

Is God **FIRST** in your life?

We must be *putting* God first. Here's *how*.



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All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

KEY WORDS: *Seek first, no other gods before me, constant contact; self-sacrifice, trusting God, praying and studying first thing.*

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Summary: This sermon covers the one aspect that puts our relationship with God on a solid foundation and in balance. It also will secure God's promise to take care of all our other urgent needs. Be sure to study it carefully.

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We're all super busy. In this busy life it's very easy to give our Almighty God the **scraps** of our time. The scraps, instead the **FIRST** of our time. And when that happens, we miss a lot of the guidance, blessings and presence of God in every moment of our lives. I'm giving this message today about how we **MUST** put God first – because I need it too. I really feel so many of us are **Laodicean** -- lukewarm, not zealous, very complacent and self-satisfied and leaving Jesus knocking on the door outside His own church (**Revelation 3:17-22**).

Here's a shortened version of a longer poem about feeling too busy to pray.

Too Busy to Pray

"I meant to kneel and pray today, But life was rushing by;

So many things demanded me— I let the moment fly.

The day grew hard, my strength grew small, My heart began to stray;

And then I learned the reason why— I was too busy to pray."

When we put God first, God straightens and smooths out our path.

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in YHVH with all your heart,

And lean not on your own understanding;

6 In ALL your ways acknowledge Him,

And He shall direct your paths"

Shirt button: Have you ever done this? I was putting on my shirt and started buttoning it, but my mind was on a bunch of things. When I got to the last button, my shirt was all crooked. Why? Because I didn't start right with the FIRST button! I started on the wrong first button hole.

By not starting right, my shirt ended up crooked. But if we get the FIRST button right, everything else falls into place. LIFE works much the same way. The FIRST thing must be done FIRST and done right or else all the rest is messed up. First things first. Especially spiritually.

So what is the correct start to our life each day, like the correct first button of our life? What or who do we put first? Have you prayed today? Yesterday?

Matthew 6:31-33

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek FIRST the kingdom of God AND His righteousness, and ALL these things shall be added to you."

Read from verse 25 on – Yeshua is telling us to quit spending so much time focusing on our life and what we LACK or NEED – and focus first on HIM.

DID you pray today? Yesterday? And the day before that? DO you do it every day? Did you study the Bible? Yeshua said we must live by every word of God. If not, we're not seeking God FIRST yet.

Isaiah 55:6-7

*"Seek YHVH while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.
7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And He will have mercy on him; And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon."*

When we PUT God first, He will direct our paths as we read in **Prov. 3:6**, smooth out the bumps that could be there. Life will go EASIER and smoother. **BUT, if God is not first, things begin to get out of order in our lives,** just as not starting on the correct button messed up putting on my shirt!

- priorities become confused. They become OUR priorities, and not God's.
- decisions become harder because we're not hearing God's guidance.
- life begins to feel misaligned. Of course it will be misaligned.

But when we put God first, everything else in life begins to find its proper place. That is why Jesus said to seek FIRST the kingdom of God and HIS righteousness. That should be our TIME FOCUS. FIRST. We should put our time more into learning about God and His righteousness than just about world news events and prophecy or technical details of this or that concept.

Putting God first is like **buttoning the right button first, the first button of life.** When He is first, the rest of life lines up the way it should.

When we put God first, ALL these things we worry about will be taken care of by Almighty God even if we just don't see the answers right away. **True faith remember is being confident even when the answers are not seen.** "Faith is being SURE of what we hope for, and being certain even of things we cannot see" (Heb 11:1 NIV).

PUTTING GOD first puts everything else in our life in their right perspective. Everything else comes second to God. Does that describe your life? ARE up seeking God first?

So how do we seek and put God FIRST every single day?

When you wake up, I recommend this: First thing, as you wake up, before you hop out of bed, thank God for another day of life. Ask him to COME into your heart and soul and LIVE in you through Jesus the Christ, by His Spirit in us. Ask him to gently convict us when we walk astray; to correct our thoughts when they wander into sin. Ask Him to make HIS thoughts be our thoughts.

Ask him to fill you with His love and grace. Start your day in praise and worship for him for a couple minutes even as you still lie there, BEFORE doing anything else. First means before anything else happens. Tell him how much you love Him and Christ, and appreciate Him saving a wretch even like you and me. Ask Him to help you live for His glory in all you do. Yes, we all fall short here – so it's even more important to ask this.

