

THE JESUS PRIORITIES

How They Add Up

The Jesus Priorities, 8 Essential Habits, (printed in 2007), was written by Christopher Maricle, a Catholic layman who has been involved in church ministry since his high school days. He has served as a teacher and administrator in Catholic schools for over 20 years. The book is available through the Upper Room website (www.upperroom.org)

The preface of the book starts tells the journey the author took that lead him to do his research. (READ PREFACE)

Anthony De Mello, a Jesuit priest, once said, “This is what is ultimate in our human knowledge of God, to know we do not know.” God knows that we cannot understand the divine, and that is why God sent Jesus. Jesus Christ came to reveal to imperfect humans with limited understanding the nature of our perfect God. In John8:19, Jesus states “If you knew me, you would know my Father.” Jesus told us that we could find God through him; so developing an intimate understanding of Jesus through his life and teachings is central to that goal.

Maricle states that The Gospels are the best windows to the truth for Christians; they are an invaluable source of faith to us. The Gospels, while written by humans, were God-inspired and therefore contain God’s holy guidance. Everything the evangelists wrote may not be completely accurate, but it seems reasonable to believe that the Gospels were written because God wanted them written and that God’s inspiration and grace ensured that the most important ideas for us were mentioned numerous times so that we, imperfect as we are, would be sure to notice them.

This belief led Maricle to develop 2 assumptions as guides to his study:

Assumption 1: God earnestly desires us to find God. God is Love and Love seeks unity. As a gift, Jesus came to help us find the way to God, to lead the way. He encourages us to follow him, so it must be within our power to do so.

Assumption 2: Because Jesus wants us to find our way to God, he left directions or instructions that could be easily found. He left them in the memory of his life, in his teachings, and in his actions recorded in the Gospels, which are available to all of us. The Good News was preached to all: “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (Mark 4:9).

When we want our children/grandchildren to find Easter eggs on Easter Sunday, we know how to make sure the eggs are found. We make a lot of them, color them brightly, and place them where others can see them. Jesus did the same thing. He left his ministry, the examples of his life, the stories of his teachings and actions recorded for us in the Gospels, and he called attention to the most important things by saying or doing them many times.

Maricle based his study of the words and actions of Jesus on a single question:

“What did Jesus consistently say and do during his public ministry that would be instructive for us?”

He then organized the events of Jesus’ story to reveal recurring ideas. Themes emerged by categorizing Jesus’ words and actions by general concepts and then cross-referencing the four Gospels to determine how many times a particular idea or event occurred and how many times it was recorded in the Gospels. By focusing on these themes, the priorities emerged not from any single Gospel passage, but from a synthesis of Jesus’ actions and teachings.

- The focus is on what Jesus said and did, not the actions of the apostles or church doctrine
- Reflecting on patterns of behavior reveals the content of a person’s character and the values the person holds. The way we spend our time and resources is an expression of our values. Jesus told us this himself when he taught that “each tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6:44). Reflecting on how Jesus spent his time should be instructive. What did he say over and over again? What did he do repeatedly?
- The public ministry of Jesus was accessible to everyone. When Jesus had the greatest potential for touching as many hearts as possible, what was he doing? For his study, Maricle defined the public ministry of Jesus as beginning with his baptism by John the Baptist and ending with the commencement of the Last Supper.
- By instructive, the author looked for the behavior of Jesus that we can adopt; the essential habits we can incorporate into our daily life. From his analysis of those things Jesus consistently said and did, he determined the actions of Jesus that are accessible to us – those we can learn and apply practically.

For each priority, Maricle established the total number of events, that is the number of times Jesus said or did something, as well as calculated the number of times that event was recorded in the four Gospels. One challenge is that some events can be placed under two or more themes, but to avoid confusion, he assigned each event to one category.

So, what are the Eight Priorities? What do y'all think?

(HEAL, LOVE, PRAY, SPREAD THE WORD, BUILD UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN, SEEK GOD'S WILL, ACCEPT CHILDREN AS PRECIOUS, LIVE WITH HUMILITY)

The eight priorities can be divided into two primary categories:

Pray and Seek God's Will provide guidance for building our relationship with God. These priorities reveal the fundamental habits of thought and the elements of personal faith essential for life in God.

