

Priorities 01 Subject Studies

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing our relationship with God through the Bible, prayer, worship, and family.

Duration: 1:11:47

Scripture: Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Priorities"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares various anecdotes and examples to emphasize the importance of prioritizing our lives as true disciples of God. He highlights the need to invest in the Word of God and not let a week go by without making that eternal investment. The speaker also mentions a program set up to train young individuals in the Word of God and practical know-how for future leadership in the local assembly. The theme of the retreat is 'the man God uses as a true disciple,' and the speaker encourages the audience to examine their own hearts and consider their priorities in life, including the Bible, prayer, worship, family, church, occupation, and other worldly pursuits.

Transcript

In coming to this seminar, to this retreat, it makes me think of a hymn we used to sing overseas, there's a sound upon the mountains, there's a murmur in the air, and the sound of coming glory thrills my soul. God is really working these days and it's great to be around where he is working. The theme selected for this retreat is the man God uses as a true disciple.

Um, there are a lot of ways you could go at this. I thought I would take it up under the subject of priorities. What is, what are our priorities? And I'd like to think with you, I'd like us to examine our own hearts and to ask ourselves, why are we really majoring in life? And some of the subjects we can think about are, for instance, the Bible.

What place does the Bible have in my life today? Prayer, worship, my family, the assembly, the local fellowship, the local church, my secular occupation, making money, TV, the honors of this world, security, hobbies, sports, recreation, you name it. Somebody said life is like a coin, you can spend it any way you want, but you can spend it only once. Now, we all know where our priorities should lie.

The first verse in the Bible tells us that, doesn't it? In the beginning, God. Put God first. When Elijah went into the home of that widow, he said, make me first a cake.

Poor soul, she was just eking out an existence and had enough left for herself and her child, and then they were ready to fold up and die. And he said, make me first a cake. I always thought, wasn't that a selfish thing to say? But it wasn't, because he was there as God's representative, and he was saying, put God first in you, and the barrel will never go empty.

The crews of oil will never fail. And then, of course, the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6.33 tell us where our priorities should lie. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

We know those things. The problem is how to implement them and to test my priorities. One way I can do it tonight is this.

What can I talk most enthusiastically about? It's a little temperature test that we can take. What do I get most excited about? And what can I speak about with the greatest enthusiasm? And really, whatever that is, is the thing that's having first place in my life, isn't it? Whether it's golf, or business, or politics, or the Lord. So I want to think about these things with you in the hours that we have together, and I'd like to begin with the Bible.

Let's check on our priorities. It's very easy for us to forget what a treasure we have in this wonderful book. Within the covers of this book, God has given us his counsels and his purposes.

And in very many ways, this book is about the most wonderful thing we have in the world. You come up here to Colorado and you look out on the wonders of God's natural creation, and they are wonderful. But really, the wonders of the word of God are more wonderful.

Do you believe that? The revelation of God we have in the scriptures is a far greater revelation than we have in creation. I think you have that brought out very beautifully in the 19th Psalm. If a carpenter takes me and shows me a house that he's built, I can tell some things about that carpenter.

I can tell you something about the type of a man he is. But if I sit down and talk with him for a couple of hours, I can tell a lot more. I can look out upon the creation and see a lot about God.

When I hear him speaking to me through the word of God, I can tell a lot more. And I really believe that what you and I are doing with the Bible today is determining our capacity for enjoying heaven. Do you believe that? We are making our initial investment now in the word of God.

And throughout eternity, God is going to be revealing to us the treasures of this marvelous book. Throughout endless ages, he's going to be showing us the wonders that he has stored up here. But my capacity for enjoying it all will be determined by what I'm doing with the scriptures today.

And the trouble is, it's so easy to spend more time in the week on the paper, Time Magazine, and TV, than in the eternal word of the living God. And these things should not be. I think it was in the little booklet Our Daily Bread the other day, the story about Jenny Lind, the Swedish nightingale.

At the height of her career, uh, she turned her back on it all. And somebody said to her, Jenny, why did you do it? Why did you turn your back on it all? She said, it made me think too little of this. Well, that's the trouble.

The world is too much with us. Late and soon, giving and spending, we lay waste to our powers. And it's just too easy for you and for me to let a week slide by and not be making that investment for eternity in the word of God.

Some people say to me, you don't understand brother, I'm not a student. Well, I know a lot of people who aren't students who became students through the scriptures, the greatest university. My father came over to this country from Scotland, and I doubt very much that he had an eighth grade education.

I doubt it. But he was saved by the wonderful grace of God. And he started digging in the word of God.

When he died at the age of 84, he could preach the gospel. He could minister the word of God. He was an elder in the local assembly and a powerful God.

A man that never had more than any... Yes, exactly. But he would come home at night from his work and he'd study the word of God. And he'd go to the conversational Bible readings and make meaningful contributions to them.

It's wonderful what God can do with a man who's really given over to him and who's willing to be taught. So let us ask ourselves the question at the beginning of this retreat, really, what am I doing with the scriptures? Am I going to be a pauper in heaven, having majored on minors and really neglected that which was of supreme importance? And closely connected with that is the subject of prayer. And really, I speak to my own heart in this.

I do believe that in eternity, one of our greatest regrets will be that we didn't pray more. Somebody suggested that man never comes closer to infinite power than when he prays in the name of the Lord Jesus. Isn't that something to think about? Man never comes closer to omnipotence than when he prays in the name of the Lord Jesus and for the glory of God.

