

The Compelling Priorities of Jesus

Mark 1:35-39

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Several years ago, I came across a quotation in J. Oswald Sanders' book on spiritual leadership that has continued to haunt me. This is the quote.

After making a generous allowance of eight hours a day for sleep and rest, and few really need more than that, three hours a day for meals and social intercourse, ten hours a day for work and travel on five days there still remain no fewer than thirty-five hours unaccounted for in each week. What happens to them? How are the extra two days in the week invested? The whole of man's contribution to the kingdom of God might well turn upon how those crucial hours are employed. They will determine whether his life will be commonplace or extraordinary.

How is it that you and I are to spend our lives? What are the priorities that should drive our time, that should control and compel those unused hours each week? We can learn what our priorities should be by looking over the shoulder, as it were, of the Son of God.

In Mark 1:35 – 39, Mark gives us a glimpse into the compelling priorities of the life of Jesus Christ; and as we look at His priorities, we in turn learn what ours ought to be. Let me read it for you, turn with me to Mark 1:35.

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone's looking for You." He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

In these few short verses, obviously, there are things about Jesus and His life and ministry that are unique to Him, and yet at the same time in these verses, we get a glimpse of the priorities of the life of Jesus Christ. And in similar ways, but different, they ought to be our priorities as well. Let's look at them together. The first one was clear even as I began to read. I think you

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probably saw it. In verse 35 you see His first priority. It was the private practice of prayer. Verse 35 says, “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”

Now, to really appreciate this you have to remember that this passage does not occur as an island isolated from the rest of Scripture. Remember this passage. This verse follows a very long day of ministry in Capernaum. We’ve studied it over the last few weeks. The day before this morning, described here, was the Sabbath. And it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had a very hectic busy day. You remember, it started by teaching in the synagogue. He attended with His disciples there in Capernaum, and He taught in the synagogue. As He finished teaching, a man came in who was possessed of a demon, and Jesus has this interaction, this encounter with the demon, and He cast him out of the man. They return home to Peter’s house only to find Peter’s mother-in-law terribly sick with a raging high fever, and Jesus heals her. And then they sit down together for a Sabbath lunch in Peter’s home.

After dark, you remember as soon as the Sabbath was officially over, we’re told that the entire city shows up outside of Peter’s house. They all show up with sick and demon possessed and people in various states of problems. And Jesus healed every sick person that was brought to Him and cast out every demon that indwelt someone there in that area.

Luke makes it clear, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, that Jesus had done this one by one. It wasn’t some mass service like you see the faith healers on television do. Jesus was very much interactive. One by one He laid hands on them, and healed them. Undoubtedly, that had gone late into the night. And now it’s morning, the next morning. It’s early. In fact, Mark describes it as being in the early morning. That description was typically used for the last watch of the night, a period of about 3 AM to 6 AM. In verse 35 he adds, “while it was still dark.” So, at some time near morning, but still dark; it’s nighttime.

And it says, “He went away to a secluded place.” Literally, the Greek text says to a “wilderness place”. The idea is that Jesus slipped out of Peter’s house, quietly left the city streets of Capernaum and found a quiet secluded place out in a nearby field or ravine, or up on a hill which was a favorite thing for Jesus to do, overlooking the beautiful Sea of Galilee as the light came up. Mark adds why He went. He was praying there. Jesus did all of this for one reason and that was to have an extended time in prayer with God. James Edwards in his commentary writes,

The work of the Son of God is both an inward and an outward work. Jesus cannot extend Himself outward in compassion to others without first attending to the source of His mission and the purpose with the Father. Conversely, His oneness with the Father compels Him outward in mission to others.

So, here our Lord prays. Here our Lord, as man, speaks to God as all godly men have done and continue to do and will do throughout history. Perhaps nowhere do we see firsthand the importance of prayer like we do in the life of our Lord.

I think sometimes we have a misperception. You know Jesus' life was a life of prayer. And maybe you've been tempted to think that the reason Jesus prayed so much is because He had this wonderful communion with the Father through all eternity, and now He's on earth, and so He prayed because He wanted that communion to continue. That's not it at all. The Scriptures teach us that when Jesus became a man, He didn't stop being God. Jesus' divine nature didn't change when He took on humanity. That means that although His human nature was bound to a body and could only be in one place at a time, Jesus' divine nature continued to fill the universe. He was forever in the presence of His Father in His divine nature.

