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## Jesus, Our Highest Priority

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*“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,  
and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

(Matthew 6:33 NIV)

*There is a quiet place,  
Far from the rapid pace where God can soothe my troubled mind.  
Sheltered by tree and flower,  
There in my quiet hour with Him my cares are left behind.  
Whether a garden small, or on a mountain tall,  
New strength and courage there I find;  
Then from this quiet place I go prepared to face a new day  
With love for all mankind.*

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Our nine year old granddaughter said to me, “Grandpa, will you take me to Disneyland?” She was unconcerned with the details of such an adventure. Details like the costs or how her family of six, four girls plus mom and dad, would travel from Colorado to our home in Southern California?

Her smiling face, and twinkling eyes looking up at me were filled with trust that I would take care of all the details. From her perspective, a trip to Disneyland was impossible. She earns about

one dollar a week allowance. But taking her request to grandpa, and grandma made the impossible a reality.

*The Inviting Church moves their eyes off of their needs, to a growing fellowship with Jesus, who provides all our needs. Jesus is our highest priority in life.*

Making Jesus your highest priority each day means that He is the focus of your life, and prayers. With the Lord as your highest priority, the doors open to experience the impossible in your life for *with God all things are possible* (Matt 19:26).

Let me illustrate by sharing an answered prayer that seemed impossible to me. You will notice how my prayer focus shifted from seeking my needs to seeking Jesus who provides all our needs.

### **An impossible prayer answerer**

I found it helpful to write the prayer requests of my church members, along with my own, on a prayer list. During my devotions I would include the requests in my prayers. One of my requests was particularly difficult for it involved a large sum of money.

My prayer need was summed up by our eight year old grandson as he, and grandma drove into the worship facility's parking area. Sitting in the backseat he said, "Grandma, this is the worst parking lot I've ever seen."

He was absolutely correct. Over the years the deacons did their best to maintain the parking area and keep it in good order. But now, after 50 years, it needed replacement. Replacing a parking lot is expensive, and for us meant a six figure sum.

The faithful church returned their tithes, and offerings. But replacing the parking lot was so far out of the question, because of the astronomical cost, the church board kept putting it off.

Like most of us, I was learning to trust the Lord more, and more in my prayers. So I decided to add the refurbishing of the

parking lot to my prayer list, and it stayed on the list for over the next *six years*.

One morning while praying for the needs on the prayer list, the Lord spoke to my heart. God didn't speak to me audibly, nor did I see an angel or anything miraculous. I just sensed the Lord was saying to me something like "Why are you asking Me to give you the means to replace your parking lot? Why not ask Me to do it for you?" I was stunned.

Since I still have the prayer list, let me share exactly what I was asking for, and the changes I made to the request as a result of the Lord's impressions in my heart. Initially, I wrote the following request on my prayer list:

*"Show us how to raise the funds and find the right company to repave the parking area."*

But fumbling for my pen I quickly corrected the prayer request to read:

*"Lord, raise the funds and find the right company to repave the parking area."*

Two weeks later, a guest came to the Sabbath service. Everyone greeted him, and made him feel welcome for guests were a regular part of our congregation. Following the service, while greeting people at the door, I noticed the guest standing to one side, and patiently waiting for me.

After the last person was greeted, I looked his way to welcome him. He walked over to me, and asked if I was the pastor. "Yes," I said. Then he reached into his coat pocket, and pulled out an envelope. I thought to myself, "Oh, no. This guy is a plain clothes police officer, and he has a warrant to serve." We were serving the greater

LA area, and before they gave their hearts to Jesus, a few in our congregation might have been candidates for an arrest warrant.

I took the envelope, and opened it. It was not a warrant but a check in six figures. “Wow, this is the largest check I’ve ever held in my hands,” I said. He laughed, and explained he was the executor of the estate of one of our former members who had passed away several years ago.

