

Matthew 6:31-34 -- Putting God First

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, & His righteousness; & all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

If you were granted a wish, any wish, **what wish would you make?** I think I can say with confidence that the **average American** would desire to have more money, a happy marriage, obedient, well-adjusted children, good health, the lightening of all of our troubles, the absence of pain, a long life, & endless happiness. Probably **even most church folks** would ask for the **same things**.

A more serious question is: "**Would my wishes reflect what God desires for my life?**" The truly important issue of life is to determine **what it is that God desires** for our lives. **What is on God's heart?** For **His desire** for my life should drive & shape my prayers & my desires. The truth of the matter is we should not be praying for what **we** want, as much we should be praying for God's will to be done in our lives.

In Matthew 6, Jesus said that **the things of this world**, our concerns for **what we want** in life, should **not** capture our hearts. Instead, what should captivate us, & serve as the focus of our prayers, **& finalize our priority list**, are the things of His kingdom. The heart of the passage is found in **Matt. 6:33** where Jesus says: "**But seek you first the Kingdom of God, & His righteousness; & all these things shall be added unto you.**" The RSV says: "Set your heart on His kingdom & His goodness, & all these things will come as a matter of course." **No statement is more fundamental to the whole Christian life than these words!** found here in Matthew 6:33. It strikes at the heart of our lists of things we desire most in life.

For a list of "**all these things**" of which Jesus refers to, look at the context of the words of Jesus in the proceeding verses (Matt 6:25ff). Jesus is talking about food & clothing & the necessities of life, & telling us not to **worry** after "these things," but rather seek first His Kingdom, & "all these things" will be added.

And what is this "**kingdom**" after which we are to be seeking? Roman 14:17 tells us "the kingdom of God is not meat & drink; but righteousness, & peace, & joy in the Holy Spirit." It is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of godliness & peace & joy in the Holy Spirit. **Put God first!** That phrase is a sermon in itself! There is no place for divided loyalty, or half-hearted commitment in God's plan. Let God be first in your life! **Put God first!**

My friends, **in order to seek first the kingdom, we must begin by seeking first the King!** Who is the King? **Jesus Christ is the King!!** If we are to seek first the kingdom of God, we must make sure our heart is completely surrendered to the King of kings, the Lord of lords! Seek Him with all your heart, soul, mind & strength, **& He will take care of the rest!**

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1, a busy merchant was chosen by Her Majesty to fulfill an important ambassadorship. Informed of this honor, he asked to be excused, saying that it would cause him great monetary loss, & severely interrupt the supervision of his industrial activities. To this the Queen replied: "**You look after my business abroad & I will look after yours at home.**" The gentleman accepted the appointment, & was gone for

several years. When he returned, he found that the Queen, true to her word, had indeed more than adequately taken care of his affairs, & that he was much wealthier than he would have been had he remained at home.

My friends, if we put the business of God first, the King will most certainly give us the true riches of life! God wants to be number one in your life! When He is not, things won't work out right for you. Instead of asking God to bless your agenda, ask Him to give you an agenda He can bless! So allow me to give you four basic rules to living a happy, successful, fulfilled & productive Christian life.

1. Give God the First Part of Your Day!

Some of us wake up & say: "Good morning, Lord!" Others of us wake up & say: "Good Lord, it's morning!" -- Which do you do?

Prayer should be something you do at the very beginning of your day; asking God's blessing on your day, & seeking His guidance. Don't give God the part of your day when you're worn out, can't think straight & can hardly keep your eyes open; give Him the best part of your day!! That's where your true priorities will be discovered. From getting dressed to setting your schedule, ask Him to help you make choices that glorify Him!

I know (oh, do I know!) we live in a world which makes many demands upon us, & upon our time. The sheer number of these demands may truly overwhelm us! We rush from the minute our feet hit the floor in the morning, till we drop, exhausted, into bed at night. The establishment of a time of prayer & devotion will **not** come easily. It will require perseverance, for you face the opposition of Satan himself, who is dead-set against your putting God **first** in your life.

But **daily prayer is so vital to the Christian life!** Prayer is not the manufacturing of well-turned phrases; it is simply talking to God, telling Him about everything that concerns you, **& doing so in your own words & language.** Prayer is expressing to God our sincere desires, & seeking His guidance for our day, & for our lives.

Since Jesus is not only our **Savior**, but also our **Guide**, it is indeed important that we should ask Him what our duties for the day shall be. Early everyday, pray! Read the Bible; establish a devotional time. Take time for prayer, Bible reading, meditating on His Holy word, & allowing Him to search your heart.

