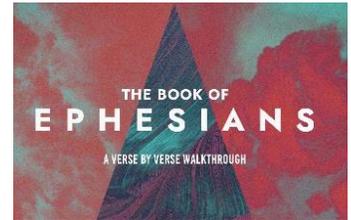


Title: Ephesians, Week 13, Priorities in Christian Relationships

Speaker: Kevin Norcross

Passage: Ephesians 6.1-9

Big idea: You can honour God in your relationships by understanding your priorities.



These few verses in Ephesians 6.1-9 are really powerful. This passage is rich in truth, reminders, and challenges about parenting, family, work, and ministry. Paul gives good instructions to Christian Relationships within marriages last week and this week is focusing mostly on parenting, kids, work, and ministry.

I have titled my message today “Priorities in Christian Relationships”. The Bible has a lot to say about relationships and there are great reminders for all of us today regardless of your stage in life. God has a plan and a design for human family, and work relationships.

Humanity continues to rebel against that plan. Each one of us falls into one of these categories: parent, kid, spouse, volunteer, leader, follower, boss, employee; so, there are lots of things that we can learn. Even if we are talking about a category that you don’t fall into, you can still listen and learn and seek understanding



Ephesians 6:1-9

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Main Priorities:

This text outlines some key relationships and helps us to understand our priorities and what to focus on:

1. Personal – your number one priority must be to focus on your relationship with God.
2. Family – your next priority is to love and care for your family.
3. Work/ministry – your next priority is work and ministry.

1. PERSONAL - Relationship with God is number 1.

Matt 22:37 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your heart and with all your mind.”

Jesus asked what the greatest of the 10 commandments. Love God

How do you love God? Pursue Him every day, on a journey, daily time devoted, throughout the day.

Simple strategy – daily devotions – why so tough?

Greatest Command = Greatest Attack.

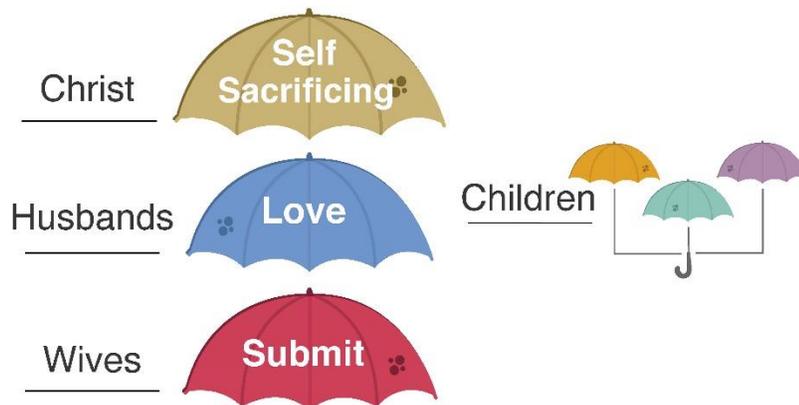
The Devil will put so much pressure on you in order to get you away from spending time with God. He will distract you, lie to you, deceive you so that you don't go deep with God. He knows that if he can get you away from that, then you will not be able to go against the flow.

Everything flows from that relationship, and you must work at it, strive after it and give it everything you got.

2. FAMILY

Marriages

Corey did a great job unpacking this last week. I would say he did a masterful job at explaining what God's word says and God's design for marriage. Please watch that if you have not. He talked about the umbrella.



- Christ – wilfully gave Himself ... self-sacrificing
- Husbands – love wife ... as Christ loves the church
- Wives – submit ... to come under as the strong helper
- Kids – Honour ... because it honours God

Kids

The next Christian Relationship that is a priority is kids. Kids – you are important to God! We are all kids and we all have something to learn here.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise.

Most of our younger kids are in kids church right now. Teens and adults are still kids.

God give some good instructions about how kids should interact with parents. So, there is a biblical outline for the way your parents should be doing their job. And then ... there is currently reality.

Because of the fall and sin, we see only a glimpse of this biblical design for parenting.

