

## **Living Accordingly**

### **John 1:1-14**

*Bryn MacPhail / Jan. 9, 2011*

Our newly announced “Every Member Serves” initiative has the potential to be misapplied.

You could read the initiative and conclude that faithful Christianity relates to *how hard you work for the church*.

That’s not the message I’d like conveyed.

Yes, the local church needs workers. It’s not hard to imagine how the ministry of a local church would quickly unravel, or at least be diminished, if there were a shortage of volunteers.

And, yes, serving within the local church is a great way to express one’s Christian faith. However, I wouldn’t want anyone to think that your busyness in Christian things will automatically translate into spiritual growth.

In order for us to experience spiritual transformation, we need something bigger than *duty* to motivate us. What we need is for our service to be motivated by *a sincere love and affection for God*.

This is at the heart of what Christianity is all about. Christianity is not a religious ladder that we climb, but rather it is a relationship that we engage in.

And what we observe throughout the Scriptures is that *our relationship with God is supposed to be the grand priority of our life*.

I don't have to examine my own life for very long to see that I have much work to be done in this area. It may seem strange for you to hear that from someone who makes his living by delivering God's Word. But this is precisely how I know that a person can be extremely busy doing things for Christ's church and yet experience little spiritual growth. I've been there!

Busyness, motivated by duty, is not the answer. *It is the orientation of our heart that sets the trajectory of our spiritual progress*.

Do you remember Jesus' answer to the question of which was the most important commandment?

Jesus answered, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”** (Mk. 12:30).

Elsewhere, Jesus instructs us, **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”** (Mt. 6:33).

It is a common thing to read in the Scripture about *the supreme priority of God and His kingdom*.

But my reality, and perhaps your reality, is this ongoing struggle to prioritize God above all else. *Our tendency, I'm afraid, is to take our relationship with God for granted.*

My aim this morning is *not* to make you feel badly. My aim is to help us reshape our priorities.

To this end, there are 3 considerations I would like us to train our mind with:

- 1) Consider the nature of Jesus and His status
- 2) Consider our status once we've received Jesus
- 3) Consider the benefits of making our relationship with Jesus our supreme priority

The apostle John, throughout this Gospel book is concerned with *our response to the call of Jesus*. John wants us to know the seriousness of this call and so he begins by describing for us *the nature and status of Jesus*.

**“In the beginning”**—that is, in eternity—we are told that Jesus is known as **“the Word”**. It is further explained that Jesus, the Word, **“was with God, and the Word was God”** (Jn. 1:1,2).

Why should we trust in Jesus? Why should we prioritize Him above all else? Because Jesus is no mere religious leader; He is no mere prophet; He is not the embodiment of some philosophical idea; Jesus is the One through whom the Universe was created (1:3). In short, *Jesus is God*.

John explains how the light of Christ shone into the darkness, but **“the darkness did not recognize (Him)”** (1:5).

John goes on, **“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him”** (1:10, 11).

In other words, Jesus stepped out of eternity and into human history but was taken for granted by those He had come to save.

So you see, *our predicament* is actually an *ancient predicament*.

But if we take some time to pause, if we take some time to consider that the One who calls us is also the One who created us, we should be sufficiently motivated to follow Him.

When we consider that the One who calls us is the Sovereign King of this Universe, we should be adequately convinced of our need to be ever mindful for His presence and ever thankful for His mercies.

The reality is, however, that we need some help. We need some reminders.

I often think back to my University years, when I worked as a landscaper during the summer months. As you might expect, our crew was divided up according to the tasks that needed to be done. The desired jobs were to drive the tractor lawn mowers or to be a part of the group that drove around watering all the flowers. The less desirable jobs were operating the push-mowers or carrying around a heavy-duty gasoline trimmer all day.

What made things interesting is that our boss would frequently have us switch jobs, mid-day, according to how well he thought we were working. At a moments notice our boss had the ability to promote us from a difficult job to a desirable job. Similarly, he could just as easily take away our plush job and give us something much more challenging to do.

Reminding us of this reality was his bright red truck, which circulated through the properties we maintained.

