
What the God First Mantra Have Taught Me

When I was in middle school, I played football. (Yes, at one time, I was in shape.) I loved football. It was my first love. And I remember it was that time that I started to have a relationship with God, and I remember hearing about this saying that certain people had. It was a mantra that stuck with for awhile. It was hard to ignore because it hit the major points in my life at the time. My youth pastor would say it. Coaches would say it. The mantra would say, "God first. Family Second. School Third. And then football." It was said it all the time. I remember seeing pictures that said the same thing without the football. It was clear. We were to put God first. But what did it mean we were supposed to put God first?

As a middle school student, it was easy for me to put school third. That made a lot of sense. As a matter of fact, I would often do other things besides homework. It was easy to put school more like 7th or 8th on my priority list. If I were to be completely honest, video games were more of my top priority. That's right. I was playing a lot of Halo and Call of Duty.

But in high school, I didn't play football. But the mantra stuck would still haunt me from time to time. God first. How does that look? I didn't grow up in a spiritual home so I had no idea what it meant to put God first. In high school, my top priority would have been my friends. Hanging with everyone was my top priority.

Now as a mature believer in the faith, I would like to say that God is a top priority for me. If I made my list, I could say that He would up there with Becky and then so on. That sounds good. If you ask me, I would say 'God first' is the only way to live.

But this morning, I have a question for us right now: am I really making God first in my life? I don't know where you are in your life. There's a different stages of life today. But I think this morning, we have a message that's simple, but I believe will make an impact with some of you, if not most.

The Bible tells us in Deuteronomy 6:5 that we are to "love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our strength" (NIV). Think about how impossible that sounds. That is a high standard set for us. None of us do well in following this command, do we? There may be times when we feel incredibly close to God, but we will never succeed in completely following this command at every moment. Our emotions and our own desires will always come into play. So how do we do put God first?

I remember one time during youth night one of my students, who she is quiet and awkward teen, was answering a question. I asked one of those obvious Sunday School question and she threw her head back and say in a very annoyed voice.... Ugh Jesus.

This morning the answer to how do we put God first is Jesus. It's always going to be Jesus. I was told early on during my time as pastor that if I am going to preach that my message is about Jesus. And this morning is nothing different. We are at church, so of course that is the answer. But wait, let me break it down.

The answer: Jesus. I bet you didn't see that coming, did you? We are at church, so of course that is the answer. But wait, let me break it down.

Jesus was always about putting God first in His life. He always asked what God the Father wanted. He always prayed about where to serve. He loved God with all of His being. So, our job really is this: we need to become more like Jesus.

Knowing that Jesus was perfect in regard to putting God first, we should look at Jesus' life and try to imitate Him. We should follow His example. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. 1 John 2:6 says that we should "walk just as He walked" (NIV). We should make our lives look more like Him every day. Jesus submitted to the will of His Heavenly Father. He served people. He prayed. He read and memorized Scripture. He met the needs of people. Here is something cool about Jesus: He never went after worldly ambition. Jesus could have made life all about Himself.

As a matter of fact, the devil tried to tempt Him in the desert to offer Him some worldly powers; Jesus refused. Why? Because Jesus was all about giving His Father in heaven all the credit and all the glory. His life was all about submitting to His Father. He really did put God first.

If we are to follow Jesus, there are some ways that we can follow Him and learn from Him on how to put God first. This isn't an entire list but I wanted us to look at a few major things Jesus did that we need to imitate.

1. Jesus met with God - a lot! Jesus served people.
2. Jesus used His influence to point people to salvation.

Let's look at each of these briefly.

Jesus met with God. There are several verses that tell us that Jesus met with His Father in prayer.

- Mark 1:35 tells us that Jesus woke up very early in the morning to spend time with God. (NIV)
- Luke 6:12 tells us that Jesus prayed all night at times. (NIV)
- Hebrews 5:7 tells us that Jesus offered up prayers while He was in the flesh. (NIV)

One of the best things we can do to put God first is to spend time with God. Take some time in the day to read the Bible. Pray in the shower. Take some time to be quiet. Connect with God during your day. Make time for God.

