



Introduction Gospel Priorities

Today we are going to structure the service slightly differently than normal so I just want to take a moment to prepare you for that.

Today we want to fully introduce our theme for 2018 but we are going to do that through God's gift of communion. Here's how that is going to work. The message this morning is a two part message of approximately equal length. Part one of the message will set our perspective and serve as a time of confession. Then we will partake in communion which will help remind us that yes we are guilty but yes we are forgiven and then we will have the second part of the message which is designed to help us take stock of our life and help us evaluate our priorities. In light of our forgiveness how ought we to live? Finally we are going to end and ask you to respond to the message in a simple way by honestly answering a few questions.

So that's where we are going.

Now I want to begin by asking you a simple question. Why isn't God number one in your life? I think this is an important question because I believe our instinctive answers are incorrect. Well I'm just so busy. The schedules are just so crazy and I get pulled in every direction and I just haven't had time. Now of course there is some truth to that.

I've heard it said that the enemy of the excellent is the good and I think what is usually meant by that is that diluting yourself with many good things will not allow you to concentrate and devote time to really excel in and become excellent in something.

That's a good life principle but I think many of us are kidding ourselves thinking that this phrase applies to our relationship with God. Yeah, here I am doing all these good things but they are sort of pushing God out of my life. Yeah the good is the enemy of the excellent.

But I think for many of us that is not the case. If the excellent is being defined here as knowing and fellowshiping with God, then...

- for many of us the enemy of the excellent is flat out idolatry.
- The enemy of the excellent is sin.
- The enemy of the excellent is fattening ourselves on the world.

God isn't getting pushed out by good things. He's getting pushed out by things he would never approve of. He's getting pushed out by worldliness and love of money and fear of man and worship of self and the cult of sports and the idolatry of entertainment.

If you want to shorten our problem down it's quite simply this: we are in serious danger of loving the wrong things.

- All of here today need to confess an idol.
- All of us here need to strengthen our love for God.
- All of us here today need to spend some time in flat out repentance.

Who among us this morning can say, I have no need to confess my love of the world. This is a daily habit of a Christian to confess as the heart drifts. If you find yourself guilty today of sin, you will be in good company. Welcome to the community of the bankrupt.

So today we are going to use 1 John 2 as our text to help us in our confession. Now it's really important to grab the broad context here. John tells us in the first 5 verses why he is writing the book. He's writing according to verse 5 so that our joy might be complete. So 1st John is a book on how to have complete joy.

Now joy is a tricky business in the Christian life because there are a lot of things that seem like they will make us happy that won't and there are other things that seem like they will make us miserable but in the end will really make us happy.

And so John is talking about how to think about God's laws which often feel restrictive and the voice of the world that often feels enticing, easy and attractive.

How do we deal with those feelings when we are tempted to arrange our priorities according to the world? How do we deal with those feelings when we are tempted to love the world.

And here's what he says,

1 John 2:15-17, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life-is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Now if you break this text down into its grammatical structure it's pretty simple. There are two commands, one negative and one positive: Do not love the world (the negative command) and do the will of God (the positive command).

And if you distill down these commands they are really appeals to evaluate the worthiness of that thing you have chosen to love. "Do not love the world" is a plea for you to evaluate is the world really worth loving? Every love relationship is a contract where you give, you serve, you commit, you give a piece of your heart and you get something in return. If I serve you, then this is what you can hope to expect.

That's why a concerned parent might say, "Don't love video games. Don't love social media. Don't love that really beautiful guy or girl in your class because they are a fool." Why? Because here's what's going to happen: you're going to invest. You're going to give your heart away. And you're going to be disappointed. It's not going to deliver like you thought. That thing isn't worth loving.

And it's in that exact same vein that John says, "Don't love the world." Is this thing going to deliver what you hope? Is it worth it to love the world?

It's not worth it. Why? Because the text says, listen, if you love the world it means you are being controlled by the flesh, the eyes, and pride. And it's result is that the very thing you are after, true life, full and complete life, will vanish before your eyes.

Now instead of loving the world, do God's will. John is very intentionally trying to pit these things against each other. Doing the will of God will always go against the culture. Always.

Do you remember in Pilgrim's Progress (if you've never read it you now have a reading assignment), Christian goes through vanity fair the inhabitants of the city made fun of them. They talked different. They looked different. they stuck out.

