

PRIORITY REBOOT

CHRISTMAS AS IS

Matthew 2:1-12 // Craig Smith

December 11, 2016

CRAIG: Good morning.

CONGREGATION: Good morning.

CRAIG: So I'm gonna have to start this morning by confessing a certain amount of hypocrisy. Christmas As Is the whole idea is, you don't have to get everything right. God loves you as you are. And so this attempt to get everything picture perfect misses the whole point of Christmas. That's the message I haven't exactly been practicing what I've been preaching.

You've heard a little bit about my bathroom project. I really wanted to get the whole thing done before Christmas happen. My parents are coming, my sister's coming, Coleta's [SP] parents are coming, and I just thought, "This bathroom is going to be ready and it's going to be gorgeous, and it's just going to be awesome." And real life has intruded, and like I don't think my timetable is realistic, and I were spending every spare moment working on it. My family came to me this week and they said basically, "Hey, how would you feel about not finishing the shower part?" And I was like, "How do I feel about it? Not good. I don't feel good at all." And you know, honestly, well you know, we'll have with the toilets ready, the sinks are ready, just they could come up here for the shower we just may not have the shower done.

And I'll be honest, there was a big part of me that just thought, "That is not good enough." And then I remembered, yeah it doesn't have to be good enough. That whole thing misses the point. And I realized that part of the problem is that we're spending every spare moment working on this thing, and it's keeping my family from being able to properly reflect and enjoy the celebration of Christmas. And so I'll be honest, I begrudgingly said "Okay. All right. Yeah, we won't finish the shower." But there was a part of me the still thought, "But maybe I will." And I was standing in the shower just a couple of days ago, and I was looking at it and I said, "This is messy." Here's how messy, not only is the tile not up yet, we're going to deal with that later, but there was like a bucket of dried grout, and one of the trouts was in the dry grout. It's like an archaeological artifact now.

And as I was staring at it looking at this mess I suddenly realized that, you know, there's an unexpected blessing that comes from messy situations. Do you know what it is? Messy situations force us to confront and clarify our priorities. It's often when things get messy that we realize, "I have to make a decision about what's really important." And as I stood there on that day I realized what's really important is that my family needs rest. We need to be able to enjoy the season, and we need to be able to go out and look at lights, not necessarily stick another tile on the wall. And so it's messy and that's okay.

But I realized that there's some real power in messy situations allowing us to clarify and confront those priorities and figure out what it is that really matters to us. Because of the end of the day the choices that we make are often driven by the priorities that drive us. So I'm going to ask you to turn with me to Matthew 2: and we're going to be bringing part of the Christmas story today, that really is about a group of people who were forced to deal with a messy situation that ultimately led them to confront and to clarify their real priorities. If you don't have a Bible please feel free to grab the one in the seats in front of you, that's our gift to you.

We're going to be reading probably a familiar story, it doesn't matter if you spend a lot of time in church or not you're going to be aware of at least part of the story. This is the story of the Magi. And in Matthew 2: begins this way. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem they asked, "Where is the one who has been born the king of the Jews? We saw a star when it rose and we have come to worship Him." Now, a couple of clarifying



issues I want to make sure we're on the same page. The first is just who these guys were.

You know, this is one of the places I think where our traditional Christmas carols may actually mislead us, because interestingly enough we change the language. Matthew calls the Magi but when we sing about them, we call them We Three Kings. We call them kings, and that may be because they brought royal gifts but the reality is they almost certainly were not kings more likely they worked for a king somewhere. They were probably representatives of the king who had sent them on his behalf. And when we say that we work for a king what we mean is they were probably advisers to a king. They were probably people that were sort of counselors, they had acquired a certain amount of knowledge and so they gave advice and counsel to the king. And maybe it's because of that that we have another other term that we use for them, we also call them the what?

CONGREGATION: The wise men.

