

Key Text:**Matthew 6:32-34**

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Three Areas of First Focus

1. First Love Consecration
2. First Place Priorities
3. First Class Expectations

I. First Love Consecration

When the life goes out of your communion with God, what can you do to bring it back?

God has called us into ongoing fellowship with Him.

In **Romans 12:11** He commanded, "*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord*"

God is concerned about His relationship with you and your relationship to him.

Revelation 2:2-5

2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have **left your first love**. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.

God will test your level of love and devotion to Him and His will.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, as a test of his love and faithfulness.

God tested Moses and the nation of Israel, from the time of their departure from Egypt to their arrival in the Promised Land

Exodus 15:25

25 So Moses cried out to the LORD for help, and the LORD showed him a branch. Moses took the branch and threw it into the water. This made the water good to drink. It was there at Marah that the LORD laid before them the following conditions to test their faithfulness to him:

Perhaps we once knew the excitement of communing with the Lord. The Bible was alive to us, and we enjoyed prayer. But now our devotions are dry, if we have them at all. We are easily distracted during quiet time.

If you're one of these people, how can you refocus your eyes on your first love? Here are ten steps I've found helpful:

1. SEEK GOD WITH DETERMINATION

James 4:8

8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Resist the temptation to quit your devotions when they become dry. Instead, set aside *extra* time for the Lord, even if it means giving up some television, a meal, or some sleep.

God repeatedly commands His people to turn to Him with all our hearts. He is the Lord of the universe, waiting for us to humble ourselves. When we come near to God, He will come near to us.

We can express our humility outwardly by kneeling or even prostrating ourselves before Him. Such outward actions, though never a substitute for true devotion, often affect our attitudes and can help us focus on experiencing God Himself.

Putting away all excuses for spiritual slackness, we can ask Him for forgiveness and tell Him we want to seek Him with all our hearts, even if we do not feel like it.

God predicted that the Israelites would have times when their hearts retreated from Him. Yet He promised them, "But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul".

Deuteronomy 4:29

29 "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Rest in this promise when you seek God in your quiet times.

2. ASK GOD TO SEARCH YOUR HEART – get rid of spiritual clutter

The Bible tells us that we are dwelling places of the living God. Like most houses, we tend to have an attic or a closet full of clutter. We stuff anything into it that we don't want to deal with. As long as the door is shut, we can fool ourselves into thinking the whole house is clean.

A period of dry devotions can be a warning sign that spiritual clutter has piled up. We need to open the door to the attic and pray,

Psalms 139:23-24

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Then we need to listen patiently for God to reveal the clutter.

Three sins that choke the Word of God in our hearts

In Mark 4:18-19 Jesus warns us of three sins that choke the Word of God in our hearts:

the cares of this world Keep us from trusting God;

the deceitfulness of riches Tempts us to think we don't need Him;

the desires for other things affects our love for Jesus

A.W. Tozer compares the sins of the self—self-righteousness, self-pity, and self-sufficiency, for instance—with an opaque veil that hides the face of God from us.⁴ We need to bring the old self to the Cross for the deathblow before we can experience the life of God in its fullness.

3. SEEK TO KNOW GOD

I usually enter a time of seeking God with my list. But usually when I entered into His presence, I find myself drawn away from my list of questions and toward God alone. I realized that God created and redeemed me so that I could know Him, and that Jesus came to give me eternal life, which is characterized by intimate knowledge of God

John 17:3

3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

The things on my prayer list may remain unanswered, but it doesn't matter if I experience a deeper spiritual refreshment than ever before.

In each generation those who focus on God, who hunger to know Him, stand out as spiritual giants. But God's call to know Him extends to all believers, regardless of time pressures and obligations.

The Apostle Paul not only traveled frequently, founded numerous churches, and wrote half of the New Testament, but also supported himself by tentmaking—yet his prayer life was constant.

David was a busy king, but he still sought God constantly and his prayers—recorded in the Psalms—bless us today. Jesus ministered to people all day long but still found time for an extensive prayer life.

Begin where you are. Ask God to give you great hunger and thirst for Him. Tell Him you want to be changed. As you learn to focus on Him, reordering your priorities will become easier, until you can say with Paul, ". . . I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (**Phil 3:8**)

4. THANK AND PRAISE GOD

The proper way to come before the King of the universe is with thanksgiving and praise ([Psalm 100:4](#)). God wants people to worship Him in spirit and in truth ([John 4:23](#)). Therefore worship is essential to entering His presence.

Study the Psalms to learn ways to worship God. Singing, shouting, clapping or raising your hands, dancing, and falling down before Him are all scriptural ways of worship. Jewish believers weren't inhibited in worship! We shouldn't be, either.

Ask the Holy Spirit to set you free. Then, experiment with various forms of worship when you are alone.

One special form of praise is giving God thanks and telling Him why we love Him. David frequently recounted God's mighty acts on his behalf in the Psalms. You can reflect often on what He has done for you on the Cross and in your life.

5. FEED MAINLY ON THE BIBLE

I love Christian books and read them frequently. But when I rely more heavily on them than on the Bible, I am not getting the best nourishment possible.

