

December 1, 2019

Invest In Your Relationship With God - Is God Your One Priority?

"God give us Your Word, Father break our idols, With our souls condemned, You gave your life, give us Your Hope, fill us with Your power, Oh precious Savior we need revival, please hear our prayer, Jesus, go before us, light the way, You are the way! Folks that's our vision for 2020. Revival. For God-sent revival to happen, we have to let Jesus be our everything, our one priority! Let's pray and we're going to talk about how God can become our one priority if we will invest in our relationship with Him! Let's pray!

Last week we talked about the miracles of the New Testament Church. One of the greatest miracles was the revival that launched the New Testament Church on its world-wide mission to take the Good News of Jesus to every man, woman, boy and girl! Our staff has been praying about our focus for 2020 and the theme of revival became very clear! God led us to lead out in three areas. Investing in our relationship with God. Identifying one person to share God's love with, and Impacting our world by using our gifts and abilities to serve! Before we jump into our passage this morning, I want to take a moment to explain to you what we are going to do this coming year to facilitate and prepare for a God-sent revival and how we will do this together as a church!

God has been so good to us at Northshore Church. From the very beginning we have had a Purpose, a Mission, and a Vision.

Our purpose is why we do, our mission is what we do and our vision is what we hope to accomplish by following our purpose and doing our mission.

Here's the three statements for you...

Our Purpose is to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

Our Mission is to transform worship, people and the world!

Our Vision is to raise up a healthy church that will impact the world with the life-changing message of Jesus!

The vision of a church wide revival is an ambitious, but very doable vision God has placed on our hearts for this year. It's a vision that will require your participation, but will only happen if God shows up in a big way! In the old days, a revival was a series of meetings held at a church with a visiting evangelist doing the speaking. The revival we are asking God to bring us is a church wide spiritual awakening and renewal!

Several weeks ago I shared in a message, the definition of revival according to Webster's Dictionary back in the 1,800's was this:

Revival 1. To bring again to life; to reanimate. 2. To raise from languor, depression or discouragement; to rouse; as, to revive the spirits or courage.

God put this on Andrew's heart some time ago and our staff had a meeting and agreed this was the vision we needed to pursue in 2020!

This will not be a series of meetings with a guest evangelist, it will be a year long spiritual pursuit of spiritual growth, outreach and service. Taking the I in revival to indicate the individual participation required for each of us, we have identified the three critical areas in which we

must focus! Each one of us must invest in our relationship with God, identify one person we will try to share God's love with, and impact our world through serving! In order to see these three things happen, our church family will be challenged to read through the entire Bible this year. We will use the Foundations 260 Bible Reading Plan to read through all 66 books of the Bible (5 days a week, 260 days). Copies of the Bible Reading Plan are available to everyone at the Connect Center. For additional assistance in reading through the Bible, we encourage you to get a copy of Foundations by Robby Gallaty & Kandi Gallaty. This book provides short devotions that correspond to the daily Bible readings. It also provides additional tools for scripture memorization, specific prayer emphases, journaling, and personal life application questions. Families will be challenged to read the Bible together. Foundations for Teens and Foundations for Kids by Robby and Kandi Gallaty are additional resources which give devotional material for kids and teens along with the Bible Reading plan.

Our weekly messages will come from one of the passages from the Bible reading plan. Our small groups will study one of the passages from the corresponding weekly Bible passages for growth in understanding God's Word and accountability to respond to it in daily application. The publisher gave us a great deal on the devotional guide at only 10.00 per book, so that's the cost. If you can't afford it let us know, we don't want anyone to not be able to have the resource. If you have extra and would like to help someone get a book, that would be awesome as well. In addition to the devotional book, you can also complete the F260 plan on the You Version App. While the Bible App doesn't include the devotional, it includes the Scripture readings and you can check off each day you've completed the readings. So there you have it. This will start January 1st. What we are going to do the next three weeks is explain the three main goals of this year long revival effort. Today we're going to talk about Investing in our relationship with God. Next week Andrew will preach on Identifying the one person God will lead you to share God's love with this year, and then the next week I'll share a message on finding your Impact through serving! We'll then have a Christmas message, and the next week we'll be full in with our vision of reading the Bible through in a year and seeing God send a Revival.

