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GOD FIRST

2021

TITHE AND OFFERINGS
READINGS DEVOTIONAL



GOD FIRST
ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

2021 TITHE AND OFFERINGS DEVOTIONAL GOD FIRST

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GOD FIRST

2021 TITHE AND OFFERINGS READINGS DEVOTIONAL



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FOREWORD

A brand new year is starting as a gift from God, and who knows what its outcome will be? Instead of being just a mix of chance and choices, this outcome may be significantly affected by adopting the right principles in life. And one of the most important ones is the God First principle.

It is with this concept in mind that we will follow Sam Neves in a discovery journey in 2021, finding out what we can learn from past and current characters that will help us to put God First. Besides his current position as the General Conference Communication Department Associate Director, Sam, an Adventist pastor, also has a great passion for Stewardship, understanding its crucial concepts from the Great Controversy perspective (see his bio on page 77).

And I believe that it is not by chance that you are beginning to read these Offertory Devotionals. Maybe the Lord is planning to bless you by leading you to apply the God First principle to every one of the 365 days of this year. But if you are a church leader, you are also invited to extend this blessing to your entire congregation!

By regularly presenting these 52 devotionals, in text or the video, followed by a short appeal and dedication prayer, all before the offering collection, you are able to partner with God in the sacred task of helping many to put God First, changing lives for eternity!

Special gratitude goes to Christina Hawkins of the South Pacific Division and Nathan Brown of the Signs Publishing Association whose invaluable editing made these devotionals a possibility.

I pray that the Lord may use this resource to lead not only you but also many of the fellow members in your congregation to put God First in 2021 and for the rest of their lives! To put God First is a choice with a sure outcome. And you may choose it now!

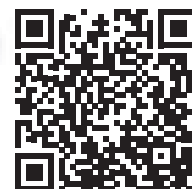
Marcos Faiock Bomfim
GC Stewardship Ministries Director

TITHES AND OFFERING VIDEOS

A SIMPLE GUIDE

You may play or download the two-minute videos (one for each of the 52 Sabbaths) by using the QR code below. The following are instructions on how to use them:

- The videos are to be presented in the church before the offering collection.
- They do not include the appeal or the final prayer, which should be supplied by the person scheduled to promote the offerings.
- The videos may (and should) also be shared through social media or during congresses, youth programs, camp meetings, church boards, Stewardship Weeks of Prayer, etc.
- The videos were recorded in English, but each division or union is permitted to translate them into their various languages or customise them with regional accents.
- The entire video with original soundtrack—no voiceover/no letterings—will also be available, upon request, to divisions and unions at no cost.
- Local church pastors and Stewardship Ministries directors must be informed about the videos and how to download them and share them in their churches, especially before the offering collection.
- You may watch the videos using this link: <https://stewardship.adventist.org/devotional-videos>





“But more than anything else,
put God’s work first and do
what he wants. Then the other
things will be yours as well.”

MATTHEW 6:33
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION



“We love Him because
He first loved us.”

1 JOHN 4:19
NEW KING JAMES VERSION





Download this brochure: What is Promise? Know the principles of purpose, proportionality, and priority. <https://stewardship.adventist.org/promise-offerings>

BEFORE READING THIS BOOK, YOU NEED TO KNOW:

WHAT IS PROMISE?

- It is a name used for the **regular** and **systematic** offering (it is different from the freewill offering), in which,
 - the regularity of giving is determined by the regularity of receiving (the income).
 - the system is proportional (percentage-based).
- Regularity, percentage and period of validity must be previously “vowed,” “promised,” or “purposed” by the worshipper (2 Cor. 9:7).
- It is given as a percentage or proportion of the income (1 Cor. 16:1; Deut. 16:17).
- The worshipper chooses the percentage of the income that will be regularly given as “Promise” (any percentage is valid).
- It is considered as important and binding as the tithe (Mal. 3:8-10).
- It should be given after any income (Prov. 3:9).
- It is not expected when there is no income (2 Cor. 8:12).
- The worshipper offers it immediately after the tithe, and before any other expense is met or giving is done (Prov. 3:9; Matt. 6:33).

A LITTLE MORE:

In Malachi 3:8-10, tithes and offerings are clearly placed under the same system. This implicitly suggests at least three similar characteristics for both: (1) regularity (according to the income), (2) proportionality (a proportion of any income), and (3) delivery (brought to the storehouse).

Ellen G. White also agrees that tithes and offerings are under the same system. She says that this system includes the concept of giving also offerings as a proportion of the income: "In the *Bible system* [singular word] of tithes and offerings [both under the same system] the amounts paid by different persons will of course vary greatly, since they are proportioned to the income."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 73 (italics provided).

