungry for God and you left here, you could rearrange your whole day to spend time with God.

Most of you could. So we don't have a time problem. We have a hunger problem.

Now, I don't say that to upset. I'm saying to be honest and real because that's the problem. That's where everything hinges.

And I'm going to repeat what I've said before, but I think it'll be important. Here's how you foster and here's how you increase that hunger. The Bible says, those who hunger will be full.

Wait a minute. There's a continual hunger. You'll be satisfied.

If you're hungering for God, you'll be satisfied. Those who thirst will be satisfied. Those who seek will find.

Those who empty themselves will be filled. When God is a priority, everything falls in place. So the enemy is hell bent on getting you to redirect your life away from God and onto everything else that really doesn't matter.

I mean, if you were the devil, if you don't believe this, read C.S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters. It's a wonderful analogy or allegory on how God and the enemy thinks. And he will try to sidetrack us every chance he gets.

He's not going to say, oh, God's called Shane to be a pastor. Well, I'll just leave him alone. Oh, no, he will not.

Same with you. God, I'm on fire for you. I want to make a difference.

I want to visit the hospital homes. I want to do ministry. I want to reach out to the home.

I want to do all these things. The devil, okay, I'll just let you do what you're going to do. Let me go into somebody else.

No, he's going to go at those areas. He's going to try to discredit. He's going to try to bring in fear and failure.

He's going to bring in laziness. He's going to use all these things, the enticements of the world. And really, that's what it boils down to.

He who loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him. He who loves the Father won't have the love of the world in him. Where's your hunger? Where's your hunger this morning? God must be a priority.

There's nothing more important than that.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/32/SID32037.mp3>

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