And I suppose that's why Hudson Taylor said, learn to move men through God by prayer. I really believe the work is done in prayer. I haven't always believed that, but I believe it today.

I really believe the work of God is done in prayer, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord. And how do we get in touch with the spirit? Through prayer. And you know, we live in a world where miracles are taking place all around us every day through prayer.

And if we neglect prayer, we're missing out. If we give our lives over to prayer, our lives will crackle with the supernatural. We'll see the marvelous converging of circumstances in our lives and our lives will be radioactive with the Holy Spirit of God.

Let me give you some illustrations. Back at Christmastime, some of our fellows were praying about going to Mexico on a gospel crusade. They needed transportation.

They prayed, went to prayer. We had these extended times of prayer and they cried out to God for a vehicle that would be big enough to take the crowd down. Save gas, don't take two cars.

It wasn't long after that that Jack Davies told them that they could take the van from the Fairhaven Gospel Chapel. The only hitch was that you had to have the drivers had to be over 25, insurance. Only one of our fellows was over 25.

What do you do? Pray. So they went to prayer and crying to God to raise up somebody over 25 that could share in the driving because they drive around the clock. They don't stop at the holiday inns on the way down.

One of them got a phone call one night from a fellow named John Berg in Fullerton. Heard you were going to Mexico. I wondered if you have room for another person in the van.

Yeah. How old are you? He was. He was over 25.

So they were going to leave on a Thursday morning at three o'clock in the morning. Wednesday afternoon somebody went into the room of our fellow who was over 25, the driver, stole his wallet with \$350 and his driver's license. I think the driver's license at that point was more important than the \$350.

So what do you do? You pray. You pray. That night after it was dark, two of them decided to go out in the neighborhood and look, they didn't even have a flashlight.

So they started going around the neighborhood and it was as dark as could be. And they looked across the street and there was the Chuck Burger there or something, a hamburger place. It wasn't McDonald's.

And they decided to go over there. One of them looked on the ground, on the ground beside one of the disposal cans and there was a wallet. The money was gone, but the license was there.

There's a wonderful thing to prove God by prayer, isn't it? And these things are happening all around us. Are they happening in our lives? Do we see God working in this way? I was reading in Now the other day, a woman, a Christian worker goes into the London airport and witnesses for the Lord Jesus. She went in recently to the London airport and she got hold of a stewardess of one of the airliners and spoke to her about the Lord Jesus.

And the stewardess was ripe. She trusted Christ as her savior. And then shortly after she said to the worker, she said, look, I've got to go.

She said, my plane is leaving. And the worker said, fine. And she reached down in her bag and she brought out a book by Francis Schaeffer and she handed it to the stewardess.

And she said, read this if you get a chance on the flight. She shot up a prayer to God. Girl gets on the flight, the flight goes on, gets her work done.

She's sitting down in her jump seat, reading the book and a man comes up to her and he says, he says, you understand what you're reading? She said, well, I've only been saved a few minutes, he said. And he said, let me explain it to you. My name is Francis Schaeffer.

Do you think God answers prayer? Really? It's a shame we don't pray more, isn't it? Last year, we had one of our extended times of prayer out there on the West coast. We started this time of prayer with a confession to God, confession of our own sins, of the sins of the church and the sins of our nation. And as the evening wore on, we began to pray about the Chad Republic.

This was on a Friday night. At that time, the president of the Chad Republic was a very wicked man named Tombleby. And he had begun a terrible career of repression of Christians there.

He was requiring everybody, all the men to take some very vile initiation ceremonies, which was really initiating them back into the old heathen rites. Many of the men who went to the initiation ceremony never came back. Time magazine reported that they buried one Christian man up to his neck in the sand and let the ants finish him off.

Another man was placed, another Christian was placed inside a drum, and they beat on the drum until he starved to death. And of course, we have friends over there, missionary friends there, and there's a very strong indigenous work among assemblies of God's people over there in the Chad. And this night, I think there are some young people here who were at the prayer meeting that night.

This night, we laid hold of God for the Chad Republic. On Sunday morning, I was driving to the meeting, turned on the radio, heard the news, military coup in the Chad, Tombleby slain. It's been a new day for Christianity in the Chad since then.

I want to ask you a question. Do you think a group of nobody's praying in San Leandro, California can influence the destiny of a nation in Africa? Well, it did. It did.

It really did. And I'd like to suggest to you and to my own heart that prayer should really have a higher priority in our lives than it has. We never come closer to omnipotence than when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus and for the glory of God.

And then I think of the subject of worship, too. Am I really a worshiper? I got a lesson years ago. I was traveling back east and went to Baltimore, and A.S. Loazo picked me up at the railroad station and drove me to his home.

When we came into the yard of his home, he had two dogs. One was a white dog and the other was a black dog or something like that. Anyway, when we got out of the car, that white dog came and jumped all over Mr. Loazo, slobbered all over his hands and really showed the utmost affection for him.

Really did. The black dog lurked in the shadows, didn't even come near. And Mr. Loazo said to me, that black dog knows nothing about worship.

And it was a very powerful object lesson for me. I thought of my own life and how you can be so busy in the work of the Lord and neglect the subject of worship. I think it's a wonderful thing that God made dogs.