Please understand that parents are people. People are broken and sinful. Parents will fall short, mess up, fail, hurt you and let you down. This is just a part of sin entering the world and we all deal with it. Parents are not perfect, and the scale of parenting is vast. You could be in various situations growing up.

You might have a parent who is in one of these following categories:

- Those who are serving Christ, are on this journey pursuing Christ and they are working the best they can. They will do a great job, and God's peace will rule in your home, and the children will reap the reward and benefit and blessing from that.
- Those who are not Christ followers are good people and can provide tremendous nurturing, sacrifice, care, provision. You will need to find that spiritual mentoring from someone other than your parents.
- Those parents who fall incredibly short of what they are supposed to do. Some parents are extremely disappointing, selfish, and hurtful and have caused tremendous pain and turmoil for you.
 - If you are in this situation, or you grew up in this situation, you will need to seek healing and strength from God.
- No matter what situations you are in as a kid.
 - Bring all of this hurt and pain to God.
 - Seek His healing and help.
 - Pray that God will fill in the gaps where your parents fall short.
 - Forgive.
 - Seek counseling.
 - Come to terms with it and ask God for help.
 - Regardless – kids, teens, adult kids
 - Be aware of the love of your parents, their shortcomings, and honour them
 - Listen to them and hear them out. Don't be a know it all, but ask them questions and seek to understand them
 - Adult kids
 - Those of you in your mid 20's – 30's especially
 - Do some digging
 - Reflect, pray, seek God, and look back at your childhood and upbringing. See what God reveals to you. It could be some small things or some big things
 - But there is probably some baggage there that needs to be dealt with. It is inevitable, because no matter what, your parents fall short, and they let you down.
 - These things could be holding you back in your own journey with Christ and God wants to help you be free from them and doesn't want you carrying around that load of weight and burden. He wants to carry it for you and bring healing and restoration.
 - Honour
 - This is the command given to children **"Honor your father and mother"**.
 - This command is directly given to pre-adult children living at home, but includes all ages and stages of being a child.
 - Again, in the society when this was written, the role of kids was subordinate, not important, low in society, had no respect or dignity.
 - The gospel gives children priority treatment.
 - Children are important to God.
 - Children's emotions, thoughts, worries, fears, insecurities, struggles are important to God.
 - Children, you matter to God!
 - Our roles as children changes and adapts throughout our lives.
 - Children are to honour their parents because it honours God.
 - When you honour your parents, it is a form of worship and service to God and it flows from your relationship with God.
 - To honour is deeper than just to obey.
 - To honour is to respect and esteem.

- Also, parents must conduct themselves in a manner that deserves respect and esteem.
- To honour is a matter of the heart.
- Now - Obedience here is within the limits of living for God.
- As children you cannot obey a parent who is asking you to do things that are immoral, idolatrous, anti-gospel, or anything that is against following Jesus.
- Obeying and honouring your parents is morally right we are to work hard at not disrespecting our parents.
- Obey and recognise that parents are under the authority of Christ.

Parents

⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

This instruction is given to both parents. Fathers (and mothers) do not provoke your children to anger by:

- Severe and relentless discipline
- Harsh and unrealistic demands
- Inconsistency
- Unfair rules
- Humiliation
- Insensitivity
- Manipulation
- Control

If we as parents do this, our kids will lose heart as Colossians 3:21 says,

“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”

Fathers and Mothers come under the authority of Christ, and both are equal, but have different roles that complement each other. Single mom’s, absent fathers, etc you may need to fill in the gap at times or find someone to pour into/mentor. Get them involved in ministry here at the church.

To simplify this ... “do not provoke your children to anger” Parents, don’t be a “meanie”. Take this role as a parent with great respect. It is a HUGE responsibility. Parents need to instead focus on (antidote).

Enjoy your kids. Recognise that they are a gift from God. God is patient and understanding with you, you need to do the same with your kids. Nurture them, teach them, raise them up. Bring them up – means to feed, nurture, educate and train

Fathers and Mothers are important.

There is a book called “Devotions for Sacred Parenting”. Kylie read it and wrote down 52 quotes from it, and I want to read some of these quotes to encourage and challenge moms and dads. I will read them, and you can follow along.

