

Priorities



Week Thirteen

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Matthew 6:19-34

CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL VISION

Central vision is the middle circular part of vision, the area that one's attention is focused on. Without this vision, one cannot see what they are trying to focus on, while they see everything else. Individuals can see around the focal point, but their sight is fuzzy, and they cannot make out anything that is front of them.

Peripheral vision is the outside part, where you can see things coming at you from the side. Without this, one can have tunnel vision, in which there is a definite focal point but nothing else around it. Poor peripheral vision leads to accidents because of the limited perspective.

You can discern the difference by placing the pointer finger of each hand in front of your face with your arms straight out. Choose one finger and focus on it. While staring at the first finger, swing your other finger and arm slowly away from it. Measure the distance of your peripheral vision by ascertaining the line where the finger can no longer be seen by your peripheral vision.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached on trusting in the Father's providence. Several times He says not to worry (Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34), concluding with "Seek first the kingdom of God..." (Matt. 6:33). This lesson will look at priorities when understanding the will of God.

Many things in this world are needed and take up our central vision. Some peripheral concerns we also need to be aware of. While to many the difference between central and peripheral concerns is implicitly common sense, Jesus sets a new way of thinking which becomes crucial to find that sweet spot in the will of God.



inScribe

Write out Matthew 6:19–34 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Matthew 6:31–34. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Matthew 6:19–34. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What is in your life that has become central instead of the kingdom of God and His righteousness?



Read more at www.inverseible.org/will13-3

MAKING JESUS FIRST

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). Though this is the phrase that we are most familiar with, the verse is the conclusion of the passage, where Christ has preached on what people should be truly concerned about. In Matthew 6:25, He says not to worry about our lives. In verse 28, He says not to take thought of our clothing. In verses 31 and 34, He speaks of not worrying about food or about the future. These are things that the world frets over. In other words, they are central concerns on which economies, governments, societies, and even civilizations are based. The acquisition of goods, the security of peace, protection against the natural elements, and the guarantee of future existence are what drive people throughout history. These become central while the spiritual concerns become peripheral. In one sermon, Christ preaches of turning things upside down through an inVerse perspective!

Instead of “these things,” Jesus places the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness (another word for His character) as central. He teaches that “these things” cannot be the central aspect of life, because they can be stolen. Christ is making a value statement for His disciple followers. Though the Father knows we have need of them, if we focus on “these things,” they will be taken from us through rust, moths, and thieves. Another way of looking at this is that time will lessen their value (rust); if not time then other natural entities will destroy them (moths); and if not these entities, then human individuals and organizations may steal them (thieves).

Whether it is fame, beauty, wealth, strength, relationships, family, security, or anything else under the sun, Christ is saying that time, things, and thieves can ruin the value we place on them. They are still important in our lives, but Christ says they must be put into our peripheral vision, not left in central.

If we place “these things” as central, then multiple things will occur. First, we will expend unnecessary energy and resources to attain them, which Christ pastorally counsels us against. Second, once we do acquire these things, they will be vulnerable to loss. Third, they do not produce what the hopes of the heart expect them to.

If we place God first, then He Himself will add them to us. They will be secured in heaven (Matt. 6:20) where the rust, moths, and thieves cannot get them. And finally, placing God in our central vision deepens our relationship with Him, for as verse 32 says, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

MAKING JESUS LAST

Ellen White writes in *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (see this week's inSight) that those who make Jesus first, last, and best are the happiest people in the world. As the previous section talked about making Jesus first, the question remains, What does making Him last mean?

In a classic illustration, an individual has a bunch of large rocks, smaller stones, and sand to put into a jar. In trying to put everything into it, placing the finer sand and smaller stones first prevents the largest rocks from fitting in. The largest rocks should be placed first, to be followed by the little stones and then the sand to fill the gaps in between. The lesson is that the largest should be placed first. Since the largest value in our lives should be spiritual, these are the principles we should cultivate and encourage in the decisions of our lives.

If we can take an inVerse approach, however, though the rocks are the largest, the smallest sand is just as important. It fills in the empty space between the stones and rocks. Not only should Jesus be the largest to us but also the smallest (and therefore, last) component that brings everything together. It's not so much about putting everything in but rather filling all of the empty space with Him. Perhaps, after all that, we find there is even space for even finer things—liquids, and even gases. Shouldn't God be the last and the most plentiful entity we fill our lives with?

Analogies have their limitations, but the point remains that not only is making God first is important but also to look at all the decisions we've made by the end of the day, or in a project, a stage of life, or your whole life, thus far, and realize that God was in the biggest chunks as well as in all the little gaps in life as well. Not only should we ask the question, Was God the largest part of our lives, but also, was He in every part of our lives?

Beyond just setting the priority of spiritual things, seeking God first and last is making God an inseparable part of our minds, hearts, decisions, thoughts, and our entire lives. We often relegate spiritual things as a formality or attempt to assign numeric value to things in a list in trying to make God first. But beyond these human attempts, God is seeking to be at one with us, in every component of our time on earth, in order to prepare us for our time together with Him in heaven. He yearns to be our first and our last; our Alpha and our Omega; our beginning and our end.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Perhaps you have made God your first, but in what ways have we made Him our last in our decision making?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/will13-4



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Deuteronomy 6:5–9

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Matthew 22:36–40

Proverbs 3:5–12



What other verses/promises come to mind in seeking God first?