A dog is a wonderful creature. Many of you have dogs at home, no doubt. And I think God put those dogs there to really teach us lessons.

They really do. They're wonderful creatures. And the loyalty and affection that they can shower on others is really something.

I have some friends in Napa and they have a red Irish setter. And it's the most affectionate dog I've ever known. It's a leaner.

Whenever you go in the house, it comes and leans its head right against your knee. And it really does something for you. I was going to say for your ego.

I don't know if it's your ego or what. But just to think that the dog cares, that's all. Well, recently their house was broken into.

And I guess the dog just gave the robbers a royal welcome. That's the kind of a dog I like. Because when my friends came home, the house was stripped and the dog was contentedly shut up in the kitchen.

They had just closed the door in the kitchen and left the dog there. Well, they said, we're going to put an end to that. And so they got a young German shepherd.

And when we visited the home, we were not to touch that German shepherd. They didn't want us to pet that German. That German shepherd was going to be a man-eater, you know.

And anybody come near that house was going to get it. I was up there a couple of weeks ago. And you know that Irish setter had transformed that German shepherd.

It was a real lover. A real worshiper. And you know, worship is like that, too.

It really is like that. And when you think, when you think of what the Lord has done for us, when you think of God becoming man so that as man he could die for us on a criminal's cross, why, he deserves all that we have. And when you think, too, that the only worship that God gets is what he gets from redeemed lips, it isn't too much of it.

And so at a time like this, and I'm speaking to my own heart tonight, I really think we should really rededicate ourselves to this whole matter of worship. Listen, there are too many brothers in our assembly whose voices are never heard in public worship. And it would lift the tone of any meeting just to hear that brother, young or old, get up and say, Lord Jesus, I love you.

David did that. I've been impressed as I've been reading some of the psalms, some of the simple things that David said. Nothing great about that.

No, nothing great about the great thing is that he said it. You know, the Lord, great is the Lord. Well, I could say that.

Why don't you say it? David said it. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and his greatness is unsearchable. The Lord is good.

David said, I love the Lord. That's just ABC. I know it.

But we're not saying it. We're not telling the Lord and he's waiting for it. I really believe that the Lord Jesus has an appointment with me at that worship meeting.

And I believe he misses me when I'm not there. Sad to say there are all too many who are really more concerned about a weekend in the mountains than they are about an hour at the throne. When the Lord Jesus went to the house of Simon the Pharisee, he said to him, you know, the woman came and anointed him and really worshiped him.

Jesus said to Simon, thou gavest me no kiss. He wouldn't think he'd have missed a kiss, but he did. He did.

Thou gavest me no kiss. I'll tell you, one of the great things that could really happen as a result of our weekend here is if we'd determined that our lives would be more fragrant for the Lord Jesus in worship from now on. And we'd let some of the other things go by the board.

You say, how do you do it? Well, I'll tell you just a practical way in which to do it. That is to dedicate Saturday night to the Bible and the hymn book. You ever think of that? I personally like to have my Saturday nights to myself and to sit in my room with my Bible and the hymn book.

The hymn book God so often uses inspiring worship really. And those men said it in ways that I can't say it. They say what I feel but can't express.

And really some of the hymns are just wonderful and they lift you right up to the very throne of God. Lamb of God, our souls adore thee while upon thy face we gaze. There the Father's love and mercy shine in all their brightest rays.

Lamb of God, when we behold thee lowly in the manger laid, wandering as a homeless stranger in the world thy hands had made. You can scarcely sit and contemplate words like that without your heart overflowing in love and praise and adoration to the Lord Jesus. Are you a worshiper? It's very pleasing to the Lord.

Mary was. She chose the better part. Service is good.

Worship is better. I don't know whether Doug Fuller is here yet. I don't see him, but he gave a lovely devotion one morning in our intern program this year.

And he quoted some men who said, God is more interested in our love than in our service. The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant. Let me say it again.

God is interested. This may not be exact, but it's the gist of it. God is more interested in our love than in our service.

The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant. That really shot through me when he said that. And I realized God had spoken to me.

So try it. Try setting Saturday night aside just to be quiet before the Lord, reading the scriptures concerning the passion of the Lord Jesus and reading some of those wonderful hymns in a hymn book like Hymns of the Little Flock or Believer's Hymn Book or Hymns of Worship and Remembrance, things that are specifically set apart for that. These are really things of first importance.

And yet the things of life, the things of the world can crowd them out so that oftentimes we look at our hearts and wonder whether we're stones or human beings. Then I think about our family. I personally believe that when God gives a man a family, that's his number one mission field.

I really believe that. And I think it's a sad thing when anybody has to say what the Shulamites said in the first chapter of the Song of Solomon, they made me the keeper of the vineyard, but my own vineyard have I not kept. Of course, she said it really about her own personal appearance, didn't she? When she said it, she was dark and swarthy, sunburned from working out in the vineyard, her own personal appearance she hadn't kept.

But it applies to our families as well. It applied to Eli's family. Eli, representative of God among his people, but he failed with his family.

David gave Adonijah a pass, as it were, but he didn't rebuke him. Years ago, it came over the radio in northern Minnesota that there was a heavy frost coming that night, and there was a woman on a farm

there, and she remembered that she still had a few cucumbers and tomatoes on the vines. And so she took her two little children and put them out in a little pen in the yard and closed the gate, and she went off down to the garden to get the tomatoes and the cucumbers.