One of the things that I encourage my students when it comes to digging into God's Word is that you begin to have a healthy understanding of what the Bible is. You have to truly believe the words that were written in here thousands of years ago. Another thing I tell students is that it has to be small baby steps. There's a lot of topics that cover a wide range of things, so take it one day at a time.

You want a secret to reading the whole book of the Bible? The same way you eat an elephant right? One bite at a time. One verse at a time.

And the last thing I suggest when it comes to connecting with God and spending time with God is to ask questions. When you are learning about someone you ask a ton of questions.

If you are not sure where to start reading your Bible, let me encourage you to start with the book of John or the book of Matthew. Here you will learn all about the life of Jesus and this will give you a great understanding of His life.

Jesus Served People

If you open a Bible to read the gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, you will see that Jesus' life was all about serving people. He healed people. He fed people. He brought the dead back to life. He taught. He forgave. He spent every day searching and looking to serve people. Life was not about Him.

Mark 10:45 says, "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (NIV).

Jesus served. The One who had ultimate power, fame, ability and talent served. He had it all, and yet He knew His purpose in life was to serve. He didn't live selfishly. He lived His life for others. Jesus was a servant.

Sometimes, I don't like this. To be honest, I don't want to serve others. I want people to serve me every now and then. That's why we go to a restaurant. Our food is made by someone else and it is brought to us and we eat and someone else cleans up after us. Doesn't that sound so much better? Having people serve you day and night while you do nothing sounds awesome. Wait. Some students in here already have this set up with your parents. Some of you have this set up at home right now. It sounds good for a while, but many people who live this way miss the point of life. We are called to serve and help and love one another. When you serve others, that is when life is meaningful. There is something inside each one of us that calls us to help people. God put this desire in each of us when we accepted Jesus.

Last Saturday, Thrive Church had the opportunity to serve with an organization called City Lights. It's an organization that host dinners for low-income and homeless people and families. Their big event they do is a dinner under the Maybelle and Brady bridge. Every Thursday night, they serve food, but they also give clothes, essential items, and books. They offer prayer and foot washing. They have stuff for the kids.

It's an incredible night that I have gotten to be a part of a few times. But once a month, they host a smaller dinner at their main location. It's a cookout for the families around the neighborhood. They offer the same thing with essential items and books and prayer/foot washing. And for this past Saturday, Thrive added their own thing. We brought our cotton candy machine and I had the youth paint faces because I have some talented students who can draw. That night, I was overwhelmed with how God loves. Because while I was there serving, I was reminded that God loves me and He's given me so much that I could make a huge list of the blessings. I can confidently say that He loves me and my life is proof.

But that night I was reminded that those who walked through the line also is loved by God the same way I am. They could make a huge list of the blessings that God has given them. And

they can confidently say that God loves them and their life is proof. Because that's how big our God is. There was this one child that said something as he waiting in line to get his face painted while he was holding his cotton candy. He said that he's never had cotton candy before and he's never had his face painted. And that's what Jesus showed us.

We didn't pull out my Bible and preach. We simply gave them cotton candy and painted their beautiful faces.

If we want to put God first in our lives, we need to serve others.

Jesus Used His Influence to Point People to Salvation.

Jesus used His influence to tell others about the way to heaven. He used His unique position and His unique gifts to communicate this.

One of the most amazing ways that I can sum up what Jesus did with his ministry is this. In Luke 19:19, Jesus said that "the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (NIV). Jesus was all about making the way to heaven known and proclaimed.

If we want to follow after Jesus and make God first in our lives, we must tell others the good news. And this good news is that Jesus saved us from sin and death.