In another quotation, she comes to the point of saying that this offering along with the tithe, instead of being voluntary, is part "of our obligation." This thought is in line with Malachi 3:8-10, which confers the idea that not bringing that offering is considered by God as dishonesty. Here is the quote: "This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80.

COMPARING TITHE, PROMISE, AND FREEWILL OFFERINGS

FEATURES / OFFERING	TITHE	PROMISE	FREEWILL OFFERING
Regularity	Determined by one's Income	Determined by one's Income	It is sporadic
System	Proportioned to the income	Proportioned to the income	According to the impulse of the heart
Mandatory	Lifelong	Lifelong	Circumstantially (when prompted by the Spirit)
Percentage	Predetermined by God (10%)	Chosen by the worshipper (___%)	N/A
Possibility of Percentage Adjustment	No	Yes	N/A
Delivered to	Storehouse	Storehouse	Place chosen by the worshipper
Final Recipients	Local, regional and international range	Local, regional and international range (suggested)	Chosen by the worshipper

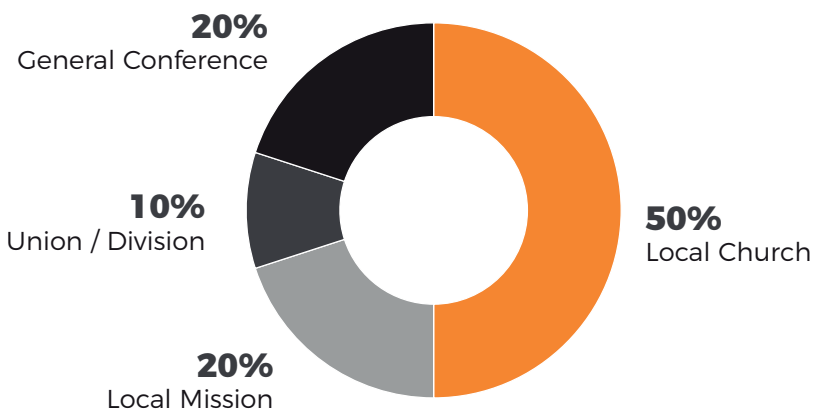
COMBINED OFFERING PLAN

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:7).

There are three different offering plans used within the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The **COMBINED OFFERING PLAN** was voted as an option in at the Annual Council of 2002 after a recommendation by the World Stewardship Summit of 2001.

It supports all levels of the church by putting total funds collected into one pool.



The funds are distributed according to a formula approved by each division but within the following percentages: 50 percent for the local church; 20 percent to the General Conference for mission funds, 10% for the Local Union and 20% for the Local Mission for mission expansion work in the local field. Divisions making use of this plan currently include: ECD, ESD, IAD, NSD, SAD, SID, SPD (Island Fields), SSD, SUD, WAD.



1ST QUARTER
**BIBLE CHARACTERS
THAT PUT
#GODFIRST**



January 2, 2021

WHEN JESUS PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Jesus that will help us put God first in our lives today?

At the start of every new year, there is an expectation that it will be better than the previous year. The thought of something new is exciting. When Jesus was 30 years old, He started a new phase of His life. After being baptised in the Jordan River, His ministry had officially begun. But what happened next was very strange—and it will help us in this new year of 2021.

Matthew 4:1 says: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.” Isn’t that strange? Since the garden of Eden, Satan had been waiting for the moment he would try to deceive Jesus, as he had done with Adam and Eve. If Satan could have led Jesus to put Himself first, the whole war would have been lost. So Satan started with food. Yes, food.

For thousands of years, the enemy had observed how humans would do anything to meet their physical needs. Matthew writes: “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” Isn’t that obvious? Well, Matthew writes the obvious because he wants us to know that Jesus is fully human and, therefore, totally affected by physical needs.

So the first temptation is for Jesus to doubt His identity and to put His physical needs first. You will be tempted throughout this year to put your own physical needs first. God has called you His child, but at every moment you can choose who should come first—God or your own physical needs. Jesus put God first.

Then the devil took Him to the temple. Jesus was now tempted, through a passage of scripture, to test God’s faithfulness. The second temptation was about putting His senses first. In other words, are you going to take God at His word? Or do you constantly need physical evidence of God’s love for you? Jesus decided to put God first.

Finally, the devil presented the very mission Jesus came to fulfil—and offered a short-cut. This third temptation is to take short-cuts instead of putting God first.

This is the first time in 2021 when tithes and offerings will be collected. Jesus put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



2

January 9, 2021

WHEN ABRAHAM PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Abraham that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Abram was 80 years old when he left his rich and prosperous home to travel into the desert. God had called him, and Abram put God first. But, a few years later, Abram began to lie to save his own life.