CRAIG: The wise men. But even that term I don't think is entirely faithful to what Matthew tells us. Matthew uses a very unusual word. He's very particular but he calls them Magi. He didn't call them wise men, he didn't call them Kings, he calls them Magi. And it's interesting how often we look to change that language. And I think the reason is because Magi is not a comfortable word. When you understand what it means, Magi is a Persian word referring to practitioners of occult arts. It's our word...It's the root of our word for magician. These were magicians. And when I say magician by the way don't think David Blaine. Don't think David Copperfield or any of those guys from the Vegas strip, no.

When the Bible talks about magicians, it's the kind of people who dabbled in the dark arts. They practice astrology and they cast spells and that kind of thing. Really, if you want to think what the Magi were in my contemporary terms don't think David Blaine, think Harry Potter. Or dare we say his name Voldemort. These are people who were schooled in and supposedly masters of the occult practices. They were practitioners of the dark arts, astrology and sorcery, necromancy those kinds of things. And the Bible was quite serious that that kind of stuff is not to be part of God's people. In fact, the book of Leviticus says anybody who practices these things is to be put to death.

So when we see that term Magi we naturally expect them to be the villains in the story. But it's interesting, if you know the story at all you realize they're not really the villains, they're heroes in the story which is fascinating. Because we're supposed to be surprised by that. And we're supposed to ask the question, how did these unexpected heroes emerge? What was it that led them to cause us to remember them even thousands of years later in positive terms?

And what I want to suggest to you is that it's their priorities. It's about their priorities. And it's this, that the legacy we leave is ultimately determined by the priorities that drive us. I'll say that again because it's important. The legacy that we leave behind, the way people remember us is ultimately determined by the priorities that drive us. We remember the Magi in positive terms. They have left us a positive legacy, but I want to say to you it's because of the priorities that we ultimately see driving them throughout this story. And the same thing is true for you and us, the way we will be remembered is awesomely determined by the priorities that drive us. And so it's critical that we understand what those are and where necessary we revise those priorities that are driving us.

Now, the second thing we need to understand about the story as it begins, is the star. And there's been a lot of speculation throughout the millennia about what the star might have been, and maybe you've heard people argue that it was a constellation of planets. That's one suggestion. People suggested it was maybe a supernova, people said it might have been entirely supernatural thing, it might have been a comet [SP]. But the real answer is we have no idea. We don't know what the star was. God's word doesn't give us any specifications. The Greek word that's being used could cover all of those suggested possibilities as well as a number of others. It just means there was a light in the sky and we don't really know what it was, and we don't need to. Because the important thing is not what the star was, the important thing is what the star did. What the Star did was it led the Magi to Israel.



But not just Israel it led them to Jerusalem, it led them to the capital city. And the reason it led in the capital city was because they came with an expectation of what they would find. What seems to be the case in most scholars agree this is probably what happened, was in the ancient world there was a long standing tradition that associated certain constellations in the night sky with particular nations. And one of the ones that goes very far back thousands and thousands of years is that a lot of these astrologers associated the constellation Pisces the fish, with the nation of Israel. And sometimes the Leo the lion, was associated with the with the tribe of Judah particularly.

And so what most scholars believe is that whatever the star was it appeared connected to one of these constellations associated with Israel. And the other tradition in the ancient world was that when you saw a stellar phenomenon like that associated with a constellation that was connected to a nation, that meant that a new king had been born in that nation.

And so what the Magi are doing here is the kind of thing we see it all kinds of ancient records, they saw the star appear and something related to Israel and they went, "Oh, a new prince has been born." And so they came to welcome him. And that's really what they say right? So where is the one who's been born the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose." And so they've come, not only does or they come to Jerusalem, to the political center they've come to talk to the king. They've come to talk to Herod. And here's where things get a little messy. Because Herod the king of Israel at this time, didn't have any kids that had just been born. And so when King Herod heard this, verse three, he was disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him. It's an interesting statement. And King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

The fact that King Herod was disturbed is not all that interesting. We expect that right? If you're the king, and you know you don't have any kids that have been born and somebody just said, "Hey, we came to welcome the new prince." You're going to be a little worked up. What's going on here you're going to a little suspicious. You're going to be on edge. So we understand why Herod would be disturbed, but the interesting statement here is that all of Jerusalem was disturbed with him.

