



Transformed Priorities

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

The rationale behind Jesus’ behavior becomes perfectly clear when we understand the greater, overarching priority which guided Him: His insistence on hearing from, and yielding to, His Father.



This teaching outline was developed in support of the resource, *Transforming Love*, for small groups.

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I. INTRODUCTION: MISUNDERSTOOD PRIORITIES

Both the religious leaders of Christ’s day and His own followers often misunderstood His priorities. Surely, the disciples thought Jesus would not want to be distracted by children. Yet He rebuked the disciples and welcomed the children with open arms (Mark 10:13–16). Surely, the Pharisees reasoned a respectable teacher should have nothing to do with politicians and sinners, yet Jesus was known as their friend (Matthew 11:19). Throughout His life on earth, Christ displayed counter-cultural priorities, giving time and attention to people and things which others despised, rejected, or deemed unimportant.

The rationale behind Jesus’ behavior becomes perfectly clear when we understand the greater, overarching priority which guided Him: His insistence on hearing from, and yielding to, His Father. *“I can do nothing on My own initiative,”* He declared (John 5:30). The actions which so confounded the Pharisees and disciples alike give evidence that Jesus’ conduct was guided not by man’s opinions, but by His Father’s heart. Paradoxically, the God-Man Jesus, the eternally existent One through whom everything holds together, freely admitted His humble dependence upon His Father. **He needed to hear His Father and then yield to what His Father revealed.**

Hearing the Father must become our pursuit and passion, just as it was the Savior's. Yielding to all that the Father reveals must become our nourishment, just as it was the Savior's.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you."

Pastor/Teacher:
Pause during this time and vulnerably share about a time when you experienced a "Follow Me" moment and yielded to what was being revealed to you.



L9. Yielding to the Spirit's fullness as life in the Spirit brings supernatural intimacy with the Lord, manifestation of divine gifts, and witness of the fruit of the Spirit

Our pursuit of hearing God shapes key aspects of our spiritual life.

"...not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Scripture records that Jesus frequently spent time in solitary prayer in order to more clearly hear the Father's voice. While this practice should have served as a model for the disciples, it appears that they sometimes had a different set of priorities. On one occasion, when they realized that Jesus had gotten up early and left the house, "*Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you'*" (Mark 1:36-37)! In the disciples' minds, there were more pressing concerns for Jesus to address—crowds to be greeted, lessons to be taught, miracles to be performed. Christ's first priority was to hear His Father. So it is for the faithful disciple. Hearing the Father must become our pursuit and passion, just as it was the Savior's. Yielding to all that the Father reveals must become our nourishment, just as it was the Savior's.

Encounter Jesus

Jesus said, "**Follow Me**" (John 1:43).

Two simple but profound words can guide our daily walk as Spirit-empowered followers of Jesus: "*Follow Me*." Whatever happens, Jesus has gone before us. He has led, and we are to follow as we live in the disciplines of hearing and yielding. What would Jesus do? WWJD is the key question to following Him and transforming our priorities.

- What would Jesus **DO** become a guiding principle when uncertainty abounds (John 3:6).
- What would Jesus **choose** guides me away from a broad road of destruction onto the narrow road of life abundant (Matthew 7:13).
- What would Jesus **say** guides my speech from unwholesome words and into words that edify (Ephesians 4:29).
- What would Jesus **think** guides my thoughts away from this world into His Word, which renews my mind (Romans 12:2).
- I find clarity and adequacy for daily living in the powerful simplicity of two words from the gospel: "Follow Me" (John 1:43).

Pause and celebrate with a partner:

"Recently I experienced an important 'following' of Jesus as I faced and found strength to ____."

II. THE PURSUIT OF HEARING HIM

Our pursuit of hearing God shapes key aspects of our spiritual life:

■ Bible Study

As true disciples, we long not for mere knowledge but for His Word to become for us "*living and active*" (Hebrews 4:12). We desire to be nourished by the Word—to "*not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). In our next sermon we will examine our calling to walk in the light of God's Word and explore the necessity of **experiencing Scripture frequently** for effective spiritual formation (Psalm 119:105).

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name” (Psalm 100:4).

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

“Be still, and know that I am God...” (Psalm 46:10).



L2. Listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment

■ **Worship**

We long to enter into God’s presence with thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 100:4), but as disciples, our entering serves a deeper purpose. We long to hear from Jesus, *“the author and perfecter of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2). In an upcoming sermon, we will explore our calling to walk in the light of Christ. We will see that spiritual formation requires **fresh encounters with Jesus** as He really is (John 8:12).

■ **Fellowship**

We long not to impress others, but to be impacted by them as the Spirit speaks to us and ministers to us through them. *“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”* (Proverbs 27:17). Expressions of Christlikeness in others provide an example, often revealing areas of needed growth and prompting change in us. In a future sermon, we will explore our calling to **faithful engagement in fellowship** as we walk in the light of God’s people as a third critical element of our spiritual formation (Matthew 5:14).

Part of our pursuit to hear God is practicing the discipline of solitude. *“Be still, and know that I am God...”* (Psalm 46:10).