The communion that the Son had enjoyed with the Father from all eternity continued during His earthly life, except for when? Those six hours on the cross when there was some breach in the relationship that They had enjoyed. When He says, "My God, my God why have You forsaken Me?" That was the only time.

So listen carefully, Jesus' prayer life was not a reflection of the needs of His divine nature, but a reflection of the needs of what? His humanity. Jesus didn't pray because He was God, used to communion with the Father. He prayed because He was a man in desperate need of fellowship with the Father. Jesus prayed. Luke tells us it was His practice to pray often to withdraw and to retire into a desolate place and pray. In Luke 5:16 it says, "But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray." [to a quiet secluded place] "and pray." By the way, in the original language the tense, of the verb tense of both "withdraw" and "pray" stress that this was Jesus' constant practice. He did this again and again.

Now, Mark tells us about Jesus' praying on three occasions. He tells us here, Jesus prayed early in the morning, after the Sabbath day in Capernaum. In 6:46 He prayed in the evening after the day's work was done, following the feeding of the 5000, the miracle. And then the final reference is in chapter 14 in reference to His praying in Gethsemane the night before the

crucifixion. Private prayer was just a normal part of the life of Jesus, and I want you to see this. Turn to Mark 6. Let's look at several of these passages because they're very instructive. Mark 6:46, well let's start at verse 45,

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side [of the lake] to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding ... [the crowd and His disciples] farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

[And] When it was evening, [So, some time has passed now.] the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them walking on the sea;

The fourth watch of the night would have been from 3 to 6 AM. So, Jesus was with the crowd as the day ended. He sends both His disciples and the crowd away, and He goes to the mountain, and it's not until the fourth watch of the night that Jesus comes to His disciples; a long time praying.

Look at Luke 6, Luke 6:12 you see this same emphasis. This is before He chose the twelve disciples, the twelve apostles. He prayed all night before He called them, verse 12 says that "It was at this time that He went off again to the mountain." He loved this. And if you've ever been, those of you who went with us in July, you'll remember that the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by these large hills, and even mountains they could be called. And He would go up into those places where He could look out over the sea, and in that context, it says He would pray. And in this occasion,

... He spent the whole night in prayer to God, and when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them whom He ... named as apostles [or sent ones]. We're going to encounter that in just a few weeks in Mark's gospel.

Look at chapter 22 of Luke. Chapter 22, this is a very interesting passage. This is the night of His betrayal, and they go to the garden of Gethsemane and notice what it says in verse 39,

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. [and] When He arrived at the place, He said to

them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and began to pray.

And you remember that there are several of these encounters. But here’s the point I want you to get, “as was His custom.” Jesus didn’t go with His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane that night because He knew it was He needed to meet Judas there. Judas knew to find Him there because it was His custom to be there and to be in prayer.

After his life the writer of Hebrews describes it like this in Hebrews 5. After the ascension Hebrews was written just before 70 A.D. So, this is some forty years after the life of our Lord, and the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 5:7, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications” [And then we get this insight into His praying] “with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death and He was heard because of His piety.” Of course, the primary reference here is to the garden of Gethsemane and the struggle that He encountered there. But certainly, this kind of praying was a part of our Lord’s life throughout His life.

Only a few times are we told about the content of Jesus’ prayers, and you can look at those passages. There really aren’t many of our Lord’s prayers recorded, and the ones that are short, with one exception. The longest one, and if you really want to get insight into what Jesus’ prayers were like, read John 17 sometime this week. That’s called the high priestly pray of our Lord. He prayed it either on His way to Gethsemane or after He’d arrived at Gethsemane for His disciples on the night of His betrayal, and it’s a magnificent, magnificent prayer. Someday we’ll study it together, there’re so many lessons that can be learned there. We’ll come back to it even later this evening.

