

Holy Habits - Set Apart for Worship

Hebrews 12:7-11, Luke 14:16-24

Brothers and sisters, back in Season 3 of the Talk Show Valleyview discovered that I used to perform gospel hip-hop as a teenager in a group called Hi-Priority.

And we called ourselves “HI-Priority” because it was our goal to preach about Jesus to our non-Christian friends and urge them to make Jesus Christ a “high priority” in their lives.

Now if you spend any time around teenagers, or if you remember back to when you were a teen, you know that teenage priorities are often very different from adult priorities, and usually developing a relationship with Jesus isn’t at the top of that list.

When I was a teenager my priorities were hanging out with my friends, going skateboarding, and snowboarding, making hip-hop music, working at McDonalds to earn money, and of course trying to look cool to impress the girls.

These were the things towards which I habitually devoted my time, my energies, my attention, my affection, and my money.

Now these were all good things for me to do and enjoy. God has created these things and given them to me to enjoy and do to his glory as worship – but... they had become my highest priorities.

Now my parents wanted me to make school, homework and getting good grades a higher priority, but that wasn’t happening. They also wanted me to make developing my relationship with Christ a higher priority – but I wasn’t interested at that point.

In part because all these good things had become god things for me - they occupied my heart and formed my habits, and my habit reinforced their place in my heart so that I was worshipping my priorities.

And that’s the thing about our priorities brothers and sisters – we choose them, we allow them to form our behaviors and

our habits – and in turn our habits and behaviors reinforce what our priorities are.

Now when it comes to what we prioritize there are be things which in the big picture aren't really very important... but - we've made them a priority.

And conversely... there are things which can be very important, extremely important - but for some reason we don't make them a priority for ourselves.

So what determines our priorities?

Personal tastes, interests, and certainly our context or stage of life – for example it's expected that teenagers will make it a priority to impress members of the opposite sex - that's part of the stage of life they are in.

But when you are an adult, and engaged and married – flirting and impressing anyone other than your spouse become much less of a priority – I hope.

So our priorities can change – and that can happen gradually as you mature or more suddenly if your circumstances suddenly change - and that's what happened to me as a teen.

When I was sixteen I was involved in a motorbike accident – and suddenly I wasn't able to focus on everything that was a priority for me. God used this accident and my injuries to force me to begin to evaluate and question what I had been prioritizing.

I realized that it was time for me to make my relationship with Jesus Christ, and telling other people about that relationship... a high priority in my life – the highest priority in my life, and what used to be priority for me became the means that I began to use to express and share my faith.

However – although I had matured quite a bit spiritually, I was still a teenager, and was somewhat still emotionally and physically immature. So while my parents were grateful that I had prioritized my relationship with Christ, they were still praying that I would make my schoolwork more of a priority...

Now friends – this principle works the other way around too... you can be physically and emotionally mature as an adult but still be spiritually immature and that will be reflected in what you prioritize.

For example, as a mature adult you will treat others respectfully and you will love your spouse and your kids, you'll work hard and provide for your family as an adult does.

You'll take care of your health, spend your money wisely and make good investments for retirement...all good priorities.

But if our spiritual maturity has not kept pace with our physical and emotional maturity... friends we will end up worshipping our priorities instead of prioritizing the habit of worship – and that will inevitably lead to our neglecting the our most important relationship of our life, the relationship that gives us life – our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And this can be somewhat of a catch 22.

If we are spiritual mature we can prioritize and make worship a habit, gather with the body of Christ on Sundays instead of worshipping priorities and allowing them to take that worship time away from us and disrupt forming that habit.

But – the spiritual maturity we need is produced from habitual participation in weekly worship with other believers - catch 22

Something needs to happen to us to break that cycle, to force us to change, to give us a boost of spiritual maturity we need to prioritize worship.

That something is Christ's grace and mercy and the Holy Spirit's power interrupting our lives.

For me that grace and mercy and power came through my motorbike accident – it caused me to reprioritize things.

For others it might be a sickness, loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, some sort of disaster or catastrophe...

As Hebrews 12 says “do not make light of God’s discipline for he disciplines those whom he loves, it’s not pleasant at the time but later it produces a harvest of righteousness....spiritual maturity.”

Now I wish it could be different – I wish that we could see how attractive a relationship with Christ is, how wonderful and fulfilling spending our time and energies on developing that relationship will be, and that the attraction would be enough to have us make it a priority – and perhaps at first it was.