When solitude (time alone with Jesus) becomes our priority:

- Prayer becomes listening as well as asking.
- Meditation on Jesus nurtures our spirit.
- Withdrawal from the world and connection with Jesus frees us to *“Set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things”* (Colossians 3:2).
- Victory in the battle of the mind is experienced as *“we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Solitude moves us beyond a preoccupation with His blessings to intimacy with the One who blesses. Religious practice gives way to the experience of His presence.

Encounter Jesus

Reveal, Empower, Provide

“Lazarus became very sick to the point of death. So his sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, our brother Lazarus, the one you love, is very sick. Please come!’” (John 11:2–3 TPT).

Jesus heard the word of His Father and courageously yielded to it. He lived life directed by His Father. In John 11, we observe an example of the Father revealing His word and the Son exhibiting courage to yield to His Father’s will, despite a request from friends.

Living a God-directed life:

- Informs judgement: *“He remained where he was for two more days”* (John 11:6 TPT).
- Empowers courage: *“Finally, on the third day, he said to his disciples, ‘Come. It’s time to go to Bethany’”* (John 11:7 TPT).
- Clarifies vision: *“This sickness will not end in death for Lazarus, but will bring glory and praise to God. This will reveal the greatness of the Son of God by what takes place”* (John 11: 4 TPT).

Take a moment to practice yielding to God, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your life as you offer these three requests:

- Ask God to reveal the areas in your life in which your opinions might be coloring your judgment:

“Lord, help my beliefs, behaviors, and relational encounters to align with Your Word.”

- Ask the Lord to empower your decision-making:

“Heavenly Father, may I have the boldness to address issues in my own life and to offer courageous confessions when appropriate. Help me to stand for what is right and not cave in to others’ pressure.”

- Ask God to provide clarity and confirmation through His Word regarding His will in your current situation:

“Lord, give me a clear purpose in life and the ability to support and encourage others in following a clear purpose.”

The true disciple passionately pays any price to hear from God.

“...get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent”
(James 1:21).

Become free to live in the present by processing unresolved emotions—
“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...” (Colossians 3:15).

III. OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL DEAFNESS

Convinced that the Good Shepherd is speaking to us, His sheep, we should now long to be assured that we are hearing Him clearly. The true disciple passionately pays any price to hear from God—not out of duty or obligation, but rather out of longing for communion with the Shepherd.

- We are instructed to deal with our sin:
 - *“...get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent”* (James 1:21).
 - Rid ourselves of *“all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind”* (1 Peter 2:1).

How do we do this you might ask?

- This is done through genuine confession of our sins to God. This brings the certainty of His promised forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).
- Also, confessing to those we have wronged is necessary (James 5:16).
- Another way we can unstop our spiritual “ears” and hear God more clearly is to become free to live in the present by processing unresolved emotions (Colossians 3:15). Such things as:
 - **Guilt** is to be confessed to God and to those we have hurt (1 John 1:9; James 5:16).
 - **Anger and bitterness** are also to be put away as we express our gratefulness for God’s forgiveness by forgiving others in turn (Ephesians 4:31–32).
 - **Condemnation** is to be replaced by gratitude for the glorious truth that *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).
 - **Fear** is cast out by a deepened love of God, the One who holds the future (1 John 4:18).

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me”
(1 Corinthians 13:11).

Cleansing must precede clarity... Christ followers long to hear the Lord so that they, like Isaiah, will want to put away anything that might hinder hearing from Him.



- L10. Practicing the presence of the Lord, yielding to the Spirit’s work of Christ-likeness
- W9. Living abundantly “in the present” as His Word brings healing to hurt, anger, guilt, fear, and condemnation—which are *heart hindrances* to life abundant

- We are also called to put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11).
 - **Childish justifying** must be replaced by personal accountability (Romans 14:12).
 - **Childish over-talking** is to be superceded by increased listening—first to God, then to others (James 1:19).
 - **Childish self-preoccupation** should give way to living out God’s “others-centered” love (Philippians 1:3–4).

Insights from the Prophet: Cleansing precedes clarity

“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1).

The prophet Isaiah’s dramatic encounter with the Lord brought with it the need to put away the sin of “unclean lips.” He confessed his sin: “*Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty”* (Isaiah 6:5 NIV). Then God cleansed him by sending an angel with a live coal. The angel touched Isaiah’s mouth and said, “*See this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for”* (vv. 6–7). Isaiah then heard the voice of God saying, “*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* The man of God then yielded to the Lord and said, “*Here am I. Send me”* (vv. 8–9).

The story of the Old Testament prophet reminds us that cleansing must precede clarity concerning God’s voice and discernment about His will. Christ followers long to hear the Lord so that they, like Isaiah, will want to put away anything that might hinder hearing from Him.

Experience Scripture

Consider a fresh experience of Hebrews 12:1: “*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*”

Do you need to lay aside and seek cleansing for:

- Particular areas of sin through confessing to God and receiving His forgiveness? — Take a moment to write them down.
- Unresolved emotions, like guilt, anger, bitterness, condemnation and fear? — Take a moment to write about them.
- Childish things, such as finger-pointing or blame? Preoccupation with self? Idle chatter or gossip? — Take a moment to write these as well.