Matthew 4:4

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"

Beware the temptation to let Christian books—devotional books, works of theology, commentaries—become the main element in your spiritual diet. Useful as they are, they cannot take the place of God's written Word. It alone is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (**Heb. 4:12 NASB**).

When our time with God has become stale, what we need is to be brought to life. We need to be reactivated in devotion, not just in devotions. We need to be pierced to the very depth of our hearts, to have our hearts laid bare before God so that He can heal us. The Word of God is what can do these things.

6. ADJUST BIBLE STUDY TO YOUR NEEDS

Have you ever committed to read the Bible from cover to cover in your devotional time? You feel the pressure to fulfill your daily quota but you also miss what God was trying to say to you because you insisted on racing through the Bible according to a set plan.

Experiment with your own flexible Bible reading plan until you find what works for you.

It is better that you experience life in your devotions through meditation, study and Fellowship with God rather than to check off the days of your reading schedule.

7. ASK!

"You do not have, because you do not ask God" (**James 4:2**).

Has your study of the Bible seemed fruitless lately? Perhaps it is because you haven't *asked God* to teach you new and exciting things, things that will change your life.

Begin by asking, "Lord, what are You saying to me? What do You want me to do?" Seek insight on how to apply the Word in various areas of your life. The more questions you ask, the more answers you will receive.

Ask God for spiritual treasures, like learning to overcome temptation and sin, growing in Him, getting to know Him, etc. As long as you are asking with the right motives, to please Him instead of yourself, you will receive (**James 4:3; Matthew 7:7; 1 John 5:14–15**).

8. USE A DEVOTIONAL NOTEBOOK

If you write down insights from the Word, you will remember them better. But a notebook can also help you in other aspects of your devotions.

Write down what to thank and praise God for, then use your list during your worship. A record of prayers and answers will build your faith. I like to note commands the Lord gives me in my Bible reading, so that I can check on my obedience later.

9. FOUR FOUNDATIONS FOR PRAYER

If you feel as if you have been just "going through the motions" in prayer lately, you might apply four principles from Joshua 24:14:

Joshua 24:14 (NASB).

"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth . . ."

When you pray, fear—or reverence—the Lord. The essence of man's rebellion against God is his refusal to submit to God as Lord and Ruler over everything, including self. Even though we are redeemed, we are still tempted to try to rule ourselves. Acknowledge that He is the Lord and joyfully submit yourself to His rule. Don't try to make God your servant. Seek to glorify and please Him. Do your prayers reflect this attitude?

Root your prayer in service to God in His Kingdom. Go to Him for instructions. Ask Him for the power to do as He commands. And commit yourself to obeying Him.

Pray with sincerity. Be completely honest with God. He knows all your thoughts and feelings anyway, but often won't deal with them until you open yourself to Him. Remember that He already proved His love for you by dying for you, so you have nothing to fear from opening yourself completely to Him, showing Him everything wicked that is buried in the depths of your heart. And keep your prayers simple. Even if your words are halting, God responds to the desire of your heart.

Pray according to truth. In other words, be guided in your prayers by the Word (**John 17:17**). For example, instead of complaining that God seems far away, tell Him, "Lord, You say in Your Word that You draw near to those who draw near to You. I seek You now, and I thank You that I will find You." God answers such reverent prayers, offered in faith. He cannot deny Himself or His Word.

See Hazel Hill's book called, "Praying God's Word" It's an excellent resource.

10. BE SURE TO OBEY

What you do *after* your daily quiet time determines its quality at least as much as what you do *during* it.

We show our love for the Lord by obeying Him in every area of life. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them," Jesus said, "he is the one who loves me" (**John 14:21**). "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. . . . You are my friends if you do what I command" (**John 15:10; John 15:14**).

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves," wrote James. "Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and

continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (**James 1:22–25**). Disobedience to God hurts our quiet time with Him.

What we learn from Scripture and in prayer during our quiet times must make a difference in our lives, or we'll soon forget it. And our consciences will make us increasingly uncomfortable because of the disrespect we show God by ignoring the commands He gives us. If we want to walk continually in a love relationship with Him, we must make it our goal to please Him by obeying Him.

Seek God with a sincere heart; confess and forsake your sins; make God Himself—not spiritual knowledge—your goal; worship and praise Him; feed on the Word in ways that meet your current needs; ask God for what you need; reflect on what God is doing in your life; pray with reverence, sincerity, truthfulness, and the desire to serve Him; and practice all day what you learn in communion with God in prayer and the Word, and your quiet time will become vital and exciting.

II. First Place Priorities

Mark 12:28-31

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" 29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: *'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these."

The top two Commandments are relational, our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with others. In a life filled with busyness It is these two priorities that usually get pushed down our priority list

Set priorities for your Spirit, your soul, mind and your body (strength)

I make myself a daily check list which includes 5 things that help me discipline myself toward my life goals

Prayer Bible Plan Exercise
 Input – learning, or studying something ie: books, magazines, CDs, tutorials, courses

Here are a few tips to manage your time and get control of your life. As you read through the following suggestions, find a few you can implement immediately. Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to adopt everything at once. And remember that to be truly useful for you, these methods and ideas must be accompanied by a desire and willingness to know and do God's will.