Heal, Love, Spread the Word, Build Up Treasure in Heaven, Accept Children as Precious, and Live with Humility describe our relationship with people. They provide guidance on essential habits for Christian life as it is lived in action, giving clear direction on how to treat all people, all neighbors.

Simple addition shows that the set of priorities about God (Pray and Seeks God's Will) includes 37 events recorded 48 times. In comparison, the number of events and recordings for the second set of priorities – about how to treat others – are 105 and 185, respectively. Jesus spent a lot more time teaching us how to treat each other.

What did Jesus consistently say and do during his public ministry that would be instructive to us? Look at the top three priorities. More than anything else, Jesus consistently acted out the importance of healing, love, and prayer. The top two focus on how we should treat other people. By considering the events and recordings, the first three priorities stand out, accounting for almost 60 percent of the total for all eight priorities.

This book is intended to be used as a guide to the Gospel of Jesus. It is meant to be used with the Bible, for looking up events and checking cross-references. The Appendix provides a complete listing of each Gospel event and where it occurs in each of the four Gospel narratives. (Only 2 events are recorded in each of the 4 Gospels – what are they?)

This book is not meant to be read and then set aside, but rather to help you to turn the priorities into essential habits for your life. The specific circumstances of our lives change, sometimes from year to year, sometimes from day to day. Amid these changes are two constants: (1) the fundamental challenges of life and (2) Jesus' priorities.

Acting differently is possible only when we think differently. Before we can act like Jesus, we have to think like Jesus. The priorities call us to see the world as Jesus sees it. When we begin to perceive our world as Jesus does, we will be motivated - even compelled – to act like Jesus. At the end of each chapter of the book, there is a section titled "From Jesus Priority to Essential Habit" which outlines four steps to help us begin thinking and acting differently.

- 1. Review a summary of Jesus' practices that demonstrate the essential habit**
- 2. Reflect on a Gospel passage expressing Jesus' priority**
- 3. Reflect on your own priorities with suggested questions**
- 4. Pray for God's help in living the Jesus priorities**

As imperfect humans, reading the Gospels once through and then applying them as best we can is simply not enough. Real devotion to the teachings of Jesus requires constant attention, action, and reflection. And that takes discipline, which is rooted in the word *disciple*. And we, like the first disciples, need a program of training. Going to weekly church services and engaging in Bible studies are very important parts of our involvement in our faith community, but we need to do what Jesus did with his apostles: act out and reflect upon God's love on a daily basis.

***The Jesus Priorities* provides a resource to do just that. By continuously reflecting on Jesus' priorities, we can bring all that Jesus said and did to bear on the questions and struggles of daily living. We can train ourselves to think differently about our world and we can begin to act differently - to develop the habits that flow from the Jesus Priorities – healing, loving, praying, spreading the word, building up treasure in heaven, seeking God's will, accepting children, and living with humility.**

THE JESUS PRIORITIES

Priority 1 - HEAL

- Stay deeply connected to compassion
- Say yes to strangers
- Do what is within your heart to do
- See with your heart

Priority 2 - LOVE

- Show mercy no matter what
- Extend forgiveness without limit
- Love others as your expression of love for God

Priority 3 - PRAY

- Pray alone
- Pray persistently
- Pray with others
- Pray simply

Priority 4 - SPREAD THE WORD

- Share the mission with others
- Invite everyone to God's banquet
- Challenge others and yourself to live the gospel

Priority 5 - BUILD UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN

- Detach yourself from possessions
- Maintain an abundance mentality
- Act justly in all things

Priority 6 - SEEK GOD'S WILL

- Rely on the example of Jesus
- Maintain a sense of urgency by seeking to be in a state of grace
- Focus daily on God's will
- See all tasks as acts of love
- See sacrifice as gain

Priority 7 - ACCEPT CHILDREN AS PRECIOUS

- Protect children
- Welcome children
- Seek to be like children

Priority 8 - LIVE WITH HUMILITY

- Rely on God's mercy - not your own merit
- Presume the lowest place
- Sacrifice your ego

ADDING UP THE JESUS PRIORITIES

Priority	Events	Recordings
Heal**	36	63
Love**	24	35
Pray*	23	32
Spread the Word**	18	36
Treasure in Heaven**	12	25
Seek God's Will*	14	16
Children as Precious**	6	14
Live with Humility**	9	12

* Provide guidance for building our relationship with God

** Describe our relationship with people