The Christian life will always be counter-cultural, and never accommodating. David Wells defined worldliness as "everything in a culture that makes sin look normal and righteousness look odd." That's a good description of worldliness.

- It's normal to love money but the Christian doesn't. He has money but he doesn't love it. He loves Jesus.
- It's normal to love power and influence and beauty but the Christian doesn't. He may have those things, but he doesn't love them. He loves Jesus and he uses them for Jesus.
- It's normal to love self and the imagine in the mirror but the Christian looks at himself and denies himself, not because denial of self has value but because he sees something infinitely more worthy in Jesus Christ. So he gazes instead at him.

John in this passage is saying, do not love the world. But how do you know if you love the world?

Let's take a little personal inventory. What this passage is saying is that your values shape you and the more you value something, the more it shapes you. The more you love the world, the more you look like the world.

If you love the world, it will show. If you love to do God's will, it will show. Your priorities are obvious by the way you live your life. If your coworkers come to you after 3 years and find out you are a Christian and say, "Man, I would have never guessed you were a Christian, that is most likely not a compliment."

Here's an example that might help. Imagine you were a car designer. Now when you design a car you have nearly infinite possibilities on how to do that.

- How big do you make it?
- What shape is it going to be?
- How big of an engine do you put in it?
- What material choices?

Now how do you decide. It ends up being a trade-off between values. So for example, you'd love to have a super fast, super powerful car that's also fuel efficient. But those are mutually exclusive, so you have to choose. You'd love to have a car that is super roomy and spacious with tons of cargo room and also turns on a dime and fits in the compact parking stalls. But you can't have both. Those are mutually exclusive. So you have to choose.

And here's what's interesting. We can look at cars that have been designed and without even a single word from the designer, I can tell

you what values informed his design. I once bought a Geo Metro which if you don't know is a tiny two door care with a three cylinder engine. My wife thinks I have a psychological disorder associated with loving small cars. I tore this car nearly down to the frame and one thing was patently obvious about nearly ever selection. When you look at a Geo Metro you realize that fuel economy and economics drive nearly everything. Everything was plastic, cheap quality, lightweight, flimsy. Conversely, when you look at a Porshe or a Mazarati or a Lamborgini you realize it wasn't economics that determined anything but instead speed and handling.

Now here's the question, when God looks at your life, or when anyone else does for that matter, what do they conclude are you living for? How is your life built? When you have to make decisions and those decisions turn out to be mutually exclusive, what priority DRIVES those decions? No single decisions could be leveraged against you. It's the sum total package.

If you love Jesus it will change your decision making process. It will affect:

- how you use your time,
- how you talk, what language you use or don't use,
- what you care about,
- what you read,
- what you think about when you are all alone,
- what you stream,
- what music you listen to,
- what you laugh at,
- what burdens you,
- what excites you,

You can't love the world and do God's will. You have to choose. I tell

my kids this all the time. Being a Christian, even in a Christian environment, especially in a Christian environment, means choosing. I choose to follow Christ. You can't be liked by the world and liked by God. The world doesn't like God and so it won't like you for the same reason. So whose it going to be?

Now this is where I want to move into a time of confession. Before we really get into how to prioritize God in 2018 we need to just confess.

And we are doing that through communion. Because it is the cross that enables us to confess. We don't have to look away in shame. We don't have to shirk back at the grossness of our spiritual infidelity. God sees it fully, knows it deeper than we know it ourselves and has forgiven us for it completely because of the finished work on the cross. Done!

So hopefully you can see what we are trying to do here. Our theme this year is gospel priorities. But how can we talk about putting God first in any meaningful way when clearly other things have crept into that first place position. We have some work of confession in front of us. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to read a prayer of confession that I've prepared. And the degree to which you agree with these words, pray them as we prepare for communion.

Prayer of Confession.

God in heaven, Jesus our Savior, Holy Spirit our comforter, we open our hearts to you this day, and offer the truth of our lives which is not easy to do. And what we have, the true us, is not beautiful, but we offer it to you because we know you will not reject us. We know that you are gracious and loving, slow to anger and abounding in

steadfast love:

We offer you first the fear that stifles us, that would cause us to run after the world because we are afraid we might miss out on something if we don't keep up. That is real fear, terror, anxiety, panic that we are missing out the world's fulfillment. We confess both it's realness and its foolishness. Lord you do not withhold one good thing from those you love. It is not up to us to take, you are the one who gives. Lord forgive us for loving the world.