What did Jesus say in this prayer, this morning early morning prayer on Sunday morning after the Sabbath? Well, in some ways Jesus’ prayer is like our prayers. There would have been adoration and thanksgiving. Perhaps on this occasion He thanked God for all that had happened the day before for the incredible ministry that He had been able to have. On other occasions there was petition. In fact, specifically you find in other passages, Jesus prayed for Peter, you remember, “I prayed for you that your faith not fail.” He prayed for Himself in the garden, and He prayed for His enemies on the cross. So, you see Jesus’ prayers were for others as well as for Himself. He prayed and asked for what He needed. Perhaps on that morning as He prayed, He prayed for the Father’s help as He began His ministry throughout the rest of Galilee.

But Jesus' prayers were always unlike our prayers in one specific way. He never once had to confess His sin and seek forgiveness, which really makes His prayers unique because, of course, everyone else does. And I don't know about you, but I spend a great deal of my time confessing my sin and seeking the forgiveness of God in prayer. Jesus never once had to do that. It was always adoration and thanksgiving and petition for requests of God for what He needed. But private prayer was one of the greatest priorities in the life of Christ. And I want you to see that, and that's the emphasis of the gospel writers.

We tend to say, you know, I just can't give much time to prayer. What are the reasons we offer? You know I just have too much to do. I'm just too busy. When am I going to do that? Do you really have more to do than Jesus had to do in that 24-hour period? Do you really have more important things on your task list than the Son of God did? Well, I need sleep, because I'm so tired from what I have to do. Your schedule is more hectic than Jesus' was during the last 24 hours before He gets up early to pray? He had worked with people, crowds, perhaps even over a thousand people that night and into the wee hours of the morning.

No, you and I must make prayer a priority. We're commanded to. Ephesians 6:18 says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." Philippians 4:6, ... "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer." First Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." That doesn't mean you have to pray every second. That means prayer is to be an unceasing part of your life as a Christian. You and I must make deliberate time for prayer just like our Lord did.

How do we do that? Well look at His example and follow it. Set a time early in the day. It's not to say you can't pray later in the day. But like the psalmist, "My voice will you hear in the morning." Jesus certainly did that. "Get up." Did you see that? It's pretty simple in Mark 1. Look at Mark 1:35. He got up. That's not hard; it's, well it may be hard. But it's not hard to understand. Get alone. Jesus was always getting by Himself. And He commanded us to do it. You remember in Matthew 6, He said when you go to pray, don't pray in a public place where you're calling attention to yourself. Not to say that there's something wrong with praying in public, but our lives, the major thrust of our prayers ought to be private between us and God.

Go into your closet, He says. Go into that room in the first century house which was meant to be locked up for the valuables, had no windows in it, nowhere for anybody to see in, or in Jesus' case, get outside. Go somewhere where you're alone. I personally enjoy being outside in God's

creation. One of my favorite places to pray is on a walk through the woods, or watching over some water. Do what you have to. Prayer was a huge priority for the Son of God. Is it for you? Can you really say prayer is a huge priority in your life?

Let's move to the second priority in Christ, and this will look a little different for us, but for Him it was the public preaching of the Word of God. Jesus has now left the city. He's gotten up early. Everybody else is still asleep. And He's gone outside the city of Capernaum somewhere to a secluded place where He is now alone, praying. Verse 36 says, "Simon and his companions searched for Him;"

Peter has apparently already taken the leadership role among the four, even though they're not 12 yet, he's still in charge. He's still the leader among the four disciples. The Greek word for "searched" here is a very interesting word choice by Mark because it usually means something hostile. It's usually translated as "to hunt, to track down, to pursue". The clear implication and a number of commentators mention it, is that they weren't happy with Jesus at this point, and that's going to come out in just a moment. It says, "they found Him...." Verse 37, "they found Him...."

The implication, by the way, is that Jesus had gone to a place in the hills nearby that He had gone before, and they knew where to look for Him, just like they did in the garden of Gethsemane, that was His custom apparently already. He's developed this custom. They've searched for Him, and one of them said, "I'll bet He's out praying, the place where we've gone with Him." And so, they go out and find Him. And they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." There's a gentle rebuke in their comment. It's as if they are saying, where have You been? Why aren't you seizing the opportunity? The crowds have come back.