The estate took years to settle, but now he was following the deceased’s wishes. The only stipulation was that the money had to be used for facility maintenance projects. The Lord answered our prayers, and provided the “impossible.” Within the next year, the parking lot was completely resurfaced, and our grandson said it looked brand new.

Make Jesus your highest priority

Do you have “impossible” prayer needs? Wonderful! *Take your eyes off the needs, and put them on the One who can provide all your needs and more.* As you look to Jesus to provide all your needs, you are making Him the highest priority in your life. With Him all things are possible.

When the Lord answered our “impossible” prayer, He taught us that prayer is a relationship with Him. Sharing our needs is a natural part of our prayers. But the central focus of prayer is to open your heart to the Lord as a friend.<sup>2</sup>

The reason to share our needs with the Lord is not to inform Him. He knows our needs before we begin to pray. But through sharing our needs with the Lord, we exchange worry and concerns for faith in Him. While we are unable to meet all our needs in our own strength, and knowledge, He “...is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine...” (Ephesians 3:20).

If you feel your prayers are delayed, keep in mind that Jesus taught that our prayers are answered according to God’s will. He

said, “Pray then in this way...*Your will be done*, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:9–10, Italics supplied).

In other words, God knows our needs, and will answer our prayers according to His timetable. God’s will is followed on earth as it is in heaven. The Lord provides all our needs at just the right time, and in a way that is undeniably His doing. As such, He gets all the praise, and glory.

Making Jesus the central focus of prayer, and your life is also making Him your highest priority. In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord taught His disciples to have faith in Him for all their needs. Jesus said to His followers to stop worrying about all your needs because “...your heavenly Father knows that you need them” (Matt 6:32 NIV).

### **People Worry**

The American Psychological Association took a poll on what American’s worry about. The top three worries were:

1. Money/Finances
2. Work
3. Relationships (Like spouse, kids, girl/boy friend.)<sup>3</sup>

Today’s worries seems more complex compared to the basic worries of the first century listed below. The Lord gave us an insight into the three top worries of people who lived in the first century. The Lord said, “Don’t worry about your life or your body” including:

1. Food
2. Drink
3. Clothes

So whether the first century or today, the solution for worry is the same. When the Lord says to stop worrying about material needs, *He offers Himself as our Solution*. He does not intend us to stop working, and sit back in a recliner to wait for Him to provide

them. Work is a part of God's plan for His human family, but our efforts alone can never satisfy all our needs.

In addition to the material needs of food, drink, and clothes are the deeper needs in each of our hearts that only God can supply. The Lord invites us to look to Him to fulfill our material needs as well as *all our needs*. Looking to Jesus means to *seek Him first*.

### **Seek first the King**

Jesus says, "But *seek first* his kingdom and his righteousness, and *all these things* will be given to you as well" (Matt 6:33 NIV, Italics supplied).

Seek first His kingdom means to position God as the highest priority in your life and prayers.<sup>4</sup> Jesus established the kingdom of heaven while He was on earth. However, "The full establishment of the kingdom of His glory will not take place until the Second Coming of Christ to this world."<sup>5</sup> Seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness is seeking first *the King* of the kingdom.

"The 'kingdom of heaven,' or 'the kingdom of God,' constituted the theme of Jesus' teachings."<sup>6</sup> Jesus is the King of the kingdom, "and those who believed in Him became its subjects."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Lord's kingdom was not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom established in the hearts of His believers.

In addition to seeking *His kingdom*, His disciples are to seek *His righteousness*. The word "righteousness" means to follow the Lord's teachings from a heart of love. For example, a person might say, "I didn't kill anyone" and that might be true. But Jesus extends our understanding of love by teaching us that "...if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment..." (Matthew 5:22). Disciples learn from the Lord's teachings to keep the law of love.

So when the Lord completes the teaching on *His righteousness*,

He ends by saying, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

### **What does “perfect” mean?**

Jesus is not suggesting that His disciples strive to be perfect in the sense of being free from all flaws or defects.<sup>8</sup> If that were true, none of the twelve disciples would have qualified to be a disciple and neither would any of His disciples today. No human, except our Lord, is without flaws or defects.