And when she came back, the little girl was missing. And the alarm was sent out, and men spent all that night searching with great searchlights for that little girl, and she was never found. The woman got her cucumbers and her tomatoes, but she lost her child.

As you know, it's possible to practice through that too, isn't it? And I'm afraid that in too many cases today that we give ourselves to the world so much that we lose our children in the process. And not only that, but oftentimes we hold before our children worldly ambitions and train them for the world and for hell. We really do.

I was brought up in a Christian home, and I really thank God tonight for the background I have, but I might as well be honest too and say that I can't remember anybody ever holding the work of God before me as a desirable way in which to spend my life. I was encouraged to go out and make a name for myself and the community and get a good job, shoot for the top, but I can't remember anybody ever holding the work of the Lord before me as a desirable way in which to spend my life. Isn't that sad? My brother went off to Bible school, and I can remember an aunt of mine saying, whatever you do, don't you do that, Bill.

And I said, don't worry. I had no intention of doing it. I knew I wanted to be an investment banker, and nothing was going to interfere with that.

That's it. And we have a whole sense of priority so warped nowadays. I know many Christian parents today would be very glad to have their children serving the Lord.

And just perhaps one more. I'd like to ask tonight, what priority do we give in our lives to the local assembly, to the fellowship, to the local church? I would guess that most of us don't really realize how important the assembly, when I use the word assembly, I mean that local fellowship, how important it is to God. First of all, the importance of the fellowship is seen by the place that's given to it in the New Testament.

Think of the vast portions of the New Testament that are devoted to the subject of the New Testament church. It must be important. It formed a very important part in the ministry of the apostles.

Wherever they went, they spoke enthusiastically about it. I don't know if you've noticed it, but it's almost a mum subject in evangelical Bible conferences today. Did you ever hear the subject of the church roached? And yet Paul had a two-fold ministry, and the church was part of that ministry.

In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul said that he was called, first of all, to declare among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. That's the gospel. And he said to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery.

That's the church. Paul didn't think his ministry was complete unless he kept the two in balance, the gospel and the local fellowship. The subject of the church forms the capstone of scriptural revelation, Colossians chapter 1, verse 25.

A rather obscure verse, but maybe we could just look at it for a minute. Colossians chapter 1, verse 25. It says, Well, if I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to

fulfill or complete the word of God.

To complete the word of God. The subject here is the church, the mystery. And he says, Whereof I am made a minister.

That is, a servant of the church, of the mystery, to complete the word of God. What does it mean? Well, I believe it means this, that when Paul gave us the truth of the New Testament church, that completed the word of God. Oh, you say, just a minute, brother.

Revelation was added after that. That's true. But there was no new important doctrine added after the doctrine of the church.

That was a capstone. When Paul gave us that, he gave us the capstone. And the church is an object lessened to angelic beings.

Ephesians 3.10. They look down and they see the manifold, the variegated wisdom of God in the church. And I'll tell you, that would be enough to spend hours just meditating on. How do angels see the manifold wisdom of God in the church? Well, it's really a wonderful thing when you stop to think of them.

You take a group like ourselves and what we've been saved from, how the Lord Jesus came down into death valley, into a very jungle of sin, as it were. And he took people of every culture and every background and every social strata and all the rest and saved them by his matchless grace and embarked on this tremendous program of conforming them to the image of his son. And he puts us together in the church to get the rough edges knocked off and to develop graces in our lives that could never be developed in any other way.

It's a wonderful thing. It's an object lessened to angelic being. The assembly is the only unit on earth to which God has promised perpetuity.

That is, only to the assembly, to the church has he said, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I know there are a lot of good Christian organizations in the world today and I'm not here to say a thing against them, but I want to tell you, I believe the assembly, the church is central in God's plan. And I believe if my life isn't bound up with that church, I'm missing God's best.

I really believe that. I really believe it with all my heart. The church is spoken of as the fullness of him that fills all in all.

I love some of these expressions of Paul. It seems that the words seem to bend under the very weight of the ideas. Imagine that the church is the fullness of him that fills all in all.

What does that mean? Sometimes it's just a jumble of holy words to us when we read something like that. But I like to illustrate it like this. If this is Christ and this is the church, the church is the complement of Christ.

It goes to make up the complete human. Now really only grace would ever say that. Imagine the Lord Jesus in any sense intimating that he's not complete without us.

I think he could get along very well without us. No, it says the church is the fullness of him that fills all in all. When I read that, I stand in awe and worship.

It's the body of Christ. Just think of that, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. How can you think of anything that expresses more intimacy and affection? And I believe the church is the unit on earth that God has chosen to propagate the Christian faith.

I really believe that. And I'm glad for the great work of the Spirit of God in our day, creating a new emphasis on church renewal. I believe this, that the weakest assembly of God's people in the world today means more to God than the greatest nation that exists.

Do you believe that? Just think of something. Maybe some of you are from an assembly like that, a weak assembly, and sometimes you get discouraged and you wonder if it's worth it. Listen, that assembly means more to God than the greatest empire that has ever existed.

You say, why do you say that? I say that because it says in Isaiah that the nations to God are as a drop in a bucket and a fine dust to the balance. He never says that about the church. He says the church is the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

And I believe that the humblest elder in an assembly of God's people means more to God than the President of the United States. Hmm. Why all this fuss about the presidency and so little about the elders? You say, well, where do you ever get such far out ideas, MacDonald? Well, I'll tell you.