Like the proverbial guy who sees the girl, and falls head over heels in love, and gets married. But then he starts his career and becomes consumed by it – and ends up neglecting his marriage.

And when this is the case friends it doesn’t matter how attractive his wife is, how much she tries to get his attention or what she does to try to get his attention, he just doesn’t see it because his eyes and his heart have a different focus, a different set of priorities.

It usually takes a harsh reality check for him to come to the realization that he’s about to lose what he takes for granted to bring about a change of heart and a change of priorities.

So friends, this morning, I pray that Jesus’ words and warning in telling us the parable of the Great Banquet will be that reality check for us if we have inadvertently slipped into the place in life where we have as Hebrews 10:25 says *“giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.”*

So the parable of the Great Banquet is a story about a wealthy man who has prepared an amazing feast and party for some guests. Everything is ready and so He sends his servants out to gather those who have been invited to come and enjoy what He has prepared for them.

Think about the last great party, banquet, feast you attended and how wonderful it is to be invited to such an event by the host and to enjoy it with all the other guests.

Friends, this is like Sunday worship – God has prepared to meet with you and the rest of your fellow believers – to have you come into his presence and enjoy being with Him.

So he sends out the invitation, the call to come and party with Him – He is requesting your presence at His banquet – you, specifically and personally... He wants you there, and you and you and you and you...

Friends this invitation goes out to everyone – Psalm 19:1-4 describes how we receive this invitation in reality...

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The creation is God's messenger calling us to worship Him – we all see it and hear it, all week long - it's not like we didn't get an invitation.

But how do we respond to that invitation?

Do we prioritize worship or do we have an excuse as to why we “can’t” that will reveal we are worshiping our priorities instead like the guests in the parable.

Why can't the guests in the parable go to the banquet?

Well the first one says - I can't... because I just bought a field and I have to go see it... The next one says – I can't... because I just bought some oxen and I have to go try them out.

Brothers and sisters I hope you can hear what lame excuses these are! Nobody bought a piece of land without first looking at it, and nobody buys livestock without first trying them out.

It's like giving that the old “*umm yeah...I'd love to, but umm - I've got to wash my hair tonight*” line to duck out on an invite.

These guests are blowing off all the hard work, energy and effort that the Host has spent preparing special something for

them - simply because they are not interested – it's not a priority for them, the person who is inviting them is not a priority for them!

Think back to that last banquet you attended – would you have blown off the invitation like that?

And when we think about that, and then read about it in this story we can see how ungrateful that comes across. But it's not so easy to see it happening when we're the ones doing it is it?

We forget who it is that is inviting us to come into His presence, to spend time with Him, to listen to Him, and to be with His people.

It's God...the creator of the universe, a being who transcends space and time and is all powerful, all knowing and all present! And He has given you an invitation.

Yeah you see the thing is... on Sundays I like to sleep in. On Sundays I can take that extra time to get stuff done around the house... On Sundays I spend time with my family, my kids – so um thanks anyways... but "I can't."

Brothers and sisters, let us be very careful that we don't blow God off! That's not a wise move.

Now the next excuse we encounter in the text seems a bit more legitimate – *"I've just got married, so I can't come!"*

We might think that the invitation to the banquet has been deliver to the young married couple as they are preparing to leave for their honeymoon – which they've planned for a year.

We might also wonder why the host planned a banquet when he might have known his guest was getting married.

However, wedding customs in those days meant that you wouldn't have been able to deliver the invitation to the man if it was anywhere close to the time of the wedding ceremony.

In ancient Jewish weddings the couple went directly from the ceremony to their honeymoon suite, close nearby - no cruises on the Jordan river or the sea of Gallilee – the honeymoon was spending the whole week together indoors together.

Then, when they came out after the week was over- the celebrating and the feasting would began.

So this invitation is really an opportunity for this young man to double the celebration of his marriage. Why doesn't he say, "*I just got married, let me bring the whole wedding party and let's continue celebrating!*"

It would be like having the option to upgrade your wedding reception dinner from a buffet to fine dining – a five course meal cooked by a top chef with all you can eat and drink for free! Why wouldn't you do this?

So this excuse really raises the question of "Why don't we bring some of our other priorities to worship?" Christ would love to hear us share about the great things going on in our

lives, the blessings he has given us. He wants to hear about what we've accomplished and He especially wants to know about the concerns we have for our priorities, where we need help, encouragement, and support – and the rest of us do to, that's what builds spiritual community.