We offer you the prejudice that blinds us. We offer you this sin that causes us to look at the world through the distorted lens of sin, that causes us to see gifts you have given us as intended for our selfish end, that causes us to interpret the world as if it were all about us. Lord forgive us for loving the things in the world.

We offer to you the ignorance that hobbles us. We are shackled by our tiny view of the world. Forgive us for acting like gods thinking we know what we need to. We know so little. We know nothing. Forgive us for our arrogance. Lord forgive us for thinking like the world.

We offer you the doubt that plagues us. We don't trust you like we should. You so clearly tell us what will bring us joy and peace and happiness. There is not a shred of unclarity as to what your will for our lives is. Forgive us for doubting like the world.

Gracious Creator, we ask that you forgive us for not seeing you in the beauty that surrounds us but rather try to somehow parse you out. Forgive us for loving your gifts and ignoring the giver. Forgive us for wasting our time on screens. Forgive us for our wreckless factoring of you out of our lives. Forgive us for loving like the world.

Forgive us for our hard-heartedness.

Forgive us for thinking that we are the source of power and beauty and life. Forgive us for those times when we have not spoken up when we should have; for or those times when we have not acted; for those times when we have not responded: forgive us.

We have failed. We have gloated. We have hated. We have ignored. We have raged. We have hoarded. We have judged. We have turned away. We are sorry. We are exhausted. We are done resisting you.

Fix us, heal us, break-and-remake-us, comfort us, instruct us, revive us, resuscitate us, bring us back from death.

God in heaven, You sent Your Son Jesus to be our peace, to die in our place that we might experience the newness of life. By the power of his blood, untie the knots of envy and disappointment that dwell in our hearts. Loosen our grasp on worldly things, that we might open our hands to your precious things. We cannot grasp both. Turn us around to You, and make us whole, we pray.

Lord you are ready to forgive right now our spiritual adultery. You are ready right now to offer forgiveness complete. God you are love which means that you forgive, again and again and again and again. Thank you God! Our hearts sing to you Alleluia!

New every morning is your love for us, and so we are bold to proclaim the Good News: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Take the Bread

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us proclaim the Good News: In

Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God! And we are not only forgiven, we are also freed. Let us greet with world as people made new in Christ. Listen, God is not done with us, not by a long shot. You are more loved than you could ever imagine. The beginning of your understanding of that love starts with your being willing to receive his forgiveness.

So know that you are indeed forgiven, and be at peace. Amen.

Take the Cup

Thank you Lord for your wonderful forgiveness!

Gospel Priorities

Now we have clearly been told what not to do. Don't love the world. And we have spent time confessing our attraction to the world. But what should we do?

And here's what he says,

1 John 2:15-17, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life-is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but **whoever does the will of God abides forever.**

Well 1st John says, we should do the will of the father. And what is that? So we are to do the will of God.

If you were to summarize all the commands in the Bible, which is another way of saying if you were to summarize the will of God, if you were to lay out God's gospel priorities, you would find yourself making it about your relationship with God, your relationship with other believers and your relationship with unbelievers. Nothing else matters. These are the gospel priorities. These are the things that matter to God. So for the purpose of our gospel priority theme here's how we are going to think about it.

GOSPEL PRIORITIES

1. Reach Up - Read and Pray
2. Reach In - Love and Encourage
3. Reach Out - Risk and Speak

Now one of my great fears in talking to you about this stuff this morning is that it will be a point in time experience rather than an ongoing transformational reality.

The goal of today is not to agree that we have done a poor job of prioritizing our lives. The goal of today is to change that, which means that you will need to make actual changes in these areas that

translate to different choices. Your calendar will look different a year from now because of decisions you make going forward from today.

Reach Up

Now let's talk first about changes you may consider making as it relates to your relationship with God.

What we are talking about here is your own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Priority #1 in your life ought to be knowing Jesus Christ better, knowing God better. That should be first above everything else. This eclipses everything. If you aren't doing this, then nothing else can be done well in your life. Everything will be out of wack. Everything will be spinning without meaning.

Now there are two ways to do this: We put two words there. Read and pray.

God's Word is the source for objective truth about who he is and how to know him. I just get this sense over and over as I talk with people that we all agree this is a good idea, that we should be doing it, but nobody does it. And it almost feels like people put it in the same category as flossing your teeth. Yeah, that's a great idea, whose to argue that it doesn't benefit. But the world will keep on spinning if I skip, or maybe never do it, what's the real consequence?