Just go through the New Testament and find the... How many verses can you find me that will tell me how to be a good President of the United States? Not many. How many verses can you tell me about... give me about the work of elders? Oh, you say quite a few. I can give you 1 Timothy 3. I can give you Titus chapter 1. Peter had a lot to say about it in his book.

You know, that's right. A lot of it. Why? Because it's important to God.

And don't ever forget it. I'll never forget years ago, back at Emmaus, I said to a young fellow, Alan, what would you like to do? You know, when you become a mature Christian, what would you... He said, I'd like to be an elder in a local assembly like Brother Chapel in our assembly. The only young person I've ever heard say that.

That is very good. I'd like to be an elder in a local assembly. To tell you, he had his priorities right.

He really did. And I believe that the visitation work in that local assembly of yours is pure religion and undefiled. I don't know what kind of visitation is going on in your assembly.

But I read in James, pure religion and undefiled is to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. And I was impressed in the choice gleanings calendar recently. And with this, I'm going to close.

There was a quotation from John Nelson Darby to George Vesemius Wigram. Some of you Greek scholars know Wigram, I think. It's really interesting that his middle name Vesemius means 20.

He was the 20th child in the family. George Vesemius Wigram. Well, Darby wrote this to him and it really surprised me, but I believe it's true.

He said, I think the visiting part is the most important part of the work. The clock strikes the hours and the passersby hear it, but the works inside make the clock go and keep the striking and the timing right. I think that visiting should be your substantive work and take all else as it comes.

I dread much public testimony and especially so if there be no private work. And that was written by a man who turned his back on wealth and luxury in Ireland. He was brought up in a castle in Ireland and when people pass the castle, their noses went up and they say, it's so nice to know the Darby.

And he turned his back on all of that and on a position of rank in the church of Ireland. He went out, traveled for 26 years in Europe without unpacking his suitcase. He lived for days at a time on milk and acorns.

One day he sat in a cheap Italian boarding house and cupped his chin in his hands and sang, Jesus, I, my cross, have taken all to leave and fall thee. When he died, his collected writing still 34 volumes. He left a New Testament assemblies everywhere he ever went.

There's many of them in the world today and he says, I think visitation is the most important part of the work. Where are my priorities tonight? Am I really giving the Bible the place it deserves in my life? Prayer, the quiet time. I didn't mention that.

My family, the local fellowship. Or am I really majoring on minors, becoming an expert in underwater basket weaving while above us burns the vision of the Christ upon the cross. Shall we pray? Father, we will pray tonight that during this weekend when we're together and we have a chance to get away from the rat race and just look out over our lives, we do pray, Lord, that you'll give us the grace to face things honestly and if things have really become rather turned upside down in our lives and if we're spending our lives in that which really doesn't matter and if we're neglecting with all kinds of theological excuses the things that we really should be doing, we pray, Lord, that we might do business with you in great waters this weekend.

We ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. One of the questions is what is your relationship with a local assembly, meaning my own? Elder? Deacon? In subjection? Well, the answer is I'm not an elder.

I'm not a deacon. My ministry is more of an itinerant work, but I do have a home assembly and I am in subjection to the elders of that assembly. That's the Bethany Gospel Chapel in Oakland, California.

Also during the week I work with the discipleship intern training program and that is under the elders of the Fairhaven Chapel and it's a work strictly in connection with a local assembly, but I could not be an elder in the Bethany assembly because I'm not there sufficiently. I do carry on with the visitation program at Bethany, but I think to be an effective elder you should be there on Lord's Day and meeting the people and entering into the life of the assembly and because of my ministry in other places I'm not able to do that. If I don't answer the question, feel free to just speak out because that would be best.

What would you suggest that a younger man, 20 to 25, do to help in the area of visitation? Well I think it's ideal first of all when an assembly has a visitation training program and when those who feel that the Lord could use them in this work come out regularly, maybe on a weekly basis, when there's a definite training schedule going on and then when they move out a trainer and a training. This is the ideal. Rather than just telling a man to go and do the work, it's much better if somebody would take him by the hand and take him out and show him how it's done.

Some of my colleagues are in Detroit this weekend putting on what they call a shepherd's seminar. I think they have about 200 people coming to it, men, and that's exactly what they're doing, trying to help the assemblies there in the Detroit and surrounding areas in setting up this type of a visitation program among

other things. Of course a young man can do it on his own, but I think it's much more effective if he goes out with an older man who knows how to do it, who knows how to take the Word of God and apply it to the various situations that you meet.

Since you would encourage your children to enter the service of the Lord, does that mean that a trade or college is not being in the service of the Lord? And then there's an illustration here of various concentric circles, trade, college, service for the Lord. Actually I'm going to spend some time on that in the messages that follow. Let me say this, I don't think it's right to encourage a young person to go to college just for college's sake, just for the status that's connected with it.

I think that's wrong. I don't think God ever intended every young person to go to college. I think that a trade is very honorable and probably neglected in this country.

The great thing is to be in the will of God and to be in the place that God wants you. There is a book out now which I'm very fond of. I buy it in quantity and give it out.

The title of it is *Secular Work is Full-Time Service* and it gives a very needed emphasis today. But if you will excuse me from not saying more about this, I will be. I'm not walking away from it, but I will be taking it up in more detail.