The disciples were thinking like humans. Build a crowd, and once you've built the crowd, do whatever you have to keep the crowd. Build on that success. It's a normal human mindset to take advantage of one's popularity and build on that. This wasn't Jesus' mindset at all. He knew what the crowds wanted, and it was about what they could get out of Jesus. In fact, Luke puts it like this in the parallel account, Luke 4. "The crowds were searching for Him and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them."

They had found their genie in a bottle. He could heal their diseases. He could provide for their needs. He could hold the influences of Satan at bay. He needed to stay in Capernaum, and the

disciples agreed with this because they thought building the crowds was the point. Surely more people means real ministry.

There's still a temptation for the disciples of Jesus today to think that. D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "The disciples implied that Jesus must return with them and follow up on His tremendous popularity. They felt that Jesus must regulate His movements by the desires of the masses." But that's not how Jesus thought. The truth is discipleship does not consist in attempting to control the Son of God but to follow Him. Verse 38, He says, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for."

Let's go somewhere else. Boy, that was counterintuitive. That was contrary to the disciples' idea. It's like, wait a minute, we're on a roll. It's like we got this thing going here in Capernaum, everybody's interested, everybody's here. You got to cash in on this. Let's go somewhere else, Jesus says. The tense of His comment implies a tour that will last sometime, perhaps weeks or even months. And where are they going to go? To the towns nearby.

The Greek word translated "towns" is used only here in the New Testament, it literally means "the village cities". Capernaum was the largest town in that area. Mark in verse 33 you'll notice calls Capernaum "a city", "a polis" in the Greek text. But Jesus wants to leave the polis, the city, the heaviest populated place in the area, with a population of several thousand people to go to smaller towns, towns that were small enough to have synagogues, which required ten adult Jewish men, but were much smaller. Jesus, and this is shocking, Jesus is leaving the crowds of Capernaum that were built the night before, and have come back on Sunday morning to go to the village towns; to go to the small places. Why? Why did Jesus want to leave the polis, the city of Capernaum and go into the nearby towns? Verse 38 says, "So that I may preach there also."

Here was the heart of Jesus. Here was His great priority. It was to teach and to preach God's truth. And notice He adds, "for this is what I came for." Literally the text says, "this is what I came out for." Jesus says, I came out of heaven to earth for this purpose, to preach. Jesus' healing ministry, and His casting out of demons were not the central part of His ministry, they were simply a confirming part. The central part of His ministry was the Word of God. Luke puts it like this in his parallel account. "Jesus said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent by God for this purpose.'"

To preach, Jesus said, is an essential part of My mission. D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "The preaching was central, the miracles were the appended seal authenticating the message. Jesus

was determined not to allow preoccupation with the miracles to obscure His message.” Jesus was about preaching.

This week I received a flyer. Actually, I guess it was last week now. I received a flyer from a new local church that’s starting up, and one of the lines on the flyer boasts, “we have talking but no preaching”. Well that’s certainly out of step with Jesus of Nazareth. This is what He came to do.

Jesus was not interested in crowds. He was interested in getting the message of the Word of God to as many people as possible, not building a fan base. If you examine the ministry of Christ, you see a very interesting cycle. First of all, there are miracles. Jesus comes; He preaches; He performs miracles. As a result of the miracles, there is fame. Word about Jesus spreads. And because of that fame, crowds gather. And when the crowds gather, they come eventually seeking miracles. And here’s what’s interesting, when they come seeking miracles, Jesus leaves. You see this over and over again in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. When the crowds come for the wrong reasons, Jesus leaves.

And that’s exactly what He says here. They come saying, let’s go back to Capernaum. What are you doing out here? Let’s cash in on the momentum. And Jesus says, let’s go somewhere else, to the small village towns so I can preach the message. This was Jesus response to seekers. In fact, every time in Mark someone is said to be seeking Jesus, that expression is used. It’s either for the wrong reason, or it’s in the wrong way. Jesus responds to the seekers by leaving. Jesus was all about the preaching.

We’ve already seen this in Mark 1:14 and 15. You remember, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and verse 15 even records His message. Verse 21 says,

They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach. [and] They were amazed at His teaching....

So, He was all about speaking the word of God. But look down at 2:2. Jesus comes back to Capernaum after this trip to the small village towns and He heard, they heard that He was at home “And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even at the door;” [again,] “and He was speaking the word to them.”