“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”

- I’m called and equipped to be their parent
- Number one goal is to produce Godly children
- They are a blessing, not a burden
- Being a parent causes humility and shapes us more into the image of Christ

- We need to demonstrate the pursuit of growth, realizing we need to change, just as our children do
- Be tender but be true. Teach kids of their desperate need of a Saviour because they were born sinners
- The annoyances and challenges of family life are ways in which we die to ourselves. Rise above circumstances and carry the cross

- Enjoy parenting in the moment
- Pursue your children ... know the important things about them
- Cooperate with God in parenting. Listen for his voice and insight
- Enjoy the day to day. It is a blessing, and you would do anything to get it back if it were gone

Parents, seek to provide an atmosphere in your home that encourages growth. Pray for your kids. Find someone who is in the next stage and ask them questions. Kylie and I do this all the time. We have 5 kids ... we need all the help we can get.

One comedian (who also has 5 kids) was asked “what is it like to have 5 kids?” He said – “well let’s pretend that you are treading water and you are getting tired, and you are starting to drown ... and then someone says – here – and throws you 5 kids. Ya, that is pretty much it, so perhaps you feel this way too. Ask for help!

Everything from diaper rash, teething, bed wetting, discipline, school, talking back, time out/time in, dating, college/university, keeping the fridge full of food when it magically disappears. All of it – ask for help.

I want to encourage young parents. If you are feeling buried by parenting, you are totally normal - just keep going, it will pass, it is just a season. I remember Kaden 2.5, twins, feed every 3 hours, feeding took 1.5 hrs. Blur. Blocked it out. Every time I have a bad sleep, I think ... if we did it back then I can do it now.

Parenting is stages – this too shall pass.

Parents, don’t lose heart. When it comes to Kids and their faith, you want to encourage, train and teach them to love Jesus. There is a transition that happens to kids along their journey. We strive to see this in adolescence where they take ownership of their relationship with Christ – but some don’t, and they rebel. There is a group of college age students who reject their faith. Some kids and youth who grow up in the church who abandon their faith due to various reasons. We want to do everything we can as families, as a church, as ministries, as multigeneration within the church family to minimize this.

- Kids min
 - Priority at Westpark
 - Small groups
 - So many involved – thank you for serving in this ministry.
- Youth min
 - Jr and Sr High is vital ... get your kids here
 - Small groups
 - Church -Get involved!
 - Kids, youth leader – talk to Bill – can I come and check it out?
- Young adults – an environment for them to grow and flourish
 - Small groups
 - If they have been in a small group all along, we encourage them to find that as a young adult to keep growing in their faith
- Small groups as adults
- Parents
 - This preparation does not happen by sitting on the edge of your kids bed as they pack for College
 - It is a day-by-day process
 - Some of the top strategies
 - Eat dinner together
 - Live out your faith in front of your kids
 - Create an atmosphere for them to wrestle with their faith and ask questions

3. WORK

Then it goes into the next area of relationships involving work.

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

This scripture talks about the role of slave and master. In the society when this was written slavery was accepted. But again, the Bible speaks against it.

There were many slaves in the Roman empire. Slaves were treated as “living tools” and had no respect or dignity. Paul’s teaching was a radical change.

In our society today there is a boss and employee and God gives us some great insight on these relationships and how we are to conduct ourselves as Christ followers.

Lead/follow

We all have people that we have influence over and there are people who have influence over us. You must seek to be a good leader and a good follower. John Maxwell speaks about a 360-degree leader:

Lead-up: Involves influencing your leader, by lightening their load.

Lead-across: This involves leading colleagues and other leaders. Leading across means that we help our peers at our level succeed.

Lead-down: You also need to help your team grow and be successful. This is done through developing and empowering them to success.

Employee

⁶Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

Bible teaches that you are to obey your boss again, within obedience to scripture. Not immoral; Not idolatrous; Not anti-gospel. But within these boundaries ... obey!

Remember that it is not that God sees a boss as more important than an employee. He sees everyone as equal.