That's why the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, **and each one of you is a part of it.***

So friends – what excuses do we have as to why "we can't" make Sunday worship a priority? As to why we don't bring our priorities to Sunday worship?

Do we realize the consequences for the habit of making excuses as to why we can't come?

We see them outlined for us in this story. The Host becomes angry when His generosity and hard work and graciousness is snubbed.

Those people who were originally invited do not get a second chance to reconsider the invitation, the Host tells his messengers to give their place to other people and they end up missing out on the banquet.

Now friends Jesus first told this story to warn the Jews of his day that their refusal to recognize and acknowledge Him as the promised messiah was going to have them missing out on being a part of the Kingdom of God.

Now as we apply it to making Sunday worship a priority please don't misunderstand me – We're not applying this legalistically to make you think that missing a Sunday here means no second chances, God is angry with you.. and zap! You are out of the Kingdom of God.

Instead we want it to allow this to speak conviction to our hearts and hear the warning that if we don't make responding to God's invitation to us a weekly priority – and a habit...

Then the truth is we're gradually starting to go down that slippery slope of indifference. And it becomes easier and easier to put off Sunday worship promising that we'll go some time when we're free – and maybe we do... occasionally... sporadically...at Christmas and Easter....

And eventually we've joined the ranks of those people – who like the Jews of Jesus day – don't recognize Jesus anymore, people who are indifferent to Him – and the tragedy is that this indifference will prove to be our undoing when Christ returns and we must give an account for how we responded to his invitation to worship Him.

Hopefully that realization shakes us awake and causes us to reexamine our priorities – to ask ourselves if we prioritize worship or if our excuses as to why we “can't” make it out mean we're worshipping our priorities.

So let's get practical with this...

What if we need to reprioritize Sunday worship? The good news friends, is that Christ is full of grace and mercy and He always welcomes us back – forgiving us for ignoring Him.

What if we need some more help – the spirit is willing, but our follow-thru is a little weak. Friends ask someone at church to hold you accountable. Say I’m planning on coming but call me Sat night to make sure I’m going to follow through, and don’t let me make any excuses! Call me Sunday afternoon if I didn’t show up and ask what happened.

Maybe you need something here at church? – Let us know what we can do to help you out so that you can bring your priorities with you to church. Do you need childcare? Physical assistance? Do you need to share your burdens, receive prayer ministry, are you looking for community, or help with a problem. Perhaps you need to know how you can contribute, how you can be involved. Let us know.

Maybe your life circumstances prevent you from being here regularly - Friends, I will admit that sometimes God has a

calling on our lives which means that we can’t be here on Sunday morning - we need to travel to do the work he has given us, to steward the business and the resources that belong to him.

If that’s the case – you’re in luck – the church exists in every corner of this world and on any given Sunday morning millions of people all across the planet are worshipping Jesus Christ – so if you can’t be here - make an effort to join in with them.

Or at the very least turn your hotel room into a church for an hour – worship God by reading the bible, praying, even singing some songs – nobody will hear you, or know you if they do 😊

Turn on the TV and catch a service that’s broadcast from somewhere – but make time to worship when you have to be away from your home church here at Valleyview.

But what if “worship” isn’t doing it for you? The music, the setting, the people, the minister’s preaching 😊 its just not

really connecting with you, not inspiring you as you like you want it to.

Well I'd say it's kind of like this – in a previous lifetime when I lived in Ontario – I wasn't a big supporter of the Liberal party, and I don't particularly like turn of the century classical architecture, formal dining and formal dining attire, and while fine cuisine is usually tasty – there's never enough of it...

However in spite of my personal tastes do you think I would have turned down an invitation to have dinner with Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada at 24 Sussex Drive? Would you? I didn't want to miss that experience!

Friends, coming to worship Christ on Sunday morning is the same kind of situation! The significance of being able to come and spend an hour with your Creator should overwhelm any personal preferences we may have about the experience because of who we are worshiping and the opportunity we have to be in His presence.

The music, the service - It's about Christ – not us friends...

So let's come before Him now – let's invite the Holy Spirit to work in us, work among us, to convict us where we need convicting, encourage us where we need encouraging, and empower us with spiritual maturity so we can prioritize Sunday worship and make it a habit that sets us apart as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.