Remember these are the people of God. These are the Israelites. These the people who have been waiting for the Messiah for a very long time. There's been hundreds of years under the oppression of foreign armies, they've spent decades now under the leadership of this man Herod, that is not really a legitimate King. They've been waiting for God's child. They've been waiting for God's Messiah. They've been praying for God to move. They've been longing for God to show up and do something. And now all of the sudden they begin to get indications that God is doing it. That God is showing up, the messiah has been born, that things are about to change but how was their response?

They're disturbed right there with Herod. Why? The answer is ultimately...it's priorities. So the people in Jerusalem, they were more concerned about Herod's reaction than about God's provision. The sign that God was moving, yeah, that's exciting but what they were focused on was how was Herod gonna to take these news. They were more concerned about how Herod was going to handle this. And to be perfectly fair that's not surprising. They had good reason to be concerned about how Herod would handle this. Herod was not what we would call a nice guy. Herod was known officially as Herod the Great. Guess who gave Herod that title. Yeah Herod did. Herod wrote an official proclamation that henceforth all official documents would refer to him as Herod the Great.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine going home and telling your spouse and your kids, "From now on, I should be known as Craig the Great." What is wrong with this person right? That is an unbelievable quantity of insecurity isn't it? And here's the thing, insecurity leads to ruthlessness. And Herod was as ruthless as they came. We know from a stock of records that Herod...I kid you not, Herod executed three of his own of sons. Because he thought they might be plotting against him. This is the kind of man that Jerusalem is dealing with.

And so it's certainly understandable why it is that when they saw that Herod was upset they got a little worked up about that. But it's interesting that they seem to be more concerned about Herod's reaction than about what God was doing, and I think that says something very important about their priorities. So here's the thing, it's an important principle about priorities and it says,



our fears often reveal our priorities. What we're afraid of often helps us to understand what it is that is driving us, what it is that we value, what it is we think is more...but we have lots of things that we would say, "This is a priority for me.

This is important to me, this is what's driving...but are those really true? Is that really what's driving us? Is that really our priorities? One of the ways to get down to the bedrock of what really is our priorities is to ask, "What am I afraid of? What am I fearful of?" And I'm going to be really transparent with you, and be honest and say that one of the things that I've realized this week as I've wrestled through this that I'm afraid of is I'm afraid of criticism. I am. And I know that because whenever I get an email from somebody that I don't know very well the first thing I do is skim the whole thing to see if there's any negative stuff going on. It doesn't matter how many positive things get said I'm looking for that with "Yeah but where's the but?"

When I walk past their mail box and I see an envelope with my name on it but no return address. I get a little tightened up inside, and I assume there's going to be some criticism there. And I realize I'm afraid of criticism and here's what that tells me about my priority. I have a priority, a far too high a priority on pleasing people. That's what my fear tells me. It tells me that I have a priority on pleasing people and that can be a dangerous thing, because it could potentially keep me from preaching God's word boldly.

It could potentially keep me from saying what God has laid on my heart, because I'm afraid of how people are going to react to it, and so it's important for me to recognize you know, the fact is I don't like it but that is a priority for me, and then I can begin to invite the Holy Spirit into work on that issue. It's important that I know it and my fear ultimately reveals that priority. And I'm in process like all of us. I'm in process, there's areas where my priorities are not quite right. And in this case my fear has revealed that priority and that's a good thing. So I challenge you to spend some time this week asking yourself that question. What am I afraid of? And then ultimately what is that fear of reveal to me about what my true priorities are.

For Jerusalem, their priority wasn't having God move, their ultimate priority was just keeping Herod happy which is never going to happen. Now, verse four says, "When he, that is Herod, when he had called together all of the people's chief priests, and the teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "Well, in Bethlehem in Judea." They replied, "For this is what the prophet has written." But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah you are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel. And then Herod called the Magi secretly and he found out from them the exact time that the star had appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem and he said, "Go and search carefully for the child. And as soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him." Now, you don't even need to know the rest of the story to know that's a lie right. You don't need to know how it all played out. You don't need to know about the fact that he ultimately slaughtered all the children in the vicinity two years and younger to get at this messiah. You don't need to know that to read the sarcasm that's dripping from Matthew's account here to read the duplicity, the lie involved. Yeah, yeah. Go and find him so that I too may worship him. And everybody hears that and goes like, "Yeah, right. Come on."