All that is going on while you are still in bed, in the first two minutes. That's what I suggest. Put God first. Literally. Our loving heavenly Father LOVES hearing from you. He loves hearing your voice addressing Him even if just for 2-3 minutes while we're still in bed.

I understand that most of us have to go to the bathroom right away or let the dog out. But then what? Just don't fall into Satan's lures and traps.

Do you pick up your dumb phone and check your text messages and emails first? Big mistake. That shows **wrong priorities** and immediately

distracts us and shows we're not putting God first. We're starting "on the wrong button" like I did with my shirt when we do that. ***DON'T start your day by picking your phone up and checking texts and emails or what the latest on Instagram or what TikTok has to offer. DON'T.***

Then get up early enough to speak to God in prayer first. LISTEN even as you pray – ASK God to speak to you. My prayers are NOT me always talking – but much of the time I say, "I want to hear what you want me to hear from you, Father. Please put your thoughts into my thoughts as I know my thoughts are not always your thoughts. Please speak. I'm listening. I need YOUR thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9 (another great verse to memorize)

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

And prior to those words, God tells us we must forsake our wicked ways first – and then perhaps we can hope for him to reveal His thoughts. See v. 6-7.

Make prayer a real two-way conversation – and not just a RITUAL we can check off a list! Prayer is not just memorized words or words other people wrote – unless it's from the Psalms perhaps. Prayer is *your* HEART being shared with God.

God clearly wants us near him. When God created Adam and Eve, he walked and talked with them. He watched them, heard them, listened to them, and they listened to him, at least in the beginning. God loves that. Our FATHER, like any father, loves to hear from his children and loves knowing he's close to them. But I think many of us have lost a lot of this. *To many, prayer has become a ritual or certain words and lines we say* – yet often without deep results.

If you ask God to speak to you – be sure you **make enough quiet times** in each day. I make a point to sit out in our lanai at night in the quiet while I ask God to speak to me and just meditate. NOISE on all the time kills that. Or I go for a quiet "walk and talk" time with God as I take a quiet walk, mostly listening to God. **You WILL start to hear God talking to you when you have more quiet time. Turn the TV off more.** You'll hear God more if you have more quiet time after prayer and studying his word. That's why I have a notepad and pen beside me when I pray. And I often stop and tell God I'm listening. Then just LISTEN.

John 10:27

“My sheep HEAR MY voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

IF you're putting God first, you *will* start to hear him speaking to you in your thoughts and urges of things to do.

Hear my sermons on Hearing God's voice.

So, Yeshua said to seek **FIRST** the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. First thing. Daily. **Are you doing that? Did you today? Did you yesterday? God has to be PUT into first place in our lives.**

If daily prayer first thing in the day is not a habit yet with you: do whatever it will take to ***make it a habit***. **Here's an idea: Set an alarm for 6:33 a.m.** to remind you of Matt 6:33! Put sticky post-it notes on your door or mirror –that says simply “PRAY.” This is to get the habit started.

You don't have to pray for half an hour or more, as I was taught 50 years ago. Even just a few minutes is good and better than skipping it entirely because you don't have a half hour. Sure, Jesus prayed all night before he selected the 12 (Luke 6). But some of Yeshua's prayers are quite short – just seconds long, as when he resurrected Lazarus.

Another note might say “Bible study.” Learn about God's righteousness more than you spend time on other topics or world news or whatever. You in Kenya and Tanzania, if you still don't have a Bible though I've bought many hundreds of them, it's time to get one. Save up for it as a pearl of great price. I know you're super poor, but having your own Bible is a top priority.

Even if you just read/study for 5 minutes at the **START** of every day, and so much more when you come home... fine. But start with seeking God first.

Some of you may feel you have no time in the morning for Bible study or even just Bible reading, but somehow you have time to endlessly scroll on Instagram or TikTok! How much time do I spend on Instagram and TikTok—ZERO minutes. I'M not on them. They're time wasters that will pull you away from God and fill your minds with temptations and distractions. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by **EVERY WORD** of God.” (Luke 4:4). The Bible is the living word of God; Jesus Christ speaking in print.

John 6:27

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

If you feel you have no time in the morning, what can you cut out?

Start by reorganizing *your evening hours*. If you have TV, cut out TV, Instagram, TikTok. Get to bed much earlier – so you can get up earlier. Change your life and do what you need to do so you CAN put God first.

When I START the day out right, I find my life is far more obedient and more righteous on those days than days when God is not first. I'll have far less temptations and far more victories in Christ.