What are some additional suggestions you have on how we can learn to worship? Well, first of all, of course, we learn from others. I think that in the very act of attending meetings, worship meetings first of all, and you can discern when worship is real, can't you? You can discern when a man is really touching the throne. You learn that way.

You learn through being quiet with the Word of God and meditating upon the Lord and upon what He has done for us. You learn by reading books on the subject. I don't know how many of you have ever read *The Suffering Savior* by Crumaker, but if you can read that and not want to worship the Lord, there's something very... is to be alone with the Lord, to be quiet.

And that's what's so hard nowadays, isn't it? Because so many other things are always intruding on our time. But just meditating on Him and on His love for us and who He is and what He has done for us. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Can you expand on the priority of the family? I know of a man whose wife left him and he couldn't understand it because he was out every night in the Lord's work. Well, of course, we know too many examples of this. The priority of the family.

I think that the family altar is very important. I really have no way of knowing how widespread it is today, but I'd be interested to know, for instance, how many families gather every day at the table and read the Word of God and pray. I wasn't brought up in a very affluent family, and my parents were both immigrants into this country.

But the lasting memory I have of that home is being at that rickety wooden table in the kitchen, and after the meal, we took out the Bible. It wasn't a question of choice, it was just done, that's all. And my father would read the Word of God every day in the family altar.

And then we'd get down by those wooden chairs. There was a family, and we prayed together. My lasting memory, a lot of else has faded into oblivion, but that made a tremendous impression on me.

And those were days when my parents were struggling to keep the house over our heads, the Depression, and there wasn't enough money to pay on the mortgage and all the rest. And we were really knit together, believe me. No danger of that family flying apart.

We were really bound together. I think a family altar is a wonderful thing. After all, doesn't the Scripture say, bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Parents really should be prepared to spend time with their children. Terribly sad stories. There was one again in Our Daily Bread this week that some of you read it, the man who had the book to write.

He had to write the book. A little kid came and wanted him to spend time. He couldn't, he had to write the book.

He wrote the book and lost the child. The child filled with resentment. And I've had young people come to me just filled with a bitter resentment because they felt their parents shrugged them off when they needed them most.

I'd be nice if some of the rest of you shared on some of these. Would somebody like to add to that? Feel free to do so if you'd like. The quote, the Lord is more interested in our love than our service.

I have always thought that love for God is demonstrated in service and obedience. Love equals obedience. Of course that's true, and I think it's a good comment.

You can't separate these things. And yet, where there is true love, there will be true service too. But the fact remains that we can be too busy in service and neglect to just come into the presence of the Lord and pour out our praise to Him.

And He really values that. He really values it. Yes? Would you expand on that? Would you explain? The fact is that we get a feel of this in life, you know.

Some children are very, very affectionate, aren't they? They really love it. Some kids can be just as cold as ice. And that's the way they leave you too.

Well, doesn't God put these things into His creation to teach us lessons? He responds to that too. And He loves it when His people come before Him. In fact, in the simplest terms, as a child of a father, just expresses the worship and adoration of our hearts.

That's certainly true. Incidentally, that's an element that we don't often find in our worship meetings, what God does think of His Son. And yet it is rather fundamental.

Thank you. Would you share something of your discipleship ministry? Also, how might we apply the principles in our local fellowship? Well, a few years back out in California, we really realized that there was a terrible crisis in assemblies. And that crisis was a lack of strong spiritual leadership.

And many of the were closing down. And God burdened our hearts to set up this program. We don't feel we have all the answers.

Believe me, we don't. But we've tried to go step by step on our knees. God burdened us to set up a program where young fellows who are highly motivated and who are willing to give themselves to work in a local assembly, not full-time work, just working perhaps as leaders someday in a local assembly would

come together not only for training in the Word of God, which is very, very important, but for the practical know-how.

Just if I can use myself as an example. Nobody ever told me how to take a funeral. Somebody died and they said, Brother Bill, would you take the funeral? It was just like throwing a baby into the water and saying, swim.

You know, my legs turned to India rubber. How do you take a funeral? Nobody ever took me to a hospital to visit people in the hospital. Nobody ever helped me prepare a message that I remember.

That probably accounts for a lot. But we felt it was really very, very important to do this. And as we checked around, we found there were a lot of people, there were a lot of men that wanted to do things in the local assembly and they didn't know how.

And so there were certain principles that came to our minds. First of all, we wanted these fellows to come into an assembly that was already functioning and doing these things. That was one of the musts.

We wanted fellows who were highly motivated, who were willing to make sacrifices for the Lord, would give themselves to this. And so what we do is we have studies in the Word of God with them every morning, Monday through Friday, 8.30 to 12. And we try not only to give them the overall view of the Bible, but also to take up every subject that we feel would be of importance to them if the Lord should ever raise them up to be elders in a local assembly.

Then and then they go out on practical Christian work. Monday night, Fair Haven has their visitation program. This semester, half of them will go out on evangelistic visitation, half of them will go out on pastoral visitation.

They'll switch around next semester. So they go out with a trainer and they go into the homes. And really some remarkable things happen.

Last year, I think it was last year, Mike can probably correct me on this, but what was this year? Gene Gibson and Fred McHugh went to a home to visit a couple. The woman is in fellowship in the assembly, the man was not. Actually, they went to make a slide tape presentation for the seminar that they're giving now.