1. Know your priorities. Write down the truly important things in your life—the things worth spending time on. It's important to have biblical priorities, to understand them, to believe them, to be tenaciously convinced of them. The pressure to violate these priorities will be continual and will come from several sources. If you don't plan your time, someone else will.

2. Do a time-use study. Find out where you are now in your use of time. Keep a simple, running record for a week or so of how you're spending your time. Carry a notebook or three-by-five cards with you and write down the time you begin and end each activity—meals, work, driving to work, relaxing, prayer, Bible reading and study, time with your children, time with your husband or wife, fixing the car, cleaning the house, visiting friends, reading the newspaper, paying bills—everything that takes up your time.

Total up the number of hours for each item and then evaluate what you have in light of your priorities in life. You'll probably arrive at four conclusions.

First, some things that take a lot of time just can't be changed. You must work a certain number of hours, and it takes a certain amount of time to get there. The baby needs feeding, changing, watching, holding. You can't cut back on everything. The rest of your time is what you have to work with, but it's probably more than you think.

Second, some things you're doing actually require much less time, or don't need to be done at all. Recognize these for what they are, and learn to say no.

Third, some things could be done just as well or better by others. Ask yourself who could do them.

And last, some things—the priority items—may need to be given more of your time.

You may find it helpful to do a study of your time use every few months. It will help you avoid the "barrenness of busyness"—much activity but too few accomplishments.

3. Plan according to priorities. As you plan the week ahead, list activities or projects according to your major priorities. Perhaps your major priorities are, in order, your relationship with God, your family, your ministry to others, and your job. In a fifth category—"Other"—you can put everything else.

Now take your calendar and schedule the activities listed under your first priority, your relationship with God. This would include, for example, time for Bible study and prayer. Next, schedule activities for the family (your second priority)—a lunch date with your spouse, a Saturday outing with your children. Then schedule activities from other categories as you have time remaining. This forces you to make sure the most important things get first consideration on your schedule. Be honest with yourself. You're probably not as efficient with your time as you would like, so don't make your schedule as if you were. Most things take more time than you think.

Two good prayers as you plan are the questions Paul asked Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus: "Who are you, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" (**Acts 11:8; Acts 11:10**).

Center your life first of all around getting to know the Lord, and secondly around doing what he wants you to do.

4. Remember your uniqueness. You have a unique personality, so don't expect to pattern your schedule too closely after someone else's. God made you and called you for something unique.

Be a student of yourself. Learn when your most productive times are and how much rest, exercise, and food you need, and know your strength and weakness.

5. Schedule a regular "think time." Set aside a half day regularly in your schedule for simply being alone to pray and plan. Start the time by reading the Scripture, and seek to gain God's perspective as you take a break from the rush of life. Doing this on a Saturday afternoon every few months would be ideal.

It will take a special effort to resist the temptation to let other people or activities crowd out this time.

6. Plan to relax. You need recreation and relaxation—jogging, camping, reading, music, or whatever—so build such times into your schedule. The Lord willing, you will still want to be going strong for him twenty, thirty, and forty years down the road, so pace yourself now.

7. Get the most from each activity. Learn how to accomplish more than one goal with each activity. If you're going shopping or exercising, invite along a neighbor you've wanted to talk to. Talk with your children as you clean house or wash the car together.

8. Get a head start on long-range projects. For projects that will require your best thinking, schedule a date in the future when you will begin working on it. Between now and then, try to become familiar with the task by thinking it over, jotting down any loose ideas that pop into mind. This can keep you from dreading the project, and give you an overall understanding of it when you actually begin.

9. Learn to say, "No" You will be made aware of more needs than you can fill. Before plunging ahead into an opportunity, give yourself time to carefully evaluate it, relating it to the life goals God has given you. Be flexible when you must, but know also how to say no to someone's request for your time.

A general rule is to never say yes to a request the first time you learn of it. Most often the request can wait a few hours or days until you've had time to pray and think about your answer.

10. Respect others' time. Let Phil. 2:4 guide your use of others' time: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Don't expect others to have any less regard for the value of their time than you have for yours. Be on time for appointments, keep phone conversations friendly but to the point, and ask when you aren't sure how much time the other person can give you.

III. First Class Expectation

When we have our "First Love" hot and our priorities in order, you can expect several things:

Discovery - He'll be Found

Deuteronomy 4:29-31

29 "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and **you will find Him** if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Proverbs 8:17-21

17 I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently **will find me**. 18 Riches and honor are with me, Enduring riches and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, And my revenue than choice silver. 20 I traverse the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, 21 That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, That I may fill their treasuries.

Philippians 3:8-10

8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Rewards – He's a Rewarder**Hebrews 11:6**

6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hope for Tomorrow

I don't know what tomorrow holds but I know who holds tomorrow

God h Jeremiah 29:11-14

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.