A “perfect” disciple imitates the Lord by loving others as Jesus loved. How did the Lord “love”? He loved all people unconditionally—no strings attached. Will disciples perfectly imitate the Lord’s love? No! But, day by day, as disciples focus on their relationship with Jesus by making Him their highest priority, they surrender their lives to Him, and their “imitation” of His love for others grows.

*The Inviting Church* disciples’ are to follow the Lord’s lead by loving all people whether that love is accepted or rejected. For example, if you wave at a neighbor, and no wave is returned keep on being a friendly neighbor. Or if a neighbor borrows something, and doesn’t return it keep on lending.

Jesus said, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same” (Matt 5:46)? “Perfect love is an active concern for all people everywhere, regardless of whether or not they receive it. To do this is to imitate God and demonstrate that we are his children [see Matt 5:45]. It is to display a family likeness.”<sup>9</sup>

Allow me to repeat that when we “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” we are seeking the *King* of the kingdom who is Christ Jesus. “Too often we are prone to make ‘all these [material] things’ [Matt 6:32] the main object of our search in life [and prayer]...Christ would have us make...[Him] first, and assures us

that things of lesser importance and value will be supplied to each according to his need.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Relationships develop over time**

The Lord knows our need for a relationship with Him. He is the only avenue to the “good life.” He said, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes” (Matt 6:25)? The Lord desires a personal relationship with us. He made Himself available to His human family by coming to earth as a man.

He walked with His disciples every day. He spent days and nights with them. He talked with them, and ate with them. He was in every way their Friend and Teacher. His friendship would continue with His disciples after His ascension into heaven. He promised to be with His disciples through the Holy Spirit who “...will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

*The Inviting Church* is a spiritual journey because the Lord Jesus continues to walk with His disciples today through the Holy Spirit. Imagine the Lord by your side throughout the day? His gentle hand leading in the direction of personal growth and service to others. *He desires the same relationship with His disciples today as He had with the Twelve disciples.*

When Ginny, (who became my wife) and I were dating, we shared with one another our ambitions, and dreams for the future. Our prolonged conversations were precious moments together. We were entering into our life’s relationship.

In a similar way, today’s disciples are invited to share their hopes, and dreams with Jesus and develop a lasting relationship with Him. The Lord’s relationship offer is not limited to adults but to all the young people in our churches.

### **Let the children come to Me**

When little children were brought to Jesus “in order that he might

lay his hands on them and pray,” His disciples objected (Matt 19:13). What was all the fuss about? The disciples were still learning that the Lord loved *all* people. The culture of the first century classified people, and those who ranked toward the bottom of the list were children. Also included on the list were women, Gentiles, outcasts, and the sick.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus was setting a new standard—love for all people. There is no question that today’s disciples love young people, and children of all ages in their churches. My heart is to encourage more involvement in the Sabbath service by reassuring all the children of Jesus’ desire to have a friendship with them regardless of their age.

Like many churches, the church we served invited children to read scripture, sing, and help with the offering. More importantly, we encouraged them to grow in their friendship with Jesus.

Our churches have boys and girls whose hearts are ready to serve like Samuel and David. Below is the story of a boy whose first thoughts were of King Jesus when a crisis threatened those around him. Even though he was young, he was mature enough to know that with Jesus all things are possible.

### **The Boy who knew what to do**

The five year old lay motionless after falling from the top of the bleachers. He had taken his seat at the top of the bleachers to get a good view of his brother who was practicing with a Pop Warner football team.

As a warm up exercise, the coach instructed the team to run in single file up and down the nearby bleachers. From where the coach was standing the bleachers looked empty. As one boy followed another ascending the bleachers, the vibration caused the five year old to bounce up and down as he might on a carnival ride. But, as the vibrations increased it felt more like an earthquake to

the five year old as more boys joined the running line up and then down the bleachers. At last, he bounced off his seat, falling uncontrollably to the ground.