This church has to be willing to use your talents, gifts, influence, and personality to tell the people in your life about the good news. I had a roommate in college that said that he didn't go to church all year long because no one invited him, so he didn't know where to go. That hit me dip. How many people out there are not attending church and not believing in Christ because they have not had that conversation. That's suppose to be convicting. I don't try to do this because I always want my messages to be about hope and love, but at the end of the day when we keep the message of God's love to ourselves and our building, we are not sharing that hope and love that's been given to us.

It's scary to tell someone about Jesus, right?. It is, and it can be. I tell my students all the time it takes is some boldness, but just ask them if they go to church anywhere. Ask them if they believe in God. Invite them to church. It's simple things like telling people that you work with that "God made beautiful weather today." when have that awkward, "weather conversation" with customers like I do each and other day at the bank I work at.

Or responding that "I am blessed today." when they ask you how you are doing. As you go about your day, just make sure and give God all glory. Look for opportunities to begin a conversation about Jesus. Here's the cool part. As you spend time with God in prayer and Bible reading, and as you serve people, telling people about Jesus becomes so much easier. Some of you understand that. And let me just say that I look up to that. When I hear someone respond with, I am blessed. Or Have a blessed day. It hits me. Because that's how I am suppose to respond too. You are telling people that Jesus is real in your life.

If we want to put God first, we tell others about Jesus.

Our mantra needs to be "Live like Jesus." Say it with me: Live like Jesus!

The Gospel

Let me stop for a moment and say this. You can't become like Jesus in and of yourself. The good news is that Jesus made the impossible possible. He has exchanged our sinfulness for His righteousness when He died on the cross, in order to make us new creations. And three days later, He rose from the dead, proving His power to make the impossible possible. 2 Corinthians 5 says that those who ask Jesus into their lives are new creations. Now we are able to love as He loves. If you have a relationship with Jesus and have made him a part of your life, you are now in Him. So now you have hope. You have hope not only in an eternity in heaven but you have hope that you can put God first and live your life like Jesus. If you don't know Jesus and you aren't sure about your relationship with Him, I would love to talk to you after the service today.

The only way to live life 'God first' is to accept Jesus. He will give you the strength to live life God's way. Because we are all sinners (Romans 6:23), it is impossible for us to become like Jesus and put God first on our own. But here is some good news. You can become like Jesus when you have Him living within you. The Holy Spirit enables you to live like Jesus.

So I wear this bracelet. I got this bracelet when I was at International Youth Convention a few years ago. It's simple band with three words on it. It's my declaration. In today's world, where it's so easy to tell others our opinion on Facebook and we can talk about so many different things. Gun control, our president, or whatever the next rant is going to be about. We sometime don't realize that our words mean so much. And this band has reminded me that these words mean so much. It says, "I Am Second".

I am telling myself and those around me that my life does not come first. It's God above all. I am not first. It's not matter of being down on myself either. It's putting Him first. It's message about humility. I am coming to God saying that my own interests and desires are second to His. It's telling people that their interest and desires are first to my own. During Jesus' ministry, He was asked what was the greatest commandment. And he replied that all the Law and Prophets were based off two commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul, and your mind, and then he followed up with love your neighbor as yourself. God and others before yourself. He was telling us to become second to Him and second to those around us. It's not an easy message. It's a message that we sometimes can twist and make it work for us. But this bracelet is not a catchy and stylist thing I wear.

In order to put God first, we need to imitate Jesus. Now, you will never do this 100% of the time. We will go through seasons and we will still mess up. But as believers, we need to strive for living like Jesus. Each day, we must take a look at our life and pursue Christ with all that we have. We must learn to submit to God each and every day. We need to remember that all of our days should be about spending time with God, serving others, and telling others the Good News. And be reminded that we are second.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, for us. Thank you for sending the ultimate sacrifice so that we may have eternal life. Thank you for the example given to us by Jesus. May we live our life like Him. May we strive every day to make You first in our life. We need you,

Lord! Give us the strength to follow your ways. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

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