



"You'll never come in second by putting God first."
—Brian Houston

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Put God First

In His letter to the church in Laodicea ([Revelation 3:14-22](#)), [Jesus Christ](#) rebukes the members there for failing to put their calling in its proper place in their lives and warns them of the consequences of their neglect. Verse 22 shows us that He gives this warning to the entire church to learn from. Our Savior provides the solution: [Repent](#) and make [God](#) and His way of life a priority.

Jesus also charges us in [Matthew 6:31-33](#) (*The Amplified Bible*):

Therefore do not worry *and* be anxious, saying, What are we going to have to eat? or, What are we going to have to drink? or, What are we going to have to wear? For the Gentiles (heathen) wish for *and* crave *and* diligently seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows well that you need them all. But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.

It is easy to be distracted by many things other than prayer, Bible study, and our relationship with the Father. He rarely beats us over the head to remind

us to study and pray. Our family, jobs, schoolwork, and a host of other things, on the other hand, always seem to demand our attention, and Jesus admits in verse 32, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." We do have to live in [this world](#). We have responsibilities to others to work diligently, but we do not have to let these kinds of demands get in the way of putting God first.

The word "first" in Matthew 6 is from the Greek word, *proton*, which *Strong's Dictionary* defines as "first in time or place," and this is where we need to make sure that we place God. Because it is a fairly new word—probably coined in the middle of the last century—"prioritize" is unlikely to be found in any translation of the Bible. However, it perfectly describes what God expects of us when He says that we must seek Him first in our lives.

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, *prioritize* means "to organize (things) so that the most important thing is done or dealt with first." The root word, "prior," suggests that we give something "precedence in right or rank" (Etymology.com). "First" also may imply "superior" and "better." This is how we must arrange our time with God, making sure that we give Him the best.

The late John Reid once spoke of when, as a younger man in San Francisco on a new job, he determined to put God first and to spend the opening part of the day in prayer with Him. He did just that and had one of the best days of his early career. In a 1997 Bible Study, "Studying the Bible," he related,

When we first came into God's church and were on our honeymoon of first [love](#), we would hear the question posed, "How much Bible study and prayer must I do to be in the [Kingdom of God](#)?" And if I recall Mr. Armstrong's answer correctly, he would respond, "At least half an hour of each, [every] day." What Mr. Armstrong meant was he knew that for us to maintain our connection with God and to bring forth fruit, we would have to have an intimate relationship with Him, and that could only be achieved through prayer and Bible study.

I appreciated the guideline of a half an hour a day. When there were schedules that wanted to interfere with that, we made [sure

that] the prayer and Bible study always come first, and blessings came because of it.

He cautioned us, though, to make sure that we avoid the trap of merely putting in the time and then expecting positive results. A warm and close relationship with our heavenly Father must go along with our study. At its base, however, this relationship requires our dedicated and devoted time spent in close contact with Him, and we do this through Bible study, prayer, meditation, fasting, and obedience to His instructions.

This life provides only one sure thing, and that is God. We must make sure that He comes before anything else! We are physical beings in a physical world, but as Jesus exhorts us in [Matthew 6:19-21](#):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

There are dangers and weaknesses in heaping up earthly treasures. Consider this story:

In 2011, 75-year-old Uri Rafaeli purchased a three-bedroom, 1,500 square foot home in Southfield, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, for \$60,000 as a retirement investment. Six months into 2012, he received notice that his 2011 taxes were underpaid by \$496.00. He made all of the subsequent tax payments on time, and in January 2013, he sought to settle the debt, but he made a mistake while calculating the interest owed and was short by \$8.41.

Because of that tax "delinquency," the property was sold at auction, along with 11,000 others across the state of Michigan. The property sold for \$24,500—\$35,000 below the purchase price and far under the then-current estimated value of almost \$125,000. Rafaeli saw none of the proceeds. A 1999 law, crafted to provide for the rehabilitation of abandoned properties, meant that Oakland County, Michigan, got it all.

The things of this world come and go (see [1 John 2:15-17](#)), but our God is eternal, and His Kingdom will last forever ([Psalm 45:6](#))—which is why we should ensure that our relationship with Him comes first in everything we do. We all have many things that need doing in our lives, but we must give God the very best of our time and efforts. [Genesis 4:4](#) recounts that Abel gave God an offering, "the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock" (*New Living Translation*). His dedication pleased the Lord, who accepted both Abel and his offering.

The issue is one of focus. Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant whose rise from humble beginnings to the wealthiest man in America is the stuff that dreams are made of, once said: "Put all your eggs in one basket and then watch that basket. Do not scatter your shot. The great successes in life are made by concentration."

When we focus on one thing, other objects on our periphery become blurred and relegated to, at best, second or third place. Our calling demands that we pay attention, prioritize, and put our focused and dedicated concentration on God and living His way of life. He has great plans for our future. He knows our needs and our dreams, and He will take care of them. Most of all, He will ensure our spiritual success—if we put Him first.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The First Commandment: Idolatry](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Idolatry is the most frequently committed sin, with five of the Ten Commandments dealing directly with covetousness and idolatry, emanating from an excessive concern with self. Our individual system of beliefs from where we regulate our lives and derive our ethical code is just that—our own unique system of ethics, morality, and worship that seems right to us. Each of us is technically the god of our own system of beliefs. God challenges us

to either defend our body of beliefs or drop them in favor of His. Since every system of law (secular and religious) is a system of ethics and morality, every system of law is in itself a religion with the object of adoration a "god," as was the case of Caesar and will be with the future Beast. Human government is a religious organization, the worship of the state, a worship of secularism, in which Christianity is becoming rapidly irrelevant. If we make a covenant with God, we must stay loyal, obeying God rather than man. Character is forged in making the choice between God and the world, creating a perpetual war within our minds. In the current secular progressive climate, God is disregarded, and His Laws have been watered down to situation ethics, with compromise and pragmatism determining moral decisions. If we revere God, we will extricate ourselves from the world's systems and follow Him only. Our goal and spiritual motivation should emanate from God's Laws, statutes, precepts, testimonies, and ways.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Recapture Your First Love!](#)

by John O. Reid

Just how do you rend your heart? John Reid describes how searching for instruction on rending the heart, he came across an answer: Recapture your first love!

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