GOD HAS TO BE PUT into first place in our lives. God will not just SLIDE into first place on His own somehow.

The first commandment is to have NO other gods before God. Whatever we put before God in our priorities and time, could be our god!

So POINT #1 – make a determined effort to PUT God first in prayer/study. Even when you first wake up and are lying there in bed.

2. OK, you've STARTED WITH GOD FIRST – now point 2: KEEP God first THROUGHOUT the entire day. It's not just first in the morning, but all day.

Keeping GOD FIRST means inviting God to lead you before you make any decisions in your life. **It means praying about decisions BEFORE we sign the contract** before we take our steps. It means waiting for the peace that God gives us when he's guiding us. If there's still mental turmoil about any decision, you probably are not yet perfectly in God's will yet.

Even Jesus prayed for guidance before decisions. Before choosing the twelve, He prayed all night (Luke 6:12-16). He sought His Father's guidance constantly. That's our example. YOU and I should pray for guidance frequently too, throughout each day. Pray for protection, spiritual help, good health for others and yourself. Do all this throughout the day for short but frequent prayers.

Jesus/Yeshua taught us to “**pray ALWAYS that you may be counted worthy to escape all those things coming**” (Luke 21:36). ALWAYS. How is “always” done?

We pray always by practicing the “constant contact” idea that I've written on AND am promoting. Throughout the day each day, especially when you're faced with decisions, immediately pray – even if just in your quiet

thoughts. Ask for His guidance and wisdom to show you his will – all through the entire day. Do that over and over.

Keeping God first *throughout* the day helps us **constantly seek God's will**. Be frequently having many short prayers – asking for God to talk to you, show you what He wants you to do. “What would Jesus do in this instance?” – is a question we often use if God is being KEPT in first place throughout the day. And if you don't know the answer, pause and ask Him in prayer, in your thoughts, to guide you.

When I'm stuck on a decision that is using up all my time pondering all the options, I stop and pray about it. I should have started long before. And almost always the very clear answer comes! I never prepare a sermon or blog without asking for help frequently before starting and all through the preparation.

(Story about Carole trying to decide what color to paint our house... Carole got up at 2 a.m. and prayed about it, took out the samples book – and it *suddenly* became clear when she gave it to God to tell her and help her.)

So this second point is to KEEP GOD IN FIRST PLACE *all through* the day.

So point 1 – PUT God first in your time and your finances and your life.
Point 2 – Continue seeking God throughout the entire day in all decisions seek his guidance, not just as a first thing in the day practice.

3. If SEEKING GOD FIRST and throughout the day establishes our foundation, then TRUSTING HIM is how we build on it.

It's like building our house upon the ROCK, Jesus said (Matt 7:24-27). And HE is that rock (1 Cor. 10:4).

Trusting is easy when we LIKE what we see God doing! But faith and TRUSTING when there's a STORM getting stronger – is where our faith is tested. Or if the healing isn't happening. Our faith MUST be tested – to be more precious than gold that perishes (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Trusting God is understanding we're seeking HIS WILL, HOW HE plans to do things – even when he doesn't reveal HOW a lot of times

Truly, always trusting God, is not easy. It means surrendering *control* of the circumstances. We love to stay in control. We like to see the whole plan God has for us before we surrender to his way. Surrendering control to God always costs – it costs *our* CONTROL,

our time, our plans. Our world teaches us to figure things out ourselves. **“If it’s to be, it’s up to me”** –we were taught.

NO – we trust God and what he’s doing. As Jesus did in Gethsemane as he sweated blood as he prayed. God doesn’t always give explanations, but if you know him, you trust him. God may not show us his plans, but he gives us *himself*.

Trusting is not based on what we see happening, but based on our intimate faith in our Savior and an intimate relationship with Him.

A trust like that *should be steady no matter what is actually happening.*

God quite often waits “til the last minute” to intervene – but we wait and trust. Even if the healing or the great answers we hope for never happen.

God’s word says when it comes to our lives, we often have to just trust God, and let go. (**Story joke – man** who was climbing up a cliff and slipped and fell. Grabbed on to a root of a bush as he fell... but then it started to give way. Prayed, “GOD, help me. What should I do?” And God said “Let go”.... He looked up and said, “Anyone else up there?”).

We can’t demand God follows OUR plan or OUR will. **We can’t say “thy will be done” and still insist on the answers we want.** Most of the time we give God our list of things we want him to do. That’s backwards. We even ask people to pray for things WE want.