Pause and consider your own ability to hear from the Lord:

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything that might need to be cleansed. Sit quietly before the Lord and allow Him to speak to your heart. Be open to the gentle voice that urges you to purify yourself, so that you might have deepened intimacy with the Creator.

“Lord, help me to put away sins that are derailing me. I no longer wish to carry the burden of these unresolved emotions. I’m sorrowed by my childish behaviors and want to renounce these. I wish to hear Your Voice and no longer listen to the distracting noise of transgression.”

“Train yourself to be godly”
(1 Timothy 4:7 NASB).

“Exercise thyself...unto Godliness”
(1 Timothy 4:7 KJV).

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
*“Let the Word of Christ dwell
deeply in you.”*

Pastor/Teacher:
Pause during this time and vulnerably share about a time when you submitted to an authority in your life, someone in your family, or a mentor in the church.



W3. Yielding to the Scripture's protective cautions and transforming power to bring life change in me

IV. THE PRIORITY OF YIELDING

Christ is formed in His disciples as we hear and yield. Faithful disciples participate in this maturing process much like athletes exercise physically.

Gymnasia, the Greek word for “exercise,” means “to train oneself,” in this case by becoming submissive to God’s will. With regard to yielding, several opportunities for training have been made available to us. These disciplines of yielding or “submitting” train us to deny ourselves, develop trust, and discern the ways of God.

Let’s consider several avenues of yielding/submitting noted below. **Pause and meditate on the Scriptures related to each one**, listening for the Holy Spirit’s prompting:

■ Submission to God

“Submit yourselves, then, to God” (James 4:7).

■ Submission to Human Authorities

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1).

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:13–15).

“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly” (1 Peter 2:18–19).

■ Submission to Family Relationships

“Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with [Mary and Joseph] and was obedient to them” (Luke 2:51).

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1).

■ Submission within the church

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (1 Peter 5:5).

Experience Scripture

In order to additionally “exercise” my heart in yielding, it may be helpful for me to give attention to submission in ____ area(s) of my life and my relationship(s) with ____.

"...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).



- L5. Living with a passionate longing for purity and to please Him in all things
- M10. Living submissively within His body, the church, as instruction and encouragement, reproof, and correction are graciously received by faithful disciples

Prayerful Reflection:

"Lord Jesus, my desire is to live a life submitted to You, committed to yield even before I have heard all that You desire of me. In order to deepen and quicken my inclination to yield, I sense it is important that I exercise additional submission in this area or relationship with _____. By Your Spirit, enable me to submit willingly and joyfully, knowing that it is for my good. In Your name, Amen."

Obedience is not always easy, yet Christ's yielding to the will of His Father was joy-filled. How can we cultivate obedience in our own lives that is motivated by the joy of pleasing God?

- Thank God often that you have received, in the person of the Holy Spirit, a yielding love.
- Declare to the Lord often that you long to please Him.
- Express joy for the privilege you have to express His glorious presence and for the fact that He, through you, finds pleasure.
- Exercise yielding through submission in relationships with others.

How might you yield?

"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46).

In His last words from the cross, Christ expresses both His identity and His legacy to us. In humility, He yielded! This is the key that unlocks the mystery of Jesus and the Father being One—whatever the Son did, it was only what He had seen the Father doing. In the same way, the key that will empower our living expression of God's glory will be our humble commitment to yield to whatever the Father reveals.

Engage Community

Consider some of these Bible passages that testify of how Jesus yielded. Ask the Holy Spirit to prompt your heart with any areas where you could further demonstrate your own love for the Father by yielding to Him.

- Jesus yielded as He left heaven's riches and became a servant (Philippians 2:5–8). How might you yield to the Father and **become more of a servant** today?
- Jesus yielded His actions to the Father. He did not seek to please Himself, but desired only to please the Father (John 5:19, 30). How might you **yield your actions** to the Father today?
- Jesus yielded to the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:1). How might you yield to the leadership of the Holy Spirit today? How might you **become more attentive** to His direction and guidance?
- Jesus yielded to the Holy Spirit when He was tempted as we are so that He might help us when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18; Luke 4:1–13). How might you **yield to the Holy Spirit in overcoming sin**?
- Jesus yielded to human authority (John 19:1–22). How might you **better yield to the human authorities** that God has placed in your life today?

Now consider John 20:21: *“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”* Consider the areas and issues in your life in which the Holy Spirit is longing to work. What do you sense will be the fresh work of yieldedness that the Lord is longing to see in you?

- To be more of a servant to others
- To better please Him in all things
- To be more attentive to the Spirit’s direction
- To better overcome evil and reoccurring sin
- To be more yielding to others’ input and wisdom

Consider praying with one or two others:

“Lord Jesus, I wish to have an attitude of yieldedness and look for opportunities to serve those in my life. Help me with my stubbornness because I tend to want things to go my way. Often, I want to do my own thing and not follow the counsel of others. Specifically, I yield to Your Spirit so that I might be ____.”