But here's the thing, I think sometimes when we focus on his words and we think about how obvious it is that there are lies, we miss something really important that's happening here in Herod's statement. I want to make sure we recognize it because it's really, it's astounding. When Herod wanted to know about the birth of the Messiah where did he turn? He turned to the religious experts. He turned to the Scriptures. Which means, follow on this. That means that Herod believed that the Bible was the Word of God. He wanted to know what was happening so he had people search the Scriptures which means that he believed the Scriptures had the answer. Herod believed the Bible was the Word of God, which means that he also believed that the Messiah was the work of God.

So Herod believed God had given the prophecies, and Herod believed that God had brought those prophecies to him. He believed that God was behind this whole thing, and yet he also seemed to think that maybe he could stop it. That's an interesting realization isn't it? What does it take to be at a place where you know that God is at work, that what is happening in your life is



the result of what God has done and still think, yeah but I think I can stop this. I mean that's like an ant thinking you can stop a steamroller right. It's an ant in front of the steamroller going, "If I just get, you know, if I really brace myself well." And we look at it and we go, "That's insane. That's ridiculous. Why would you ever think that?" But here's what you've got to understand is that our priorities shapes our perceptions. Our priorities, they shape the way that we see the world. They shape the way that we perceive things. They shape our ability to understand what is right and wrong. What is possible and impossible. Our priorities ultimately color the world around us.

For Herod, his priority was holding onto his power. And holding onto his power ultimately shaped his perception the way he saw people around him. He began to think even though his own sons were plotting against him and historically speaking there's very little evidence of that. but that's what happened. His priority shaped his perceptions. He began to see threats where there were no threats. He began to look with...he began to look with suspicion where there was nothing to be suspicious of. He begin to assume fault for there was no faults. He became paranoid to the point that he had sees own sons executed. See it was shaping his perceptions and ultimately we see it here too. It made him delusional, he actually thought he could stop what God was doing. That's a delusional person but it started with his priorities. His priorities ultimately shaped his perceptions of what he thought was possible, and what was not possible.

Now, after they had heard the king, the Magi went on their way. And the star that they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. And when they saw the star, they were overjoyed. And I want to stop for just a second and I want to talk a little bit about that, word overjoyed. That's what the NIV says. Most translations are something like that, but it's a perfectly good translation because the actual phrase that Matthew uses is almost untranslatable. It's something like...and they rejoice with an exceedingly great joyfulness of joy. He piles a bunch of joy words together, and it's very clear that we're supposed to stop at that point and go, "Wow, that's really powerful. He's really saying that they were beside themselves with joy. You know, when you post a picture of the Magi and I don't know what your nativity scenes what they look like, but in my Magi and my nativity scenes are really very kind of somber kind of individuals. But we're supposed to picture them as a way Matthew they're like, they're beside themselves with joy. All the decorum is gone. If they are just like...they're losing it.

And it's such a powerful thing and it's very clear that Matthew wants us to kind of stop and ask, "What's going on? And I think what we're supposed to understand is that the Magi have been on more than a physical journey. They've been on a spiritual journey, they've been on a journey, they're reorienting their priorities. See me what happened was, they were out there doing their thing. They were doing the night sky, and serving, and then they saw the star associated in some way with Israel, and so they went to their king and they said, "Hey, it looks like...we think there's a sign that the new Prince's arrived in Israel when the king said, "Well, we should probably send something." Were they registered?" No. Okay, well, let's send the normal gifts, get some of that stuff. And why don't you guys go and be my emissary. Go play nice with Herod so they went. And they went to the capital city expecting to have this conversation with Herod, and then they found out how huh! He doesn't have any new kids. That's interesting.

And then they heard that Herod called in the religious scholars who read from a holy book and they must followed, that's interesting. Who is this God? What is this holy book? And they found that the Holy Book didn't just give generic vagues things like, someday there should be a king yaay! But no, it was incredibly specific even down to the town in which this King would be born, and this have been written hundreds of years and they began to go, "Hih! This is an interesting God," And so then they were told go and find this king." They went, "Yeah, we'll do that." And as they went the star began behaving differently.