The noise overpowered the five year old's screams as he fell. Chatting nearby, the parents were unaware of what just occurred. Then one of the running boys noticed something on the ground. He yelled to the other boys to stop and look. Pandaemonium electrified the players and parents as they saw the still body of the five year old under the bleachers.

The players repeated again and again, "What should we do?"

Ten year old Angel, answered the question by yelling to his teammates saying, "I know what to do, let's pray." Standing in front of the bleachers, he grabbed the hands of the boys nearest him and the other team members coming off the bleachers joined the prayer circle. The boys bowed their heads to listened as Angel prayer for the injured five year old.

Under the bleachers, the five year old's mom cradled her son in her arms. Parents helped her lift her son from the ground and walked with her to a waiting car to rush him to the emergency room.

When the football practice ended at its usual time, the team heard the good news. Except for some scratches, and the bump on his head, the five year boy would be okay.

Angel needed no coaching to decide the reason for the boy's recovery. In his heart, he was confident that the Lord answered his prayers and saved the boy's life. Angel didn't understand all the fuss when his story was shared with us on Sabbath. To him it was no big deal, for he loved Jesus and was convinced that Jesus knew what to do.

Let's continue to encourage the growing faith of young people in our churches. Angel was a quiet boy who listened carefully

to the Sabbath messages. There are kids like Angel in all of our church families.

This Sabbath, look around at the kids, and then lift them up in your prayers to serve the Lord this week. By the way, why not go over to a few of the kids, and let them know how important they are to you. Perhaps, God will use them this week in His service. God used Angel, why not the kids in your church?

### **Seek Jesus**

The Lord assures us He is well aware of our needs. He is more than able to provide our material needs like food, drink and clothing (Matthew 6:31). All our needs includes our work, school, and home related needs. All our needs include our personal, social, and spiritual needs. The Lord provides for all our needs.

Only the Lord knows what each new day presents. We might be facing troubling news or a crisis. Prayer is not a time for Christians to steel themselves against whatever the day will offer. Prayer is the time to trust the Lord for He has promised to teach us how to respond to any and all circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Man can shape circumstances, but circumstances should not be allowed to shape the man. We should seize upon circumstances as instruments by which to work. We are to master them, but should not permit them to master us.<sup>13</sup>

Seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness is not a formula but a relationship with the One who loves us best. All our needs will be met as we “put God first.”<sup>14</sup>

Making Jesus your highest priority does not imply a life absent of challenges, and problems, nor a sure-fire recipe for answered prayers. He rarely changes circumstances to please us. Instead, He changes us within the circumstances. Seeking first the Lord’s

fellowship each morning we grow in faith, and love with Him who is our highest priority.

### Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. With Jesus as your highest priority, all things are possible. Write your requests, including those “impossible” ones, on the Prayer List. During your devotional time, review your Prayer List. Add new requests, and make note of your answered prayers. Never give up praying for the needs on your Prayer List (Luke 18:1-8).

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2. On a scale of worry, choose a number between 1 (No worries) and 10 (Full time worrier) that best describes your worry style. How can you exchange worry for faith? (Refer to the heading, **Make Jesus your highest prayer priority.**)

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3. The Lord said to His disciples, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48). What does it mean to be a “perfect” disciple? (Refer to the heading, **What does “perfect” mean?**)

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4. What was the reason for the disciples' objection to bringing children to Jesus for His blessing and prayer? (Refer to the heading, **Let the children come to Me.**)

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5. How will all your needs be met? (Refer to the heading, **Seek Jesus.**)

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**This week in your prayers**

Approach your prayer time as if you were opening your heart to your dearest friend in conversation. Ask Him to teach you how to make Him your highest priority in life. Tell Him your needs, but refrain from dwelling upon them—He already knows your needs. Exchange worry for faith. Recall how much the Lord has forgiven