When we put God first and trust him – *we’re realizing we have to quit trying to figure everything out ourselves. Our life story is a story only GOD can write.*

God doesn’t want us to fit Him into OUR plans – but to START with him and then revolve our plans around him FIRST. FIRST when we wake up and throughout the day.

There may be fears we have that distract us. **Think of Daniel.** The edict came out that no one was to pray to any God anymore for the next 30 days or they would be thrown into the lions’ den. **What would you have done? What did Daniel do?** *He immediately prayed about it.* We must obey God rather than men, as Peter said in **Acts 5:29**. So he immediately prayed.

Daniel 6:6-10

So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted

together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. **And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days."**

And what happened? God tamed the lions. He shut their mouths. That's what can happen when we seek God first. He often fights our battles for us. I say "Often" because clearly God has also often tested our faith and trust by NOT giving us the answers we hope for, or when we hope for them. So, many of you will worry instead, and I have worried thousands of times too, instead of seeking God first. But let's all change that together.

When we TRUST – we don't have to understand how everything will work out. We just need to understand who it is we are walking with.

Trust turns worry into worship, fear into faith, chaos into calm. Not because the circumstances have changed, but WE changed.

So when presenting needs to God and asking for his direction and guidance – we say from our heart, "God I trust YOU more than I trust myself. Lead me, guide me."

4. A GOOD SIGN IF GOD IS FIRST IN OUR LIFE – IS HOW MUCH are we willing to SACRIFICE? We are ALL called to sacrifice.

Yeshua said our hearts are set on whatever we treasure (Matt 6:19-21). Paul says we're called to BE a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1)

It's tough to get people who have money to sacrifice some of it for our ultra-needy brethren in East Africa whose poverty is beyond comprehension for most westerners. We help provide some of their needs, helping them have their own Bible in their own language, a place to meet in instead of just under a mango tree in the hot sun or pouring rain, have chairs to sit on, clean drinking water to drink from the water filters we're helping provide – *due to some of you willing to sacrifice. Thank you, in Jesus' name, thank you. Those of you sacrificing for them -- you've literally saved some*

lives who would have otherwise died from contaminated water or by having no funds for medical help. We had a 4 yr old boy *die* from Malaria because they didn't have the funds to hospitalize him. I sure appreciate *those of you who help. And remember you're doing all that for Jesus, when you help the ultra- needy and very poor "least of these his brethren" as Matt 25 says.*

Whatever you're reluctant to give up when God calls you, is likely what is sitting on the throne of your heart.

Putting God first demands your willingness to sacrifice. **True worship that puts God first costs something.** Abraham was asked to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. It made no sense – but Abraham proved God was #1 by his immediate obedience to that very point, until God stopped him.

GOD sacrificed his only son. Not almost – but totally. Yeshua not only put Father's will first, but he lived it, he breathed it, he died for it – and for us.

Galatians 2:20-21

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and GAVE HIMSELF for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

We're told to be willing to crucify ourselves. **Luke 9:23** says "if anyone wishes to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Putting God first will stretch our faith. We have to be willing to follow God and keep him **FIRST** even when it costs us everything, as Daniel and his three friends all showed.

We may not have to sacrifice our life just yet – but we may perhaps have to **sometimes sacrifice something else, like an awesome JOB** that requires us to work on the sabbath. We may have to be willing to have family reject us because of what we believe.

What are we hanging on to that God wants us to walk away from? Sometimes it's the comfortable **SINS** that have become habits in our life. If they're wrong, and not part of the Kingdom of God, then we have to sacrifice them, give them up though we enjoyed some pleasures of sin for a moment (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Sacrifice says to God, "You're worth more than anything I have to give."

SO I'll end with that. Let's put God ABSOLUTELY FIRST.

1 – SEEK GOD FIRST in each day. PUT HIM IN FIRST PLACE in your life, your time, what you do first thing every day, in your finances, in your priorities. He comes ahead of Instagram and TikTok, ahead of anything else.

2 – KEEP GOD first throughout the day. Ask for his guidance quietly throughout the day before decisions. Ask His blessing frequently on meetings and chores you have to do. Be very aware of Him all day long.

3 – TRUST GOD even when we can't see what he's doing yet. If you've committed your life to him, He'll work with you. He'll talk to you and guide you. But even if he lets us die or doesn't answer the way we want, we still stay with him because we trust HIM, not just the good answers we want.

4 – BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE FOR GOD and what He shows you.

Practicing these four points will change your life.

Closing prayer.