I mean what Matthew suggests is the star began to move in a different way. And I don't know exactly what that means but Matthew seems to say that the star actually came to rest not only of at one Bethlehem, they were already going to Bethlehem. But somehow right over the house itself, somehow what they saw in the night sky indicated this is the house. And so by the time they got there you can imagine that their anticipation had been building, and building, and building and they were on more than a physical journey it had been a spiritual one. It had been a journey where their priorities had been reorienting as they began to understand who this God was and how he's involved in human history.



And so when they finally got there and they entered into this house, and you know, maybe the door opens and there's Mary and Joseph they were like, "We brought you some stuff." They were overjoyed why? Because here's the thing and you need to understand this is another principle about priorities, that what we rejoice in also reveals our priorities. In the same way that our fears reveal our priorities so to do our joys. What we rejoice in is a very powerful indicator of what we believe to be important, what really drives us. So that's an interesting question to ponder in this Christmas season. What makes me rejoice. What gives me joy, and what does that tell me about where my priorities are.

I had a call from my oldest daughter on Friday Clayton I went out shopping for stuff for the bathroom, and she called and she said, "Hey, can I share something with you guys?" And I could tell that she was on the edge of tears which I got be perfectly honest it's not that uncommon for Rachelle, and I was like stealing myself a look at what's going to be? And she began to share a couple years ago, she's part of the early college program at Parker, she had a professor who was a pretty radical feminist, and a self-professed atheist. And it was a really powerful experience for Rachelle to be in that environment being hit with that kind of worldview, and to be at home we got to process that with her. But something about this woman just really was laid upon her heart and so she had begun praying for that woman and Claudia and I were also praying for that woman, and then that woman left she moved away, she moved back East somewhere. And I'll be perfectly honest, once she was gone I forgot about praying for her, but Rachelle didn't.

And yesterday, or on Friday as Rachelle was reading through Facebook, she came across a post from this former professor. And in the post the professor essentially said that she had come to believe that God existed and to understand the God's nature was love. And she had come to understand that by reading a book about Jesus. And Rachelle was...she was on the edge of tears but they were joyful tears. She said, "I've been praying for this woman for years. And God has moved." Maybe she's not all the way there yet, but clearly something powerful has happened, and she's coming and Rachelle was just overwhelmed by it. She was rejoicing with exceedingly great joyfulness of joy. And I remember [inaudible 00:24:49]" Yeah, that's fantastic, and we talked about it for a bit and then I hung up. And I thought you know what? She's a senior, she's going off to college next year. That's always a scary thing for a dad right? And you wonder about you know, are they going to be okay, and what kind of decisions are they going to make and that sort of thing.

And I remember hanging up the phone and thinking, "She's going to be okay because her priorities are right." And I know her priorities are right because of what she was rejoicing in. The fact that that experience could drive her to praise and rejoicing says to me that she has a priority at least in that area that's absolutely in the right place. But it's not always that case for us though. Then as we rejoice about things that really aren't all that great, if we rejoice...I got a raise, yaaay! It means I get to buy this car. I get to do that vacation and that kind of thing. See we're rejoicing but it tells us something about where our priorities are and not necessarily in a healthy way. And so I think it's a powerful exercise not only to ask what did my fears reveal about my priorities but also what was my rejoicing reveal about my priorities?

For the Magi, what God had done, what God had brought them to was a cause for celebration. And that tells us a lot about who they are. And you might be asking yourself the question like, "Why all this focus on priorities? Because here's the thing. When things get messy, is our priorities able to determine the choices we make? And on coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and they worshiped him. And then they opened their treasures, and they presented him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

I want to make sure we understand the significance of that statement. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they return to the country by another route. Understand what's going on here. They've been sent by their king to make nice with Herod. They've been sent to build goodwill with the political powers in Israel. When they got there they found out that King Herod didn't have any more kids, so their very presence there was a little bit awkward they're trying to figure out, "How do we how we salvage this? How do we do what our king sent us to do, just to build this relationship?" And then Herod presented the most best opportunity. He said, "Go and find the child, and when you find him just come back and tell me about him. Tell me where he is so



that I can go worship him.”