It says to work hard even when no one is looking. This applies to all relationships: personal life, home life, work/ministry life. God I am doing this for you. I want to lay my head down at the end of the day in peace whether I get credit here on earth or in Heaven.

It teaches that as a worker, and employee, you are honouring God. You can actually see your work as worship to God so you can find joy and fulfillment in that. Serve as Christ came to serve. Think of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Nasty job but Christ did it. We do the same.

Don't be shady and manipulative, but genuinely serve and work hard.

Look for opportunities to take the initiative at work and use the God given abilities that you have and be a blessing to your boss and to your company. I had a job painting in Calgary earning \$10/hr. End of the day – you know how to paint! I got a raise to \$15. Sometimes you will get noticed, or promoted, or thanked, or a raise. Sometimes you will do something and you will get no credit.

Remember that your reward is in Heaven. You can bank on the fact that God sees your hard work and keeps track and will reward you. That is kind of fun and freeing and enjoyable – God sees it.

Don't get caught up in the games, politics, manipulation, gossip, drama, and weight of the workplace. These things can drag you down and rob you. They can suck the emotional energy right out of you. Refuse to fall into it. Some of you carry the weight of this junk and filth and you bring it home and you dump it on your spouse and your kids. God has something better for you. Be sure to honour Him and put your family first.

Boss

Instructions to a boss or a leader is similar to that of parenting.

⁹And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Again - Don't be a meanie. Be God honouring, represent God well. Being a Christian leader in a Christian context or a secular is a great opportunity. You can lead so well and be a blessing to other people. Your leadership comes under submission to God.

It could be:

- Ministry at the church
- Parent in the home

- Coach on a sports team
- Boss at work
- Team leader at work
- Project at school
- Leader among your peers
- Whatever scenario, be sure to honour Him in your leadership and remember that you will be held accountable

Remember that God loves boss/employee the same, leader/follower the same. If you are in a leadership position, you are not any better than those you are leading. Don't be a meanie!

- Serving in ministry and community, same principles here as other areas.
- Good ministry flows out of your relationship with God.
- Dream about what you are passionate about and test drive it.
- Get involved in ministry.
- There is nothing like being used by God to have an impact on someone.
- We need to work together as a church to pour into our families.

A couple of weeks ago Corey talked about an older generation pouring into the younger generation. Want to know an easy way to do that? Offer them food. Just say "hey, can I feed you?" And watch their eyes light up and go from there.

Within the church and community, find a place to serve.

Priorities are important. **Big idea: You can honour God in your relationships by understanding your priorities.** We need God's help to keep them straight. Personal life, home life, work/ministry life.

Sometimes we fall into the trap of getting our priorities mixed up. There is a temptation to slack off in the personal and family area, and then pretend at work and at church. This is very dangerous ground to walk on.

My challenge to you today is to spend time this week looking at your priorities and ask God to help you, correct you, convict you. Make some changes in your heart and in your schedule and in your life in order to honour God and serve Him with your priorities. We have been learning a lot about our relationships as Christ followers over the past few weeks. God is stirring your heart and I encourage you to listen to Him and to act on it.

Let this be your prayer today.

- God, help us to get our priorities straight.
 1. Relationship with you.
 - Set our hearts on fire. Help scripture to come alive. Revive and refresh our walk with you.
 2. Family. God, would you strengthen our families?
 - Marriages, Kids, Parents, Families would be places of deep strengthening and peace and joy.
 - A place of healing in the midst of a dark, terrible, scary world.
 3. Work and ministry.
 - Help us to honour you and serve you
 - Those who are discouraged and defeated in their career, would you give them fresh purpose and vitality and drive to work hard? Those who are managers and bosses, give them the strength to lead in a godly way.
 - Help us as we serve in your church and community. Help us to represent you well and be used by you. Stir our hearts for ministry. Stir up the gifts within us. Help us to pour into others
 4. Priorities
 - i. God in all these areas, help it to flow out of a love and passion for you.
 - ii. Help us to be a bright light in this dark world.
 - iii. Help us to be the salt of the earth.
 - iv. Help us to be your representatives in all areas of our lives and in all the relationships you have blessed us with.