Why did Abram become so fearful that he stopped putting God first? Time happened.

Did you have a time in your life when you would have dropped everything to follow Jesus? Many of us have done exactly that on multiple occasions. But then time passes, and our faithfulness turns into routine. Life happens and we start leaving God in second place or worse.

Some of us become disappointed with God because our lives didn't turn out as we expected. Did you achieve everything you aimed for last year? Probably not. It is easy to fall back into our own desires and fears.

Abram had the courage to challenge God and demand His promises be fulfilled. After all, Abram was promised a land and descendants. However, in Genesis 15, Abram challenges God directly:

"Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go

childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Sometimes we need to have some serious conversations with God. Do not continue in silence if you have a few things to say to your heavenly Father. Are you disappointed? Tell Him. Do you feel alone when He promised to be with you? Challenge Him like Abram did.

So God invited Abram to leave his tent and come outside. It is almost as if God is taking Abram from his limited reality and bringing him to God's reality. God says to Abram, "Your tent ceiling isn't large enough to accommodate what I can do." God reminds Abram that God is God, and Abram is not.

It is precisely because Abram put God first that his name was changed to Abraham. And his desire to be faithful led to the first biblical reference to tithing.

Abraham put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



3

January 16, 2021

WHEN MOSES PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Moses that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Moses tried to save the people through his own power. It didn't work. In fact, he was banished from Egypt and his dreams were dead. After decades working as a shepherd in the desert, something strange happened to Moses. God called him to revive the dreams of his youth—to see the people of Israel freed from slavery.

Moses wasn't ready. He could no longer speak properly and believed he was too old to challenge Pharaoh. He was right about that. For Moses, putting God first meant refusing to believe in his own ability and strength. It meant putting his whole life in God's hand and accepting the call based on God's power, not his own inadequacies. Here is Exodus 4:10-12:

"Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now

therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

Because Moses put God first, his entire nation was rescued from slavery. Moses wasn't perfect and neither are we. Like God called Moses, He is still calling us to put Him first in our lives. Each of us has a special mission that can only be achieved by putting God first. Even though this can be difficult, the Holy Spirit helps us with the courage to do it.

Moses put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



4

January 23, 2021

WHEN JOSHUA PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Joshua that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Joshua had been a slave in Egypt. He was familiar with the slave master's whip tearing at his skin. Then, one day, an old man walks into Pharaoh's palace and tells him to free the Israelites. Joshua saw every Egyptian god being humiliated by Jehovah, the only true God. Soon after, he was walking across the sea on dry ground on his way to freedom.

Joshua became Moses' disciple soon after, even following him to the base of Mount Sinai when God delivered the commandments. Sometime later, Joshua was chosen by his tribe to represent them as a spy going into the land God had promised. He must have been both scared and thrilled.

Along with the other 11 spies, Joshua saw for himself the wonderful land they would inhabit. However, he would soon discover that his moment of courage was not visiting the land but arguing with his fellow spies.

Ten of the spies saw the same thing Joshua did, but disagreed with the conclusion. They were

sure the Canaanites were going to destroy them. Joshua had to put God's promises first and stand up against them.

Eventually Joshua was chosen to lead the people of Israel into that same promised land, some 40 years later. It wasn't easy for him, but Joshua was certain of one thing—he would put God first, no matter what happened. Here is what Joshua said to the people of Israel, as recorded in Joshua 24:15:

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua put God first and God always came through. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



5

January 30, 2021

WHEN RUTH PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Ruth that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Ruth was not an Israelite when she was born. She grew up as a Moabite and probably worshipped Chemosh, the fish God of the Moabites. Chemosh was also known as “the destroyer”. In 2 Kings 3:27, we see the king of Moab offering his own son and heir as a blood sacrifice to Chemosh.

In sharp contrast to this, Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi, spoke of Jehovah, the loving God of the Israelites, who rescued His people from slavery and calls them to love and respect each other. Ruth must have started to worship Jehovah a long time before the tragedies happened.

In a sad and dark turn of events, Naomi lost her husband and two sons within a decade. Her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were devastated. Life was already difficult when their husbands were alive, but now the situation was desperate. Naomi decided to return to Israel and sent both of them home. Orpah eventually agreed to go home. On the other hand, Ruth simply refused.

Even at this darkest hour in her life, she didn’t

blame God for her circumstances. Instead, she put God first in her life and insisted in travelling with Naomi to continue worshipping Jehovah. Here are Ruth’s words, as recorded in Ruth 1:16:

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Life may be difficult for you right now. Putting God first doesn’t guarantee that our lives will be easy, but it does mean we will find peace and salvation. Ruth found a loving husband and joined the people of God. In fact, Ruth had the honour of becoming a direct ancestor of Jesus Himself, the saviour of the world.