Oh great. That's how we'll fix it. That's how we'll obey our king's command to make nice with you, to build bridges with you we'll just obey your command. And so they went and they found the child, and they were probably thinking, “Okay, now we're going to go back to Herod.” And then they had this dream. And apparently in this dream they understood that this God that they had been coming to understand in this process had a different plan for them. But the plan was messy. Do you see that? Because if they didn't go back to Herod not only would they be disobeying Herod and his command, but they would be acting contrary they'd be acting against the very thing that their king and sent them to this country to do.

How do you explain that when you get home? “Yeah we went, turns out Herod didn't have any kids.” “Well then what happened?” “Well he told us to go find the kid and we did.” “And then what?” “Well, he wanted to come back and see him.” “So you did right?” “No. No, we completely ignored him.” “Why did you...” “Well, we had a dream.” You understand the messiness of the...you understand the courage that it took to disobey Herod and ultimately put themselves in hot water with their king. You understand how messy that situation is right? And it's at that point that we have to ask this question, how did they do the right thing?

You know, Matthew doesn't tell us much about the process. He doesn't say that they debated it. He doesn't describe they wrestled with the ramifications of the pros and cons. He just tells us they did the right thing. Because that's what we're supposed to understand no matter how else it took place, at the end of the day they did the right thing in the midst of that incredibly messy situation they made the right choice. They came out of the other side and that message situation in a way that left a legacy that we remember some 2,000 years later. And the question that we're supposed to be asking I've believed with all my heart is, how did they do that? How did they make that decision in such a situation where they had so many pressures to go the other direction? And I think the answer that we're supposed to take away is this, that God-centered priorities will lead us through the messiest of situations.

Somewhere in this journey their priorities had been reoriented. Their priorities had come to depend upon this God that they were learning about and it was those God-centered priorities that allowed them to make the right choice when everything in the world was against the making that choice. God-centered priorities will lead us through the messiest of situations. We always face situations where there's pressure on us that pushes away from doing the thing that we know God wants us to do. How many of you have ever faced a situation where you knew what God wanted you to do, where you knew what was the right thing to do but there was an awful lot of pressure to do something else. How many of you ever faced a situation like that? Absolutely.

And so the question becomes, how do we get through those situations in a way that honors God? And the answer is that we go into them with priorities that honor God. God-centered priorities will lead us faithfully through the messiest of situations. Which means that what we really have to deal with here and in terms of what God is saying to us is just how do we do that? How do we develop God's-centered priorities? What journey to we need to go on that will bring us to the place of like the Magi having God set of priorities to take us into and out of those messy situations.

Let me suggest three things that I believe God's calling us to do during this Christmas season. Number one, is that we develop God's-centered priorities by discovering our current priorities. That's the first step. We discover our current priorities. And three things we've already talked about two ways to do that. Number one is we ask ourselves the question what do my fears reveal about my priorities? And I challenge you to wrestle with that question. I certainly have been doing it this week myself. What am I afraid of and what does that tell me about what's driving me about what my priorities are? Similarly, what do my joys tell me about my priorities? What is it that I find myself happy about and what does that tell me about what my priorities are?

What we're doing is we're zeroing in on the priorities that are often behind the scenes. They're often underneath the surface. But we need to know what they are before we can begin to decide whether or not we should embrace those, or we should look to replace them. When we discover our values that's the two things that we do. We can either embrace those priorities, or we can replace them. Embrace or replace, but you've gotta know what they are first. Asking what your joys are what your fears are is a



good place to start that, but sometimes that's not enough. Sometimes you have to do something that's really scary, that is you have to ask other people. Have you ever thought about asking your spouse, or your parents, or your kids? Hey, what do you think my priorities are?