If we began to take our current position for granted, all we needed was a glimpse of that red truck to help us regain our focus.

Now, my point is not to say that God is like a demanding boss in a red truck. But rather, my point is that because we are prone to take our privileged position for granted, *we need reminders to motivate our devotion.*

Fortunately or unfortunately, God does not drive around in a red truck reminding us throughout the day that we need to prioritize our relationship with Him.

But God does provide us with His written Word, which challenges us and reminds us of *the nature and status of Jesus Christ*—the Scriptures remind us that Christ is the sovereign ruler over all of creation.

Secondly, as we seek further motivation for prioritizing God and His kingdom we would be wise to *consider the status we have once we receive Christ.*

Thankfully, not everyone rejected Christ—there were some who did recognize the light and so John reports that **“as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God”** (1:12).

Friends, if you have received Christ, if you have trusted in Him for your salvation, the Scriptures declare that you have a new status—you have become a child of God.

There is a distinction made here that cannot be easily dismissed. Those who receive Christ are, in a special way, God’s children.

It is true that God has created every human being and every living thing, and so in that sense He is the Father of all. We also know that all of creation receives benefits from the Creator. Jesus, Himself, says that God **“causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Mt. 5:45).

And yet, while all of God’s creation enjoys the favour of a generous Creator, we are also told that only those who receive Jesus are given the particular right of becoming the children of God.



Followers of Jesus then, should often consider their particular status. We are, in a very distinct way, God's children. And, as such, we represent God in a distinct and special way. Accordingly, how we speak and how we behave reflects on Him—because we have taken His name in calling ourselves Christians.

And finally, as we seek to correct our tendency of taking God for granted, we should *consider the benefits when Christ is made our supreme priority.*

If you do not know first hand what this is like; if you do not know the benefits of making God your supreme priority, I want to encourage you to observe the benefits of this pursuit that are being enjoyed by others.

Reflecting once again on my younger days, I recall the first time someone convinced me that cliff jumping into the lake would be a source of great fun.

In response to my friend's testimony, I went with a few people to the island that was recommended, but my experience was quite different.

On my first jump I made the mistake of yelling in mid-air only to have the water slam my mouth shut causing me to bite the tip of my tongue.

I'll not go into the gruesome, bloody, details that followed. Needless to say, I did not find cliff jumping to be a joyful experience, in spite of my friend's testimony.

Sometime later, I tried cliff jumping again. This time, I made sure my mouth was shut, but I made a new mistake—I held my arms straight out. The result of my arms slapping the water caused me great distress and left behind bright red markings. Again, not very much fun.

Call me a glutton for punishment, but a couple of years ago I attempted cliff jumping once again. This time, however, I paid attention to what other people were doing.

I desperately wanted to share in their joy and so I watched their every move—I watched how they approached the ledge, how they jumped, what their body did in mid-air and what their body did when impacting the water.

I am glad to report, as the expression goes, ‘the third time was a charm’. Well, really, there was no ‘charm’ here—in order to experience the joy of cliff jumping, *I had to carefully emulate the habits of those who were already enjoying the exercise.*

And, so it is in the Christian life. For most of us, we need more than to simply hear from a pulpit that making Christ our supreme priority is the key to lasting joy. We need examples of where this has been true. We need role models who we can watch and imitate.

I certainly have not mastered this. Making Christ the supreme priority of my life is a daily struggle, but I can tell you that when He is first in my life—it is then that I am most satisfied with life.

My limited experience resonates with the beautiful testimony of Psalm 84, **“How lovely are Thy dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God”** (Ps. 84:1,2).

Friends, I want you to know that there are innumerable benefits to making Christ and His kingdom your supreme priority. It is joy producing. It brings peace to troubled hearts.

The temptation for many of us is to be motivated by *duty*. And, at times, we are even motivated by *guilt*.

I want something different for you. I long for each of you to be motivated by your love and affection for Jesus Christ.

Consider *His nature and status*.

Consider *your own status* having received Christ.

Consider *the benefits* of regarding Christ as the Supreme One.....and *Live Accordingly*. Amen.