And these people were told in advance that these people were going to come and that pictures would be taken. Do you know the man found the Lord that night? It's all on tape and in pictures. Things are going on brightly for the Lord.

Fred McHugh will never forget that. And then, of course, on other nights, they have cell groups in various homes, Bible study groups during the week. Each one is expected to disciple another man during the year.

Actually, they do much more than that. Thursday, they go out on campus, evangelism. They have counseling, and all kinds of practical Christian work opportunities right now.

Each of the fellows has been assigned a Sunday night before the breaking of bread, and each one is going to take up some specific aspect of the glory of Christ before the people remember the Lord. Each one of them has that assignment. So, by the time they finish, they should have engaged in many of the practical Christian activities that they would ever have to do.

If there are funerals, we take two of them with us in each funeral. Weddings, they're taught how to handle the wedding. No stereotype, but just helped how to do it.

Am I forgetting something, Mike? Yes, they have to study too. General idea is 15 hours of class, 15 of study, and 15 of practical Christian work. Actually, the practical Christian work, I think, goes much more than that.

I wonder how much we should support and fellowship the organized church structure in missions and gospel ministry. I'm really not sure I understand. I hate answering a question when I don't feel that I really know what it means, because I could be shooting.

I wonder how much we should support and fellowship the organized church structure in missions and gospel ministry. Anybody want to explain that to me a little bit further? Well, I don't mean that it's worded poorly, but I could be answering it and not hitting what the person had in mind. Okay, well, that helps me now.

Thank you very much. Actually, I think every one of us before the Lord has to set up certain standards as far as our stewardship is concerned, and I will just share with you. I don't know that these are the last word, but I'll share with you what some of my standards are.

First of all, I feel a special responsibility to those who have gone out for the sake of the name, looking to the Lord for the supply of their needs. I feel a special responsibility to them. In other words, there are some Christian workers who go out and they have been provided a Mercedes-Benz and a guarantee of so many hundred a month.

Well, I don't criticize that, and God can use that, but I feel personally more obligated to those who are really spending the time before God in prayer, looking to Him to supply their needs. Secondly, I feel a special responsibility to those who are building a work according to what I believe to be New Testament principles. I think this is very, very important.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I know there are wonderful works going on in the world, and I don't never have fellowship with them, but my prior responsibility, I feel, is to those who go out with the gospel, playing for the gospel, see New Testament assemblies established and strengthened. I think this is fundamental.

I have a personal thing in my own heart against well-publicized appeals for funds. This is personal. Please, I'm not pressing it on you, but when I get these expensive brochures begging for funds, I have a place to file them myself.

And don't misunderstand me. I believe God uses these works, but it's just, you know, I have my own principles that I try to operate on, and that's one of them, but I prefer those who do not. Now, you have to make exceptions, too.

The Bible societies have really been a handmaiden to all of our missionaries and have done a wonderful work, and I don't think you can go wrong investing in the Word of God Bible societies. And then Christian radio, really reaching out to places where we could never reach. I think we have a responsibility to these, so we want to work it out.

It's something you have to hammer out in your own anvil before the Lord. Does that answer your question? If not, feel free to ask, well, we've gone through them rather hurriedly. Are there any other

questions that anybody would like to ask from the floor? Well, actually, spiritually, there's no distinction between domestic and foreign missions.

It's just something that we use to express ourselves, but I think the principles are the same, whether you're working in this country or overseas. Is that what you mean? Well, those are general statements. And let me say something to that.

First of all, it depends on what country you're from. I would think that generally speaking, American missionaries overseas are much better provided for than British missionaries. And I'm sorry to say this, but it's caused really conflict in the mission field because of the difference, especially when you have American and British missionaries working on the same field.

It's difficult. And people that would give you the shirt off their back in this country or in their homeland, let me say, you get over there and somebody goes down and gets a letter of fellowship and you didn't get one and you're in the devil's territory and the green-eyed monster. Very, very difficult, really.

As far as being provided for in this country, I can only testify that in 1947, I felt God leading me to spend my full time in the work of the Lord and I have found that God pays for what he orders. And I have never known a moment of worry with regard to finances. I have had a problem and the problem has not been where the money was coming from, but how to be a faithful steward with what the Lord provided for me.

So I just say, I know there are men that have had needs, but I can only speak from personal experience that God has been most faithful in providing all of my needs and I've had much more to put to work for the Lord than I ever did when I was an investment banker in the First National Bank of Boston. Well, I couldn't honestly say that. I couldn't really honestly say that America's the most needy mission field.

I'll tell you why. You can go down to a local drug store and buy a copy of the Word of God. You know what I mean? You can turn on a radio and hear the gospel preached in all its fullness.

Really. You can't say that about Senegal where Brother Gerhard is going. Really.

I think there are portions of Africa that have been wonderfully well evangelized, but what about Turkey with 35 million people and around 50 born-again Muslim Turks in the whole country? And then I couldn't say when I've seen some of these countries that America is that kind of a mission field. The Lord knows we're a needy people. We need revival.

The Lord knows that. But as far as the availability of the gospel here, there's no country in the world like it. Yeah, all you have to do is look at the car in front of you and it's got the gospel on the bumper.

Really, you don't see that in other countries. Do they have that in Germany, Gerhard? Few. Not many though.

Yeah, a few. You did have it in Germany. I don't know whether that answers your question, dear.