So the first step towards true revival is to...

Invest in your relationship with God!

Ask yourself this question...

Is God my one priority?

We envision individuals in our church being transformed in 2020 by devoting ourselves to knowing God as our top priority. Imagine the spiritual growth of our church if every person would commit to being intentional about spending time with God daily for the entire year. The love and grace of God will be showered upon us as we grow in our relationship with him. Our faith will increase. His purpose for our lives will be clear. Our hearts will be in tune with his. Our church will be unified. Paul said this in Philippians 3:7-11...

Phil 3:7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Phil 3: 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Phil 3: 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Phil 3: 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Phil 3: 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Is that not one of the most powerful statements ever on investing in your relationship with God and making Him your one priority? That's Paul the Apostle who at one time was known as Saul of Tarsus, a man who hated and persecuted Christians. Paul, who was Saul at the time, was there when Stephen was stoned to death. He had heard Stephen preach his powerful message. You know, the one I told you last week to go home and read. Okay, I know some of you are thinking, "Man I was totally going to do that!" Well, we're not going to go through his entire sermon, but there are some highlights that will help us understand what it means to invest in our relationship with God. And some of the details surrounding the event will also help us. Let's look at Acts 6:8-15...

Acts 6:8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Acts 6:9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,

Acts 6:10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

It is obvious that Stephen had invested in his relationship with God. God was his one priority! It says...

Acts 6:10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Where did Stephen get that wisdom? Where did Stephen get that Spirit with which he spoke. It was his relationship with God! Stephen was not just a Sunday morning Christian. He was the real deal 24/7, in church, out of church! It was a way of life based on a personal relationship with God through Jesus! In fact when the New Testament Church needed some Godly leaders to help the twelve apostles with the ministry, here were the qualifications...

Acts 6:3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom...

It goes on to say...

Acts 6:5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...

So now we know the reason for the next part of our text...

Acts 6:15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

There's just something different about a person who has God as their one priority! Now let me set up the next part our message so you see the method to my madness. Stephen is about to preach a powerful message. It was a message tailored to his Jewish religious leader audience. We won't have time to go into all the details, but my prayer is that you'll see through some of Stephen's points how our relationship with God should be our one priority in life. Remember, Stephen is now before the authorities and this had happened...

Acts 6:11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

Acts 7:1 Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

Acts 7:2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia (Tigris-Euphrates valley, extending to Canaan and Egypt), before he lived in Haran.

Acts 7:3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

Acts 7:4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.

Acts 7:5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

Acts 7:6 God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

Acts 7:7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'

Investing in your relationship with God and making Him your one priority is about God's presence not a place or your circumstances!

Stephen was letting the Jewish religious leaders know that God had promised them possession of the land but it was not about the promised land, it was about having a place to worship! The Holy Land was not Holy because its mineral makeup was somehow different from land in other parts of the world, it was Holy because of God's presence. Back when Moses was instructed to take off his shoes because he was standing on Holy ground, it was because of the presence of God, not because of the makeup of the soil! God then rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians so they could worship in freedom. But somehow they missed the point, and Stephen goes on to say...

Acts 7:37 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'

Acts 7:38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

Acts 7:39 "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

Acts 7:40 They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!'

Acts 7:41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made.

How tragic! Moses had received living words from God to pass on to the people, but they rejected the words of life and chose instead to follow the ways of the Egyptians. They wanted something tangible. They wanted idols, something they could see, and touch. That desire for tangible and walking by sight rather than by faith plagued the Jewish people down through the ages. Later on, when God allowed them to enter the promised land and build Him a temple, they put their trust in the temple instead of God! And here's what amazes me: to think of all God had done for them to get them out of Egypt, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, their provisions in the desert, being led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night, and yet they would rather return to their slavery in Egypt than obey God's living words! Instead of focusing on their relationship with God, they chose to focus on their circumstances. They were stuck in a desert, and weren't happy, even though it was whose fault they were in the desert? And here's the thing, I still see that in people's lives. Their bad choices sometimes bring about bad circumstances and yet rather than trust God to help them go a different direction, they choose to go back to their old ways rather than investing in their relationship with God! They refuse to allow God to be their one priority. Not that bad circumstances are always a result of bad choices. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, but how we choose to respond is critical!