Anybody excited to do that? Yeah, that's a little bit of a scary question and I know, there have been times in my marriage where I've had to ask Colletter, "Do you think you're a priority to me?" And of course what I want to hear is, "Of course." But sometimes the answer hasn't been that quick. Sometimes the answer has been, "Well, I know that I'm a priority to you, but you know..." My God, I hate the but. And sometimes in that conversation I realize you know what? What I want to be a priority you making my wife feel supported and loved, is not the way I'm actually acting. And I've had to ask that question to find out that the priority that I was actually being driven by was not the one that I wanted to be driven by.

I was driving home with my younger sister Renee yesterday, and we were talking about this, and we're about halfway home and she finally said, "So what do you think my priorities are?" And I glanced over and she was like...and I get that because it's not a safe question sort of a painful question, but it's an incredibly powerful question. And if you really want to uncover those priorities that are often under the surface behind the scenes, that can be an incredibly powerful way to begin to zero in on it. And the second thing is after we've discovered what our priorities are, then we have to evaluate them. That's the second stage. We evaluate our priorities. And we ask ourselves the tough questions. "Is this thing that's driving me something that should be driving me?" Is this moving me towards a legacy that I longed for, or is this moving me towards a legacy that I want to distance myself from?

We evaluate the priorities according to what God has to say, according to what God says should matter. I mean God said, "Seek first his kingdom and all this other stuff would be added to you. But we spend a lot of time...I struggle, I spend a lot of time going after all these things that Jesus said are secondary. "I'll take care of those." And I'm like, "Yeah, I know you will, but I probably need to take care of it first." Right? To evaluate the priorities that are driving us.

And then the third step is we have to develop our priorities. Whatever your priorities are they can be changed. They can be embraced, they can be replaced. It's often necessary that we know what they are before that deep soul work begins to happen, but we can develop those priorities. So a couple ways we do that, number one is we feed those priorities that are that are good. We feed the God's-centered priorities. And what I mean by feed them is we act according to them. When we realize, "Okay, this is what a God's-centered prioritiness would look like, we act according to that, even if we still feel a tremendous amount of pressure to act in another way. Even if we're still struggling to be driven by that party we can make an intentional decision. "I'm going to make decisions based on what I know my priorities should be no matter how much I'm still struggling in the midst of that."

And what happens in that process is that we're feeding. We're supplying water, the Spirit begins to pour the nutrients into that priority and it begins to take root as it becomes part of who we are. Contrary to that, we can also starve the other ones. When we recognize you know, I have a priority here that's not a God-centered priority. It's not what God would call me to have. It's not leading me to a legacy that I want to leave. We can choose to starve those priorities. We can say, you know what? I'm not going to be driven by that. I'm not going to make decisions on the basis of that. Even though I feel that impulse, I'm going to choose to do what honors God. I'm going to choose to do what is right even though I still feel the draw to that. And what happens as we begin to starve those other priorities, and their roots begin to wither. And they cease to be the driving forces in our lives.

Listen, we're all going to face messy situations. Christmas will probably be a messy situation for a lot of us. It often is, but here's the thing, messy situations have the unexpected blessing of forcing us to confront and clarify our priorities. Christmas can be a season of discovering and evaluating and developing the priorities that God longs to cultivate in us, so that we come out at the end of those messy situations in a way that we look back on and not only are we proud of but Jesus says, "Hold on. You've been good and you've been faithful."

Would you pray with me? Jesus we invite you to do work on our priorities. We invite you to use the the chaos, and the mess that



may come of Christmas or whatever circumstances of life we're finding ourselves in to reveal to us what our priorities are. To show us those things that are driving us. And Lord as you show us those things that truly are driving us whether it's your understanding of our fears, our joys, our involving other people, or simply by the revelation that comes from your holy spirit, as we understand what our priorities are, would you give us the wisdom to evaluate them honestly, and to make changes where changes are necessary. To starve those priorities that are not from you, and to feed those priorities that are from you so that what you do in us as you cultivate priorities that will lead us through the messiest of situations.

We invited you to do that work this Christmas. Thank you for making us a priority. Thank you for saving us as we celebrate at this Christmas season. We realize it was messy for you to come and do it, but we realize you were driven by the priority that you placed upon us, so we thank you for that. In Jesus' name, Amen.