Have you ever noticed that the great saints of the Bible often met with God **at daybreak** to seek His leading? For example: Abraham got up very early to stand before the Lord (Gen. 19:27). Jacob woke up with the first light of the morning to worship God after having seen a vision of angels in the night (Gen. 28:18). Moses went early to meet the Lord at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:4). Joshua got an early start when he prepared to capture Jericho (6:12). Gideon made his way at dawn to examine the fleece he had placed on the ground to discern God's will (Jud. 6:38). And Job left his bed at an early hour to offer sacrifices to the Lord in behalf of his children (Job 1:5). And on & on it goes, throughout the whole of Scripture.

We are even told Jesus, "In the morning, long before day-light, got up & went out to a deserted place, & there He prayed" (Mark 1:35). If it was important for Jesus -- how much more so must it be for you & I! It is essential for us to ask God for His grace, His strength & power, to be able to know & to do His will for the day.

Let me ask you, what are you seeking first? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God by praying? **Or** are you seeking first your favorite TV program? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God by reading the Bible? **Or** are you seeking first the daily newspaper?

A noted young concert violinist was asked the secret of her success. Her reply was: "**Planned neglect.**" Then she explained, "Years ago I discovered that there were many things demanding my time. After washing breakfast dishes, I made my bed, straightened my room, dusted the furniture, & did a host of other chores. I then turned my attention to violin practice. That system, however, failed to accomplish the desired results. So I realized I had to reverse things. **I deliberately set aside everything else until my practice period ended.** That program of **planned neglect** accounts for my success!"

My friends, put priority on daily Bible study & prayer, even if you must set aside some secondary duties until later. Hear the words of Jesus: "Seek first the kingdom of God." It will help you all through the day. Ordinary events will become scared events because **He's** involved in them!

2. Give God the First Day of Your Week!

To the Jews, the last day of the week is considered the **Sabbath**. The Sabbath Day (7th Day) is clearly designated as a sign between the Jews & God. But as New Testament believers, we observe Sunday, the first day of the week, as the day on which to worship God. It was the first day of the week that Jesus was raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great cornerstone of our faith! The resurrection of Christ was God's great **stamp of approval** on Jesus, **that He was everything He had claimed He was!** So from that time forward, Christians have met on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ! This was the practice of the Disciples, & the Early Church, in honor of Christ's resurrection from the dead. To the Christian, the first day of the week is considered the Lord's Day.

If we put God first, His day (the Lord's Day) will be kept holy! The Lord's Day should be set aside to worship God; a day of rest; a day of spiritual reflection. The Lord's Day of the week should be a sacred & holy day! Too many people have added the letters "ida" into the word **holy**, & made it a **holiday**, instead of a **holy day**.

There are 168 hours in each week! Can you imagine that? We spend 56 hours sleeping (8 hours per night), if we are lucky. We spend 21 hours eating (counting 1 hour per meal). At a minimum, we spend 40 hours working each week. This totals to 117 hours out of the 168 hours. If out of one week I spend 117 hours on myself, should I not give God at least 10 hours? This includes morning & evening worship on Sunday & Sunday School, plus one hour daily for prayer & Bible reading. Let me ask you, What are you seeking first? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God by attending worship at church, **or** are you seeking first a leisurely weekend?

A Chinese Christian used the following parable to illustrate the idea of robbing God in regard to our time. He said: "It came to pass that a man went to market with a string of seven coins. Seeing a beggar asking for alms, he gave the poor man six of the coins, & kept one for himself. The beggar, however, instead of being thankful, followed the good man, & stole the seventh coin also." What an ungrateful wretch, you may exclaim! **Yes, but there are those to whom God has given six days, & who steal the seventh day also! Give God the First Day of Your Week!** As a Christian, you will find real spiritual growth in giving the Lord His day.

3. Give God the First Part of Your Income!

The prophet Malachi tells us to "bring all the tithes into the storehouse." "If you do," says the Lord Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it

in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!” (3:10 NLT). As a Christian, I am interested in having the blessing of God on my life! God is concerned about my financial needs, & He wants to pour out a blessing so great I will not have enough room to take it all in! God says: “Try it! Let me prove it to you!”

What is this **tithe**? Webster’s dictionary defines it clearly. It is “the giving of 1/10th part of one’s income for the support of the church.” Tithing is not something the church dreamt up! Tithing is God’s Biblical plan to finance the work of His church here on earth! It is God’s approved way of financing His church. It is clearly taught both in the Old Testament & the New Testament.