Review your memorized verse from Matthew 6:19–34.

The question still remains as to what are the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The Greek word for kingdom is *basileia*, which denotes the territory subject to the king's dominion. The English word kingdom is the shortened version of just that—the king's dominion. Are we to spend our lives in expanding the territorial property of God? Though there have been mistaken Christian interpretations of this verse, we are not called to expand the enterprise of the church through acquisition and procurement. After all, the psalmist says of God, "The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them" (Psalm 89:11).

Then what is implied with seeking the territory of heaven? God is not in need of land as much as He is in need of the hearts of humanity. "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Making God first, last, and best involves putting soul-winning motivations above personal ones in our decision making. When choosing elective classes for our degrees, we should have an evangelistic eye to see where we can expand the kingdom of God, rather than the expansion of something else. When choosing a house to live in, it is the mind of expanding God's kingdom into hearts that should motivate us rather than equity, mortgage rates, and resale value. The ultimate reason for raising our children should be for their salvation as well as the training of new soul-winners for the kingdom rather than just mere biological and sociological dynamics. Choosing an occupation should involve strategizing the most evangelistic potential rather than annual income and career building.

Not only does Christ mention the expansion of the kingdom of God, but He also equates with it the reproduction of His character, or His righteousness, in us. Whatever we decide to do, we should ask, will it develop Christ's character in us? Will it facilitate the production of the fruit of the Spirit in me? Will I be able to share my Lord and Savior's spirit with those around me?

Most Christians know exactly how they want to live their lives and want God to bless them to achieve that. But God's vision is much larger: He knows how He wants us to live and wants us to bless Him to achieve it.



Where is Jesus in the
midst of the prophecies of
Matthew 6:19–34?



Where is Jesus in your decision
making?

What is He saying to you through
these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently
or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to
seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/will13-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

→
After this week's study of the
chapter, what are personal
applications you are
convicted of in your life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/will13-7

AIM HIGH

“The fear of the Lord lies at the foundation of all true greatness. Integrity, unswerving integrity, is the principle that you need to carry with you into all the relations of life. Take your religion into your school-life, into your boarding-house, into all your pursuits. . . .As disciples of Christ, you are not debarred from engaging in temporal pursuits; but you should carry your religion with you. Whatever the business you may qualify yourself to engage in, never entertain the idea that you cannot make a success of it without sacrificing principle.

“Balanced by religious principle, you may climb to any height you please. . . .

“Do not for a moment suppose that religion will make you sad and gloomy and will block up the way to success. The religion of Christ does not obliterate or even weaken a single faculty. It in no way incapacitates you for the enjoyment of any real happiness; it is not designed to lessen your interest in life, or to make you indifferent to the claims of friends and society. It does not mantle the life in sack-cloth; it is not expressed in deep-drawn sighs and groans. No, no; those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world. Smiles and sunshine are not banished from their countenance. Religion does not make the receiver coarse and rough, untidy and uncourteous; on the contrary, it elevates and ennobles him, refines his taste, sanctifies his judgment, and fits him for the society of heavenly angels and for the home that Jesus has gone to prepare.

“Let us never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is a wellspring of joy. He does not delight in the misery of human beings, but loves to see them happy. Christians have many sources of happiness at their command, and they may tell with unerring accuracy what pleasures are lawful and right. They may enjoy such recreations as will not dissipate the mind or debase the soul, such as will not disappoint, and leave a sad after influence to destroy self-respect or bar the way to usefulness. If they can take Jesus with them, and maintain a prayerful spirit, they are perfectly safe.

“ . . . As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. No scientific works are so well adapted to develop the mind as a contemplation of the great and vital truths and practical lessons of the Bible. No other book has ever been printed which is so well calculated to give mental power. Men of the greatest intellects, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered; they cannot comprehend the Creator or His works. But set the mind to grasp and measure eternal truth, summon it to effort by delving for the jewels of truth in the rich mine of the word of God, and it will never become dwarfed and enfeebled, as when left to dwell upon commonplace subjects. . . .

“In the word of God we find subject for the deepest thought; its truths arouse to the loftiest aspiration. . . .

“Our youth have the precious Bible; and if all their plans and purposes are tested by the Holy Scriptures, they will be led into safe paths. . . . No other book can satisfy the questionings of the mind, and the cravings of the heart. By giving heed to the teachings of God's word, men may rise from the lowest depths of ignorance and degradation to become sons of God, associates of sinless angels.
(*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 82–86).



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



How does one discover what is central in one's life?

What is it that is central in your life?

How does one make their needs peripheral and God's kingdom central?

What are examples of modern rust? Modern moths? Modern thieves?

What are different ways of making God last?

How do we make God best in our decision making?

What are new revelations of God's will to you?

Are we the happiest people in the world? Why or why not?