Ruth put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



February 6, 2021

WHEN HANNAH PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Hannah that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Hannah experienced a wonderful miracle in her life. God answered her prayer and gave her a son. She must have been so happy to discover she was pregnant. A few months earlier, she had entered the temple in Jerusalem and opened her heart to God, even promising that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to God's service.

Now that she was a mother, her life was so different. She named her son Samuel, which means "heard by God". We can imagine Hannah sitting with little Samuel and teaching him about God through the telling and retelling of the old stories. Samuel was a miracle and she loved him with all her heart.

But the time soon came when she had to take Samuel to the temple to serve the Lord, as she had promised. Although God had given her many other children, Samuel was her first. Giving him up to the Lord still as a child must have been very difficult. Putting God first is often difficult. But here are Hannah's own words, as recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1, 2:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord;
in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth
boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance. There is no
one holy like the Lord;
there is no one besides you; there is no
Rock like our God."

Samuel became one of the greatest prophets in the history of the people of Israel. He was a man of God who anointed king Saul and even king David himself. None of this would have happened if his mother had refused to put God first.

If you are a parent, have you ever wondered what impact putting God first will have on your children? It is impossible to predict the kind of impact children will have on the world when they grow up witnessing their parents putting God first.

Hannah put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



February 13, 2021

WHEN DAVID PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from David that will help us put God first in our lives today?

King David is remembered as a hero in the history of the Israelites. His greatest moments were those when he accepted the call to put God first. When his fellow Israelites were shaking in fear from the giant and his insults, David put God before his own protection. Picking up a few stones and facing Goliath in the name of Jehovah seemed foolish to others. But David put God first and God delivered him in that battle.

Later in the story, David had been anointed king, had defeated the giant, had worked in the palace and had even married the king's daughter. You would be excused for thinking his life went from glory to glory after all this. It did not. King Saul persecuted him as the greatest terrorist in the kingdom and every Israelite soldier who saw Goliath fall to the ground were now trying to capture David, dead or alive.

Nevertheless, even in these frustrating and confusing circumstances when all seems lost and God seems to have disappeared, David put God first. When he entered the camp where king Saul was sleeping, he could have killed the tyrant and taken over the throne. He did not. God would not

have approved revenge in this way, so David put God first and went back into hiding.

David didn't always put God first. The adultery with Bathsheba and her husband's killing were clear examples of sins David committed when he put himself first. But eventually David takes responsibility for his sins, repents and puts God first again. By the end of his life, he cannot accept that his house looks better than the house of God. He vows to do everything he can so God's house is better than his palace.

David put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect our tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



February 20, 2021

WHEN DANIEL & HIS FRIENDS PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Daniel that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Daniel was a young man when he was taken to Babylon, the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. King Nebuchadnezzar would take the best and brightest young men as captives from the many nations he conquered. He would then indoctrinate them into Babylonian science and religion, knowing they would greatly contribute to the expansion of his kingdom. Ten thousand other young people were taken alongside Daniel and, from them, the best of the best were taken to the palace. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were some of these.

Their first test was a biblical diet. Putting God first could have cost them all the privileges afforded them—or worse, they could lose their lives. However, these young men made a commitment in their hearts to put God first, no matter what happened. They couldn't be forced or bribed to do otherwise. They were faithful with their diets and God gave them wisdom, helping them become the top students in the Babylonian "university".

Later, Daniel would be put in charge of all other scientists, while his three friends would eventually become the top leaders of the capital city, Babylon itself. This only happened because they put God first, no matter the consequences. In fact, they were willing to be burnt alive rather than compromise. Daniel 3:17 records their words:

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

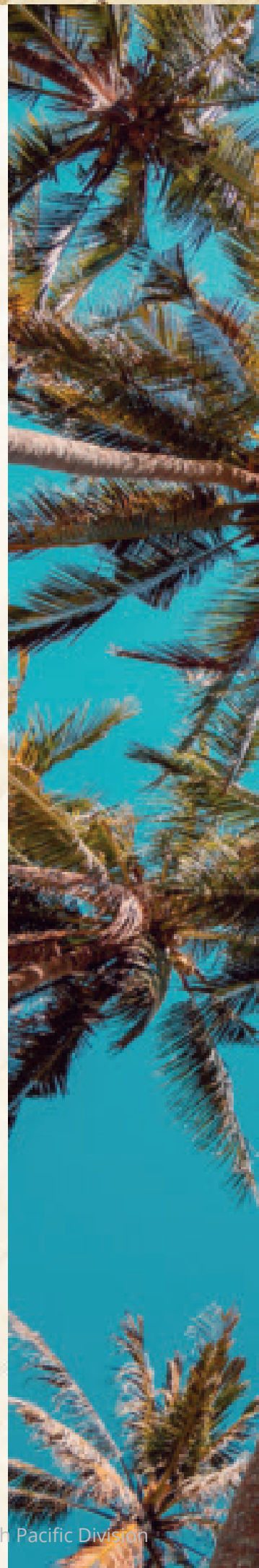
Even as an old man, Daniel would rather be thrown into a den of lions than stop praying first thing in the morning. But God came through again and Daniel lived to praise him and become the prime minister of Babylon.