Is that how you think of reading God's Word?

John 6:63, It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Psalms 119:50, This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.

I can tell you from personal testimony that every single week I am so nourished and encouraged from reading. That is not to say I always feel like it. I often times don't. But every time, and I think that accurate to say, I read and I am challenged, I am confronted with some sin in my life, I see the beauty of Christ freshly and am drawn

to it.

Listen it all starts in his Word. Let me ask you and please just answer this question honestly. Are you reading God's word regularly, daily? If the answer to that question is no, can you really say that God is a priority?

Are you praying to him daily, hourly? If the answer is no, can you really say that God is a priority?

If I never talked to my wife and only listen to 4% of what she says can I say that she is a priority? I have had times in my marriage where I get distracted by things.

- And I'll harbor zero animosity in my heart, I will be 100 percent fine, I will be super happy even and excited and energized about life and I will find myself in a conversation with my wife later that night while she is in tears and it shocks me.
- She feels neglected, ignored, uncared for, unloved.
- And it terrifies me.
- I think, how did that happen.
- I had no awareness of that in my soul.
- But somehow it happened that I got distracted and the thing that is most important to me got deprioritized.

I think that is how our relationship with God often works. We are content, happy, even thrilled with certain aspects of our life. But truth be told, it's way jacked up. Trials will show you that. Burnout will show you that. Depression will show you that.

Let me ask you, will you make God number one in your life this year and as evidence of wanting him in that number one place, read your Bible regularly so that you can hear his voice. Perhaps you have a

Bible reading plan already. Great! Stick to it.

If you need some help, I'm glad you asked. We have developed what we are calling not the Bible reading plan, but the Bible reading tracker. And here's the idea. We want you to be creative and consistent in your Bible reading this year. Read parts of the Bible you think you can tackle for that day. If it's a crazy day, read a Psalm and check it off. If you have more time and are actually just bored waiting to pick up your kids from school, read a few chapters in Leviticus and check it off. Maybe you are reading a book that talks about a certain issue or maybe you are going through a season of life where you need encouragement in a certain area. Well study a book of the Bible that deals with that. You get the idea. This is designed to help you keep track of your Bible reading but also motivate you to keep moving.

Now be creative:

- Do this with a friend.
- Maybe blog about it.
- Maybe post to Facebook about things you are learning.
- Don't be afraid to listen to people read the Bible. I've listened to the whole Bible and I love it when others do that for my while I'm driving or working out. It's a true gift that technology offers us.

Now another thing we are doing to encourage this is on Wednesday nights during youth group we are going to have a Bible reading group. And this is nothing more than a time to come and read the Bible together. We will mix it up. Sometimes we'll take turns reading. Other times we will listen to a professional reader. We'll pick selections from the OT, from the NT. We'll spend some time at the end praying based on the themes that come out of it. My thought is that a lot of you drop your kids off for youth group during that slot;

that's the situation I'm in and so I thought well, let's do something with that time. Stick around and let's read the Bible together. Basically what I'm asking is would you be my friend?

If you don't have kids in youth group, come! If you are single come! If you are newly married come! Bring the little kids and have them participate. We aren't scared of squirmy kids so bring them too. Let's just enjoy reading the Bible together.

Now I have one word of warning here. I hope you are inspired right now to do something. But here's how this works and it's by design. The second you have decided to finally draw that line in the sand and you step over it and you say, "I'm going to be deliberate about prayer. I'm going to develop my prayer life," the normal thing that happens is you experience spiritual dryness. One of the things that happens is you just give up.

It's the same thing with Bible reading. You say, "I'm going to read through the whole Bible." You get to Leviticus, and that's that. You start January 1, and somewhere around February 1, you get into Leviticus, and then you never get any further.

What are you supposed to do? You don't give up. You pray right through it. You read right through. You just keep going right through it, because you have to be patient, because you know this is not something you're going to do to yourself. Spiritual life is not about self-discipline. It requires discipline. But it's not about it. God teaches us constantly in life that you can discipline yourself all you want and you can't get spiritual life. Spiritual life comes from the Spirit. You're not going to thrash around in your effort and expect that to produce something in your heart. So pray and wait and meditate and be patient for God's Spirit to do his work in his time. If every time you

exercised effort you were immediately transformed then you would draw some incorrect conclusions that our effort produces transformation. Our effort is necessary, but it does not produce anything. And often times God will use spiritual dryness to teach us this.