How **faithful** are you in the giving of your tithe? How cheerfully do you participate in the giving of your tithe & offering? God loves a cheerful giver! If we really put God first, tithing will be simple & easy & joyful!

Tithing is a test of your acknowledgment of the ownership of God over your whole life! Your life includes the stewardship of your money. Tithing is an indication that you have acknowledged that you are only a **trustee** of your property, & **not** the owner. **God is the owner! All that you have belongs to God!**

When people say: “I can’t afford to tithe” they are really saying, “I can’t afford to put God first!” **It is a confession of doubt!** If God is first, we will not hesitate to make Him Lord over our material possessions. A pastor, in praying before the offering, stated: “**Lord, after all is said & done, here is what we really think of You.**”

I never want to produce a **guilt trip** on people when I speak about tithing! In fact, bringing our tithe & offerings to the Lord should be a **joyful** part of our worship! **And God loves a cheerful giver!** In this way, we acknowledge God as the Giver of all we possess. In this way, we confess our **faith** in His continued faithfulness to us!

The Lord has promised that if we will bring our tithe, He will “open the windows of heaven & pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive” (Malachi 3:10). I do not know how God does it, but I have witnessed it over & over. When we give our tithe, the tenth of our income, somehow the 90% we have left over always goes further than the 100% did, if we had kept it to ourselves! **God’s math works differently than our math!**

He was a brand new Christian, & he heard a sermon on tithing. He wanted to do what was right; but he was hardly making ends meet as it was. But he determined he was going to put God to the test, & he gave his tithe on Sunday morning. Back then it came to \$20. The next Sunday he came to me with a glow on his face, & a smile on his lips, as he told me how that week an offer was given to him that saved him \$20 a week, the exact amount of his weekly tithe! He couldn’t believe it! I could! For I’ve seen God do it over & over! My friends, Give God the first dollar of every ten! If we put God first, tithing will be simple!

4. Give God First Place in Your Heart!

Put Him before pleasure; put Him before position; put Him before popularity; put Him before possessions! God wants our whole-hearted devotion! Far too many Christians have pushed God so far back in the operating procedures of life, that it’s almost as if He’s not there at all. We are not the first to be misled, misguided, & misinformed. Ever since sin walked onto the scene the human heart has been out of focus. We’ve been seeking after diamonds & gold, while dismissing the voice of God! We’ve been seeking after cheap, imitation designer clothing, while robes of righteousness are offered. We’ve been seeking after good health, while holiness is neglected. We’ve been seeking after palaces of bricks & mortar, while homes of grace & godliness are passed

by. We've been seeking for our pain to be alleviated, while we turn our backs on God's purposes for our lives.

The only way out of our predicament, the only way to discard our wish list of toys & trinkets, **is to allow Jesus to take His seat on the throne of our hearts**, & then continuously, earnestly, & passionately **seek God's will for our lives each & every day!** Oswald Chambers said it so well: "**Beware of anything that competes with loyalty to Jesus Christ!**"

My friends, seek the King! & His kingdom with all your heart! We tend to seek things, not God! We seek our comfort, not God. **Things** can never give us direction in life. **Things** can never comfort us in a lasting way. **Things** can never instill within us the wisdom we need to understand our predicaments & possibilities. **Things** are just **things**, but **God is God!** The highest desire that can possess us is a desire to be like Jesus! Our greatest need is to seek God with all of our hearts! **Give Him first place in your heart!** You will never be sorry if you do! For God will give you all you need from day to day, if you live for Him & make His kingdom your primary concern!

Conclusion: -- The reason so many people are dying spiritually today, is they fail to let God be first in their lives! Let God be first in **your** life! **Put God first!** Put spiritual things above material things! Give God the first part of your day! Give God the first day of your week! Give God the first part of your income! Give God first place in your heart! God wants to be number one in your life!

Your life here will last at best a few years, but the life here-after will last for eternity! What is your greatest desire for today? Is it to please God & seek His will, & lay up riches for eternity? Or is it to live for the things of this world, without much thought of eternity? My dear friend, believe God & give Him first place in your life! Obey Him, & seek to do His will. **God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded & surrendered to Him.**

*Give of your best to the Master; Give Him first place in your heart.
Give Him first place in your service; Consecrate every part.
Give, & to you will be given; God His beloved Son gave.
Gratefully seeking to serve Him, Give Him the best that you have.*

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September 28, 2014 -- Sunday Morning