Daniel put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

MATTHEW 22:37-40
ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION







9

February 27, 2021

WHEN ESTHER PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Esther that will help us put God first in our lives today?

When Esther agreed to join the selection process that would eventually make her queen of the Persian empire, many doubts must have rushed through her mind. Her people were exiles and their prospects were dim. It looked like God had abandoned them to the Persian rule, while still demanding obedience. But Esther was beautiful and this was an opportunity to rise above every woman in the empire.

Esther was beautiful, both inside and out. Even a ruthless king could see that. Xerxes chose her, above all others, to become his queen. Esther enjoyed her own palace and privileges she could have only imagined in previous years.

It is difficult to put God first when we struggle with poverty and the lack of resources. Yet, wealth and power often also lead people away from Him. How do you put God first when you have more wealth and influence than those around you? You follow the example of Esther and remember those who need protection.

King Xerxes was deceived by an advisor when he issued a death decree against all Hebrews. When challenged to beg the king for mercy, Esther was

afraid. In her own words, Esther 4:11 reads:

“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

Esther was not immune to fear. But she was as courageous as she was beautiful. After asking all the Hebrews to fast and pray, she risked her life by entering the king’s presence uninvited. At that moment of great risk, she puts God first and proclaims some of the most unforgettable words in all history: “If I perish, I perish.”

Esther put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



10

March 6, 2021

WHEN PETER PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Peter that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Peter was one of the oldest disciples Jesus called. He was determined and trustworthy. On a stormy night, Jesus appeared to the group as a ghost walking on water. Peter was the first to speak out in his desire to be with Jesus, even if it meant jumping out of the boat and walking on water. Putting God first seemed to come easy for Peter. Until he almost drowned.

Soon after walking on water, Peter doubted. As Peter began to be engulfed by the tempestuous water, he must have felt the shame of public failure. He had asked to come to Jesus and all the disciples could now see that he had failed. Putting God first in our failures isn't easy. But Peter did it. He shouted for help and Jesus saved him.

This story repeats itself when Jesus is arrested and crucified. Peter had promised to be next to Jesus, no matter what, but Jesus warned him of his betrayal that very night. Peter wasn't scared. He was ready to die for Jesus. This is clear from Peter's attack in Gethsemane. Despite the soldiers surrounding them, Peter tries to kill someone.

Thankfully, he was a fisherman, not a soldier. He missed and cut the man's ear instead.

What Jesus did next confused him. Jesus healed the man and said He didn't need protection. What could that mean? Peter was ready for conflict and Jesus rebuked him for it. He followed Jesus from a distance and denied knowing him three times that night, as Jesus predicted. Meanwhile, John stayed right next to Jesus throughout the horror of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Peter had failed again. How could he possibly lead anything after that?

Putting God first in the midst of our failure, confusion and shame is impossible. It is only through God's power that we can accept God's forgiveness and start again. Later, Peter would become an excellent leader as Jesus trusted him again and again. Perhaps you've been unfaithful with your tithe and offerings in the past. Perhaps you've failed. Putting God first means asking for and accepting God's forgiveness today. It means starting again to trust in God with your finances.

Peter put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



March 13, 2021

WHEN PAUL PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Paul that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Paul had always put God first but, as he persecuted the followers of Jesus, Paul could not see what was right in front of him. It was only when Paul fell to the ground, blinded by the light of Jesus, that he began to truly see. For Paul, putting God first meant humbly questioning his assumptions and going back to scripture.

After three years in Arabia, Paul returns with a renewed conviction that God had not given up on the world. Jesus was the saviour who wanted to reach every human being. Paul continued putting God first as he travelled from city to city and village to village to announce Jesus. Nothing would deter Paul from putting God first, including the many times people tried to kill him.

On one occasion, Paul and his companion Silas had their clothes ripped off in the middle of the city square. They were beaten and put in the inner cell, with their feet clamped in the stocks. Still bleeding and bruised, Paul and Silas did the unthinkable:

Instead of complaining, they worshipped Jesus.

If you are at your lowest moment right now and everything seems to have gone wrong, there is no better time to worship than today.