Here's the key: Your awareness of God's presence! When you invest in your relationship with God you begin to develop a sensitivity to His presence in your daily life no matter what your circumstances! This awareness of God's presence was the very thing the religious leaders were missing. Everything they did was based on setting up a kingdom in this world! They were all about power, position and prestige! So temples and tabernacles and great buildings were very important to them. They had come to think that the presence of God was confined to the temple complex!

Now don't get me wrong, having a facility to gather together as the church and worship, is not a bad thing, in fact the Bible says...

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

...but if the only time you invest in your relationship with God is at a church building on Sunday, you've missed the whole point! God wants a relationship with you 24/7.

In fact Stephen goes on to say this in his sermon...

Acts 7:44 "Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

Acts 7:45 Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David,

Acts 7:46 who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

The tabernacle was a portable church! They took it with them wherever they went. Northshore Church knows a thing or two about portable church! Stephen goes on to remind them that God allowed Solomon to build a temple, but then gives them the shocking truth...

Acts 7:48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

Acts 7:49 "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?

Acts 7:50 Has not my hand made all these things?'

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

You see, the religious elite were more about pomp and circumstance and refused to allow the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, to dwell in their hearts and lives. It was not whether they were in the desert or the promised land, in a tabernacle or a temple, it was about coming together to worship and celebrate God's love! It was not about the ark of the covenant, but about the presence of God with the people! It had always been about God's desire to have a personal relationship with His people, not about elaborate buildings or religious artifacts. In the desert Moses had erected a tent outside the camp and it was called the tent of meeting. Listen to this description in Exodus 33...

Exo 33:7 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

Exo 33:8 And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

Exo 33:9 As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses.

Exo 33:10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent.

Exo 33:11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

Face to face as a man speaks with his friend! Folks that's what God had always desired. As you read through the Bible this year you will be reminded that before the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, God walked with them in the garden every day, fellowshiping with them, until they made a choice to turn away from God! And this brings us to a second truth to be found in Stephen's message...

Investing in your relationship with God and making Him your one priority is a choice!

Stephen is desperately trying to get his hearers to remember the most important thing was their personal relationship with God, but they had already made some terrible choices...

Acts 7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him--

Acts 7:53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

God had given the Israelites the law, but they had not obeyed it! Those who tried to teach the truth of the law and the purpose of the law had been persecuted and even killed. The sad thing was that the religious leaders had made it all about the law, the letter of the law, when it was never about the letter of the law, it was about the Law Giver. The law was given to guide them into a relationship with God! But once again they focused on the tangible rather than walking by faith. Don't forget, who was listening to Stephen's sermon, Saul, who would later become Paul the Apostle. God had burned Stephen's message into Paul's heart. Listen to what Paul would later say when he was in Athens. This is fascinating to me...

Acts 17:16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

Acts 17:17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

Acts 17:18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?

Acts 17:20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean."

Acts 17:21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Acts 17:22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.

Acts 17:23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

Acts 17:25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.
Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Paul let the people of Athens know that even God's act of creation was done to give people a chance to choose to love God and to be loved by God! It was God's will and desire that human beings would seek Him and reach out for Him, and find Him!! God has never been playing hide and go seek with us, He wants to be found, but He has made it so that we have a choice!
Again Paul said...

Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Paul said this in 2 Corinthians...

2 Cor 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Cor 3:7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was,

2 Cor 3:8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

2 Cor 3:15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

2 Cor 3:16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

2 Cor 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Cor 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The Temple, The Promised Land, and The Law were tools given by God to the people of Israel to be used, not to be worshiped. It's not about the tools, it's about the work they can accomplish. The tools were to guide them into the promised land of relationship with God and to take the good news of God's love to the world. However, many of them missed the message!! We must not miss the message! Investing in your relationship with God and allowing Him to be your one priority will help you discover God's presence in your life daily. It will allow Him to transform you and to use you to make a difference in the world. Here's what investing in your relationship with God will do if you choose to allow Him to be your one priority...

Rom 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Rom 11:34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

Rom 11:35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

Rom 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Folks that'll bring Revival! Let's pray!

