

**Keeping first things first...
“Five priorities for the new year”**

Intro: Each year for several years I have built my lessons around a theme. Some years we have studied great texts of Scripture like the book of Ephesians, James, or the Sermon on the Mount. Other years we have looked at different topics— Living a fruitful life and last year Character Matters!

This year I want to us to focus on “keeping first things first.”

The idea of priority is found throughout the Scriptures

David expressed the single priority of his life with this statement:

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple. (Ps. 27:4)

Jesus expressed a priority in the simple language of putting first things first
But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt. 6:33)

Similarly, He corrected Martha’s complaint about her sister’s neglect in helping her serve tables with these words:

But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk. 10:41-42)

Of course, what all these verses underscore is the priority we should place upon the Lord and His rule.

As Christians we need to keep first things first... (5 priorities for the new year, not necessarily in order of importance, but all important)

Priority one--Saving the lost

We could say this was the first priority of Jesus.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Lk. 19:10)

So also we must making saving souls a priority. Like Paul we must say:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

Keep your eye on the people around you and who you may invite to worship and teach the gospel.

Priority two-- Taking care of our families

While we should be ever ready to teach others, we must also keep an eye on our families and make sure that we take care of our relationships.

Again and again the Scriptures stress that conducting ourselves in holiness as husbands and wives and as parents is an essential part of our spiritual life. Several letters addressed to Christians address the importance of taking care of one another in our homes:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. (Col. 3:18-21)

Priority three—Building our faith

We live in a world hostile to faith; but we do not face a challenge that other generations did not also face:

for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1 Cor. 16:9)

Enemies of truth surround us; but we must fortify ourselves against their attacks by building up our faith and knowing how to defend the truth against their attacks.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. (Jude 20-21)

And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Pet. 3:14-15)

Priority four--Increasing in holiness

While we seek to save others, love our families, and build our faith, it is also important that we continue the work of improving our character, growing in the knowledge of Christ and growing up into His likeness. Paul put it this way:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:11-16)

Every day we are faced with that challenge of presenting Jesus to the world through our conduct. Our efforts to teach will only succeed if we can give others an example of what we are calling upon them to be.

Priority five—Worshipping in spirit and truth

Though many people today are turning away from organized religion, God in His plan brought people together to worship Him and to find strength and encouragement in being together before Him as a people. As Christians we should make it a priority to be present at every service to encourage one another:

and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25)

But surely we must do more than just occupy a pew. While here we need to make the most of the opportunity by worshipping God properly and with sincere feeling.

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (Jn. 4:24)

Implementing these priorities in our lessons

My goal this year is to focus on these priorities and help us accomplish them. Each month we will devote a lesson to each of these priorities

Saving souls--The first Sunday we'll focus on things our neighbors need to know and that we need to be reminded of about the gospel.

Taking care of our families--The second Sunday we'll focus on things that will help us build our relationships with our children, parents, and spouses.

Building our faith--The third Sunday we'll focus on challenges in our culture that undermine faith or look at evidence God has given to strengthen our faith.

Increasing in holiness--The fourth Sunday we'll focus on Christian living and how to live more effectively as a Christian.

Worshipping in spirit and truth--The fifth Sunday we'll place special emphasis upon the experience of worship (Sermons in song and scripture)

I'm asking you to help me gear my lessons to these priorities.

What would you want me to say to your neighbor?

What challenges do you face in your family?

Where is our faith vulnerable and how can it become stronger?

What challenges do you face in living a holy life?

How can we keep worship meaningful without changing what God has commanded?