Then God sent an earthquake. Assuming the prisoners had escaped, the officer in charge picked up a sword to kill himself. Paul and Silas remembered the beatings, torture and humiliation that officer put them through. For Paul and Silas to have revenge, all they needed to do was wait for the officer's body to hit the ground.

But Paul and Silas were the kind of men who put God first. In that split second, they decided to forgive the officer and shouted for him to stop. That officer and his family met Jesus and, by the end of that night, they were also worshipping the King of Kings.

Paul and Silas put God first. Their example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



March 20, 2021

WHEN JOHN PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from John that will help us put God first in our lives today?

John was the youngest of all the disciples. He loved Jesus with all his heart. When all other disciples scattered following Jesus' arrest, John stayed close to Jesus through the entire ordeal. Jesus honoured his faithfulness by giving him the mission of taking care of the woman who cared for Jesus the most: Mary, His mother.

But when he was young, John was vengeful and angry. It was hard for him to feel compassion for those who rejected Jesus. Once he suggested to Jesus that fire should come from heaven and completely destroy the Samaritans who rejected Jesus. Putting God first in John's life wasn't a single moment of courage. Instead, it was a lifelong commitment to love as Jesus loved.

After Jesus returned to heaven, John remained faithful until his death, some 70 years later. He eventually became the pastor of the church in Ephesus and wrote many books of the New Testament—the gospel of John and the book of Revelation among them. However, his letters to the churches provide the greatest insight into his

conversion. Here are his own words, recorded in 1 John 4:7:

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is from God.”

Sometimes we are disappointed that we still can't control our temper and our desires. But John went through a profound transformation over a lifetime by putting God first every day of his life. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to also put God first today.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



13

March 27, 2021

WHEN NOAH PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Noah that will help us put God first in our lives today?

If you have ever felt that people in your city don't care about God, you know how Noah felt. In fact, it wasn't only God they didn't care about. They didn't care about each other either. The situation became so evil that if they were allowed to continue acting that way, every human being would have been destroyed.

It was at that moment that God stepped in to save the world the first time around.

Noah was told to put God first and dedicate the next century of his life to building an ark, and call everyone to repent and change their ways. He was mocked and ridiculed by the very people he was instructed to warn, but he didn't give up. Every day Noah put God first and followed the instructions he was given.

All of us are tempted to put our own projects and priorities first. Perhaps you are an administrator of many resources. Or perhaps you are constantly

struggling to make ends meet. Like Noah, all of us are challenged every day, every week, every month, to put God's kingdom first. God has promised that all other things will be added. And God keeps His promises.

The flood came and the ark saved Noah and his family from total destruction. Humanity had been saved.

Like in the days of Noah, the people God has asked you to warn might mock and ridicule you. But one day soon, God will come back to save us. Those who put God first will see the results of their efforts with every person who will be saved.

With every plank and nail, Noah was putting God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first today.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

An aerial photograph of a sandy beach meeting the ocean. The sand is a warm, golden-brown color, and the water is a deep blue-green. The waves are breaking gently onto the shore, creating white foam. The overall mood is serene and natural.

2ND QUARTER

**BIBLE CHARACTERS
THAT REFUSED TO
PUT #GODFIRST**



14

April 3, 2021

WHEN JUDAS REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Judas, who refused to put God first?

The other disciples believed Judas was the perfect disciple. He was intelligent and very competent. He also believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, Judas wanted to follow Jesus closely so he would obtain a high position in the kingdom of God.

Ellen White reminds us that “the Saviour read the heart of Judas; He knew the depths of iniquity to which, unless delivered by the grace of God, Judas would sink. In connecting this man with Himself, He placed him where he might, day by day, be brought in contact with the out-flowing of His own unselfish love. If he would open his heart to Christ, divine grace would banish the demon of selfishness, and even Judas might become a subject of the kingdom of God” (The Desire of Ages, page 294).

Many of us have talents and abilities that help us achieve so much in our careers and local church leadership. Like Judas, it is possible for us to believe in Jesus while we are slaves to our own selfishness. Judas was in charge of the money so he could experience the joy of giving in a transformative way. Putting God first in our tithe and promise is a tangible way Jesus is also transforming our hearts.

Like Judas, we are also tempted to follow Jesus so we can get our mansion in heaven. However, the Bible doesn't encourage anyone to desire

heaven because of the wealth. When Judas asks to become a disciple, Jesus simply responds:

“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:19, 20).

When Judas denied Jesus and eventually committed suicide, his selfishness finally won the war for his heart. Money had no value any longer, so the 30 coins became a curse and a reminder of his failures. God is inviting you and me to put His kingdom first in everything we do. Money is a blessing from God only when we allow Jesus to defeat selfishness in our hearts.