Well, we do have a great needy. We do have, but really the need is just so vast. Like in the Muslim world and the communist world, you just can't get too excited about America as a mission field, really.

I mean, you've been in some of those other places. Anybody else? About the question of being in subjection, the question about elders and all, do you feel that everybody should be in subjection to somebody? I feel everybody should be anchored to a local church. I don't think there's any precedent in

the New Testament for what you might call a freelance.

For somebody who doesn't have his roots in a local church and who is under the discipline of that church, I think such a thing does not exist in the New Testament. If you mean being under the umbrella of some independent man, I don't agree with that. But is that what you had in mind? No, I was wondering about whether every believer should be tied in.

I really believe it. I think it's very, very important, an important principle of the Word of God. Do you consult the elders in your meetings considering concerning your identity? They don't expect me to do it on the details.

Like if I get an invitation to go down and have four weeks of meetings in San Jose, they don't expect me to. But on major moves, I do share with them and seek their prayer fellowship. Recently a situation has come up and one of the elders came to me and said, Brother Bill, we don't want you to become involved in this.

It could ruin your ministry. And I said, I respect your advice and I will abide by it. Okay, time tomorrow.

Okay. Building versus no building? Building versus home? Okay. Well, as far as the New Testament is concerned, for the first two centuries, I believe, the services were held, the meetings of the church were held in the home, the universal gathering place.

And certainly in the book of Acts, it was what you might call a household church. There's been a great return to that in the day in which we live, and there are some very strong advantages of a household church. First of all, the church remains mobile.

When you have a huge building program with the mortgage and all the rest, the church is really pretty tied down. It's not in the same position to hive off when it's under that tremendous financial burden. And in fact, usually a church like that doesn't want people to hive off because they need the help with getting the mortgages paid.

The household church is much better in a time of persecution. It can go underground much more easily. From a business standpoint, it really doesn't make very good sense to build an expensive building and use it three or four hours a week.

No business could operate on that basis. If you buy a great printing press, you've got to use it more than three or four hours a week. So really, that part of it doesn't make good sense.

But that isn't the whole story either. As the work grows, as you have Sunday school, it can be very difficult. In a home, you run out of bedrooms.

Also, it can be very difficult for a family if their home is used week after week. It can be very difficult for the wife if the whole routine of the home is disrupted, all the furniture has to be moved, and all the rest. I don't think that the word of God clearly legislates on it one way or the other.

I must confess that personally, my sympathies are with the household church. And I feel when it outgrows the location, the thing to do is hive off and start another one. But really, in order to do that, you have to have strong leadership.

Otherwise, it's going to be disastrous. So it's not a clear-cut issue. If you're going to be fair, you're going to say there are really arguments on both sides.

I say if you do have a building, use it for the Lord. Use it around the clock. And don't worry if it gets a little messy at times.

Where there are no oxen, the crib is clean, but much increases by the strength of the oxen. Just on the idea of, you said, hiving off and maybe starting a second meeting, shouldn't this be done? Should a meeting split from a period of time? Should the two meetings maybe meet separately at times, meet together other times? There's no way of legislating on that. I would imagine that the usual way is for a group living in a geographical area to meet in a home bible study at first and watch it grow.

See people, see them indoctrinated in the truths of the church, and then with a happy fellowship of the other group, start breaking friends. I would think that would be the norm. But even then, you can go in and just preach the gospel in a place and see a work started.

So God hasn't really just limited us to one method. Anybody else? Yes? Well, I think it's scary in contemplation and enjoyable in retrospect. Like when you look forward, well I mean that, you know, when you look forward to it, it's kind of awe-inspiring and you're really scared.

But when you all gather together on a Monday night after you've been out visiting, the enthusiasm is terrific, you know. Without breaking confidences, you share, you know, triumphs. And although your visit might have been a dud, somebody else's will be very good that night and it'll pull up all the spirits of the people.

So I think that it's just like everything else in Christian life. You fear when you enter the cloud, but really you have wonderful experiences. It might be good sometime if the brethren in this area would have these brothers from Fairhaven come and put on that Shepherd Seminar and they have visual aids to get the idea across.

They put it on in Seattle and I must say, to the glory of God, it's really revolutionized the lives of the assemblies up there in Seattle. They have almost 200 meetings this weekend in Detroit. They put it on in Oakland and really it's a new day for the assemblies in the Bay Area.

They went back from the seminar and they started to do it and the work started to grow. If you carry on a visitation program consistently, it will pay off. It really will.

I can't name any place where it's happening and where they're still growing, probably because I don't know enough. I know an assembly that did have a building in Cleveland years ago, the Grace Mount Assembly. They had a hive off and their numbers went down precipitously, but only for a short while.

Pretty soon they built up to normal again. It wasn't long before they had another hive off. Again, their numbers took a nose dive, but very soon they had to put an addition on for their Sunday school.

They had a third hive off. I think the third was probably down in Akron. If I'm not mistaken, they've had four hive offs from the Grace Mount Assembly.

And whether those were hives? I can't answer because I don't know. Okay, maybe we can just put the Lord in first. Father, we thank you for this time together and we thank you for stirring up our pure minds by

way of remembrance of many of these things.

We pray that the word might become flesh in our lives as we go away from the retreat. We pray that the shockwaves might be felt in assemblies throughout this whole area. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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