This was really the thrust of Jesus' ministry. This was the mission God had assigned Him, shouldn't be surprising. Isaiah had prophesied this is what Jesus would do. You look back at Isaiah 61, Isaiah 700 years before Christ had said this is what the Messiah would do. Isaiah 61:1,

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring the good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD.”

That was Jesus' first message in Nazareth, the one where they rejected Him. But Jesus same said, I've come to proclaim; I've come to teach; I've come to present the truth of God. When Jesus comes to the end of His ministry He was still underscoring the priority and place of the Word of God in His mission.

Look at John 17, I mentioned this a few minutes ago, this is Jesus' high priestly prayer. And I do encourage you to read this prayer, it is magnificent and teaches you so much both about prayer and Jesus and His relationship to His Father. But notice, how, even in this prayer on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus references the priority of the Word in His ministry. Notice verse 4. He says, “Father I have glorified You on the earth, I have accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”

Now obviously, there is a portion of that work still to be done. He's anticipating Calvary the next morning. But there is a sense in which the work that He was sent to do has been accomplished. What work is that? Well look at verse 8, verse let's look at verse 7,

“Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words [the words] which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”

It's all about the words, it's all about the message that I brought, it's all about the truth. It's all about My teaching them. Verse 13,

“But now I come to You (Father); and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.” [So, what I have spoken to My

disciples, I have spoken so that they have full joy.] Verse 14, “I have given them Your word.”

This is the mission Jesus accomplished. Remember back up in verse 4, “[I] ... accomplished the ... [mission].” I taught them. I’ve given them Your word. Verse 17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

God, use the Word I have taught them that was Your Word from You through Me, use that in their lives to sanctify them, to make them personally holy, to make them more like Me. Use the truth that I’ve taught them. Jesus was all about the Word. He was all about the ministry of the Word. That’s what His mission was, and that’s what He says in Mark 1. This is the reason I was sent out. Certainly, Jesus came to die, we understand that, but another significant part of the mission that God sent Jesus to earth to do was to teach the Word.

It strikes me that when you come to after the resurrection, now it’s hard for us to put ourselves there because we haven’t experienced that first-hand like the disciples did. We haven’t gone through the trauma of seeing the Man that we have admired and worshiped and lived with for three and a half years suddenly arrested by the Roman authorities, and railroaded through, and eventually crucified. We haven’t stood at a distance as the women did and seen the body of Jesus hanging naked on a cross mangled and destroyed, dying. We haven’t seen our Savior dead, not remembering that He promised that He would come back to life.

Can you imagine the crush, the weight on the disciples of that reality? And we haven’t experienced the elation to discover that He’s alive. And yet, what does Jesus do after His resurrection? Think of all that Jesus could have done. Think of all He could have said to His disciples. Think of all of the wonderful things they could have done together.

But you know what Jesus does over those 40 days starting with the Emmaus’ road disciples in the end of Luke on the way back, on the way to Emmaus? You know what Jesus does? He opens the Scripture. Have you ever thought about that? Of everything Jesus could have said and everything He could have done, He comes right back here. This was the priority of His life.

Jesus said to His four disciples, “let’s go throughout Galilee so I can teach the word of God there also.” And that’s exactly what they did. Verse 39 says, “He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.” The little village towns; Matthew adds in his gospel 4:23,

“Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Jesus spread throughout all Syria;” [Even in the Gentile territory] and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.”

What we saw happening in the synagogue on the Sabbath in Capernaum would be repeated in the weeks to come in all of the synagogues throughout those little village towns peppered across the Galilee. Jesus’ primary method of outreach in this period of time was the synagogue. We’ve already looked at the synagogue and its services, but you know there’s an interesting observation to be made about the synagogues.

William Hendrickson, the great commentator, makes a chilling observation about Jesus’ ministry in the synagogues. Every synagogue in the land of Israel was built so that it faced Jerusalem. That meant that when the speaker was speaking, he was always facing the city of Jerusalem. William Hendrickson writes,

What this meant for Jesus was that in whatever synagogue He preached, He was always, while speaking, facing the very place where He would one day be crucified. It was impossible for Him not to be thinking about the cross.