Judas refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His kingdom first, while Judas' example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

April 10, 2021

WHEN ADAM & EVE REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

When Adam and Eve refused to put God First Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Adam and Eve, who refused to put God first in the most decisive moment of their lives?

Adam and Eve had everything. Their home was beautiful. Their work was profoundly meaningful. They loved each other and they had the best food in the world. Literally. They experienced peace from sunrise to sunset. Not only our kind of peace—the absence of trouble—but God’s peace—Shalom, the absolute harmony of everything.

They understood the ultimate hierarchy of our planet. God is above all. Humans—male and female—stand side by side ordering and subduing the earth, which is beneath them in this hierarchy. As long as they lived under this reality, everything was perfect.

But one day Eve and Adam decided to rebel against this hierarchy and eat the fruit with the hope that it would turn them into gods. This destruction of the hierarchy represented the disruption of Shalom and it brought death. The Bible uses the word sin to describe any disruption of Shalom.

When someone takes a substance and elevates it to an existential level by saying, “I can’t live without this ‘thing’”, they are disrupting Shalom and the consequences are selfishness, greed and, eventually, death. All drugs and materialism fall into this category. When we take another

human being and elevate them to become icons similar to gods, we disrupt Shalom and this brings depression, anxiety and, eventually, death.

The lesson from Adam and Eve’s experience is that God is God and we are not. This is a fundamental truth in our universe. When we read in scripture “God says”, we are constantly tempted, like Adam and Eve, to rationalise and find our “own truth”. This is sin and it leads to death.

God commanded us to bring our tithe and offerings. God is God and we are not. However, like Adam and Eve, we are also tempted to be our own gods and act differently. God grants us that freedom, but He doesn’t remove all consequences. Adam and Eve left the garden that day but hoped for the salvation God promised to bring.

Today we have the assurance of our salvation through Jesus. However, like Adam and Eve, we are tempted avoid putting God first when there is a cost. Adam and Eve refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Adam and Eve’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



April 17, 2021

WHEN CAIN REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Cain, who refused to put God first?

Adam and Eve had been cast out of the Garden of Eden when Cain was born. They experienced hardship together. Adam worked hard to grow sustenance from the earth and his children certainly helped when they were old enough to start working.

Cain focused on agriculture. Abel kept flocks. Both observed carefully how their parents talked about God and told stories of the garden. Both heard how God sacrificed the first animal for the forgiveness of their sins and to cover their shame. Both Cain and Abel wanted to worship God.

When they came of age, the Bible says they both brought an offering from the best of what they had. Abel brought fat portions from some of the first-born of his flock, while Cain brought some of the first fruits from the soil. God looked with favour on the offering Abel brought, but rejected Cain's offering. Cain became furious. Not at God and not even at himself. He was furious with Abel, his brother.

Rejection isn't something human beings know how to deal with well. We hate being rejected and much of our lives is spent doing everything we can to avoid rejection. We sacrifice many years studying, so we are not rejected when applying for a job. We sacrifice time and money dressing up and taking care of ourselves, so we are not rejected romantically. We sacrifice our talents

raising resources, so our credit card isn't rejected at the store.

Despite our best efforts, however, rejection still comes. In this case, Cain clearly rejected God's example of what an acceptable offering should have been. In humility, Cain should have arranged with his brother to have an animal sacrifice. He didn't. Perhaps he thought he would do his best and that should have been enough.

Sometimes we decide to make our own rules when it comes to our offering. This is a mistake. God is God and we are not. The instructions on what we should do with our tithes and offerings are clear and we must follow them.

Once rejected, Cain could not bring himself to be vulnerable and talk to God, his parents or even his brother. Without any resistance, resentment took over Cain. God tried to help but Cain rejected God too. Sin took over his heart and he surrendered all control to his anger and violence. Cain would go down in history as the first murderer.

Cain refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Cain's example is a warning for us today. But we don't have to be like Cain. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, let's put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



April 24, 2021

WHEN SAMSON REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Samson, who refused to put God first?

Samson was born as a Nazarene. This meant he had to live a certain way. First of all, he should not drink wine, grape juice or anything that came from the vine. He should not touch dead bodies and—most famously—Nazarenes should not cut their hair.

Since his younger years, Samson was a strong and disagreeable boy. When he came of age, the Lord led him to a young Philistine woman. Meeting her is described in this way:

“Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. . . .

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along” (Judges 14:5–9).

Did you notice it? Samson liked to live on the edge between right and wrong. God’s instructions were clear: stay away from grapes and dead bodies. In this one short passage, he disobeyed both instructions. Later it would be easier for him to allow his hair to be cut as he already chosen the rebellious route.