GOSPEL PRIORITIES

1. Reach Up - Read and Pray
2. Reach In - Love and Encourage
3. Reach Out - Risk and Speak

Reach In

What we are talking about here is using your gifts in God's church. We put two words here, encourage and love. These are the one anothers of the body. Are you using your gifts to serve others? Believe it or not, other people need you.

There are 59 one another's in the Bible. This is not about other people ministering to you. This is about you ministering to others.

1. Love one another is by far the most often repeated.
2. Bear one another's burdens
3. Greet one another (that's like a straight up plug for the greeting

ministry)

4. Have equal concern for one another
5. Submit to one another
6. Admonish one another
7. Encourage one another daily
3. Confess your sins to one another
9. Pray for one another
2. Teach one another.

Do you see how important this is to God? Make this a gospel priority this year, to reach in to God's church and love one another. This is a pretty good plug I think to get involved in small groups. There are not a lot of meaningful ways to do this on Sunday morning. We come here on Sunday primarily to worship as a body. It's primarily an upward movement. There is some horizontal activity but that's a byproduct. Small groups on the other hand are all about living out the one-anothers. Talk to Jim Stout or contact the office if you want to get involved.

Another way you can live out the one others is just by inviting someone over to your house. Many of you experienced the fruit of this last night as you participated in our dinner with friends event. Thank you for those who hosted and thank you to those of you who were brave enough to attend a stranger's house. How can you bear someone's burden if you don't know them and how can you know them without spending some time together. Every time we have people over to our house, many of these one others happen both ways. We love others, we are loved. We bear burdens and others bear our burdens. But you have to again, make it a priority.

Reach Out

Now this is all about reaching the world for Jesus Christ. This is the

third major category of what God cares about. He wants his gospel to go forward.

Jesus left us with what we call the great commission in Mt 28 to go and make disciples of all nations.

Two words come to mind here: risk and speak.

Many of you I know have relationships with unbelievers and have been working on that for years. Perhaps this is the year to risk and speak truth that will invariably offend but it also maybe received with joy.

We can spend a lot of time developing relationship but at some point you are going to have to open your mouth. You are going to have to speak truth. Perhaps this is the year for that?

You have the words of life but you need to be reaching out. In the same way that you need to spend time with believer to do the one anothers you need to spend time with unbelievers so that you can love them and share truth with them.

Now there are a thousand ways to do this but I want to share with you a training opportunity coming up here shortly.

So we have our Wednesday night Bible reading and prayer group. Well once a month we are going to join everyone else in something we are creatively titling, "First Wednesdays." It was inspired by our Lynn Wilder event we had a couple months ago and the idea is that once a month we will bring in a speaker to address an issue we think is relevant and important for our culture. We have a guy lined up to talk to us about creation/evolution. We may talk about middle

eastern issues or homosexuality. Things like this. Well our first one coming up the first Wed of February, Feb 7th will be on understanding the refugee population here in Boise and how we can help. So we've invited in Nick and Laura Armstrong who were missionaries to Indonesia for 25 years and worked with displaced people groups while they were there. So they understand this work very well and they have an organization here in Boise called Glocal which aims to connect the church to refugees. Carolyn Langley in our body is working very closely with them. So we are excited to invite them in and learn how we can be a voice for Christ.

Every refugee has an incredible story of suffering and pain. Some refugees are Christian refugees. They have persecuted for their faith and so we can come along side them as a church and bear their burdens. Many others are Muslim refugees and they need the hope and healing offered in the gospel.

So would you consider coming to this event?

Okay, now hopefully you know what we mean by gospel priorities. God wants us to prioritize our life such that we are reaching up, reaching in and reaching out. We will circle back several times throughout the year and hit these again and weave them into the small groups and retreats and sermon applications.

Application

Now here's what I want you to do. I'm done. I'm just going to sit down and the musicians can come up and they are going to play for about two minutes and I just want you to listen to the music and read this card and think about it.

- If there are things that are on here right now that you know you need to do, then check it and do it.
- If you want to think about it, hold on to it. Pray about it.
- Go home and check it off there. This is just a tool.
- If you want to keep this between you and God, don't put your name on it. There are a few questions on here that require us to know who you are so that's why the spaces are there.

But again the idea here is that we are trying to encourage real change. Significant change. Let's make 2018 a year of putting God in that number 1 place!