Jesus went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee preaching the Word of God, preaching the kingdom of God, preaching the good news that was prophesied back in the Old Testament and has now come to fruition in Him.

Now, as I studied this passage this week, I was struck with the priorities that Jesus did not have. Jesus wasn’t into personal comfort. He didn’t have His own home. He was staying apparently with Peter. He stays up late into the night helping people. So, He’s not into personal pleasure either because He’s all about other people. And He gets up early the next morning while it’s still dark to go pray. He’s not about personal position and popularity either. He’s not about status. If He was about that, He would have stayed in the largest city while the crowds were clamoring for Him to stay. But instead He says, “let’s go to the small towns.”

We also learned from Jesus though what His priorities are and what ours should be. The compelling priorities of Jesus’ earthly life were all about private prayer and the public

proclamation, or we could put it differently. They were about prayer and the Word of God. He set the standard for all who would come after Him as His servants. Acts 6:4 says that the apostles said they would devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. That's the call for us as elders as well. But He also set the standard for you for every individual follower of Jesus Christ. You have to be devoted to the same things. And if you doubt that, look at the early church, Acts 2:42 says this is what happened in the early church. They were continually devoting themselves to four things and two of them are the apostles' teaching and prayer; to the Word of God and prayer, they were devoting themselves. And so should you, and so should I.

You know what, it sounds simplistic to say that the spiritual priorities of your life should be prayer and the Scripture. It sounds simplistic to say that when there are spiritual problems in your life they probably stem ultimately to a neglect of prayer and or the Scripture. I know that sounds simplistic. Life is more complicated than that. But I can tell you that invariably when there are problems in people lives that need counsel, nine times out of ten much of the reason, much of the contributing factor is that they are not consistently into private prayer and the Word of God. I not only can tell you from the experience of others, but I can tell you from my own experience. My greatest spiritual struggles come when there is not a consistent pattern in my own life of being in the Word of God and being in prayer.

Are you struggling in your Christian life? Well ask yourself this question. Are Jesus' priorities, my priorities? Let me challenge you to do something. For the next 30 days spend a significant amount of time, maybe 30 minutes, or if you are able to, 30 to 60 minutes a day. Make a commitment for the next 30 days to consistently spend 30 to 60 minutes a day in prayer and the study of God's Word. You say, where is that time coming from? Well, you're not as busy as Christ, so I'm sure you can figure it out. I can guarantee you that if you will consistently do that, you will look back 30 days from now, and you will see significant spiritual progress in your life: no better time than now. This is the time you have. An anonymous poem that was engraved on a sun dial says this,

“The shadow of my finger cast, divide the future from the past.
Before it stands the unborn hour in darkness and beyond thy power.
Behind its unreturning line the vanished hour no longer thine.
One hour alone is in thy hands, the now on which the shadow stands.”

Let me challenge you to determine now, at this point in your life, if it's not already a priority in your life, to embrace the priorities our Lord had, to embrace the priorities of consistent private

prayer and the Word of God. For Him it was both study and public proclamation. It may not be public proclamation for you, but those same basic priorities ought to fill your life. The Son of God gave Himself for 3½ years of ministry, and they were consumed with two things; prayer and the Word of God. Those should be our priorities as well.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for the example of our Lord. We thank You for His life that perfect life. He did everything that honored You. He lived in a way that perfectly satisfied Your demands and Your desires, Your will.

Father, help us to follow in His footsteps. Help us to embrace those same priorities. These were His mission. These were the dominating factors of His life. And Lord, help us to embrace them as well.

Lord, I pray for the Christians here tonight who are struggling in their Christian life and experience. And they know, even as we've studied this passage tonight, much of the reason is their lack of discipline and self-control, simply to be consistently using these great resources You've given to us the resource of prayer and the resource of Your Word. Father, may tonight be the night that they decide to do something about that. Lord, may You give them the will to do what pleases You, and then give them the power to do it. Father, give them the resolve, and then help them to be consistent.

And Father, when they when they fail, when they stumble, help them to get back up and continue. And Lord, encourage them with the progress they make, encourage them with the spiritual growth they see by that consistency. Lord, may we be a church of individuals, and a church as a whole, that embraces the priorities that Jesus had in His earthly life.

We pray it for His sake and for His glory, Amen.