No one wakes up on day and decides to reject God. There is always a series of small decisions when we fail to put God first. When we notice our strength hasn’t left us, we convince ourselves

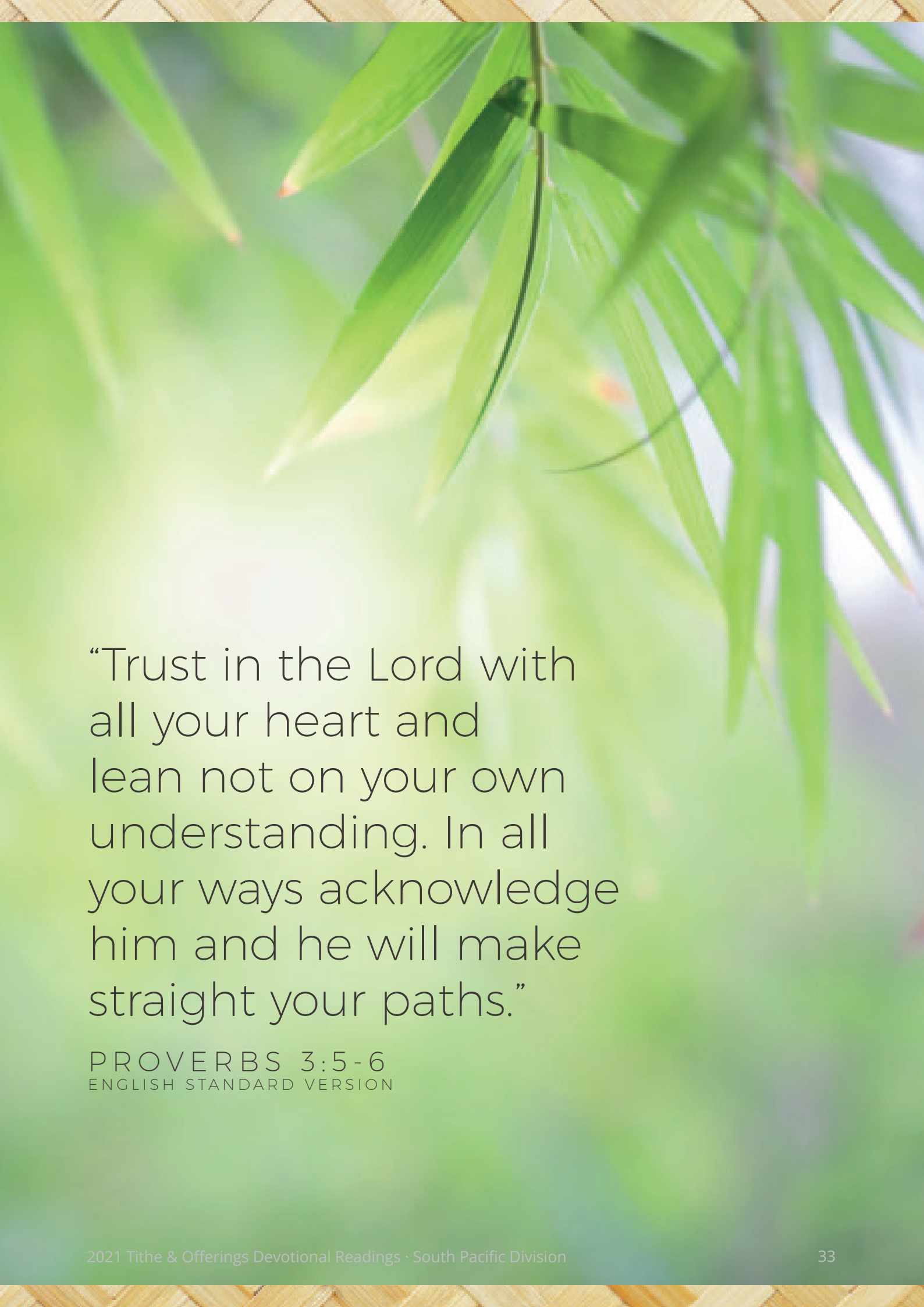
we are still on the right track. God invites us to put Him first today, so we are not victims of our enemy like Samson was.

When Samson woke up to the spiritual corruption of his heart, he immediately called out to God and God answered. In fact, the Bible tells the story that every prayer Samson prayed was answered. God was merciful with Samson and He will be merciful with us. Even if you were not faithful with your tithe and offerings in the past, you can always start today.

Samson refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Samson’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.





“Trust in the Lord with
all your heart and
lean not on your own
understanding. In all
your ways acknowledge
him and he will make
straight your paths.”

PROVERBS 3:5-6
ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION



18

May 1, 2021

WHEN ELI'S SONS REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Eli, who refused to put God first?

Eli was a great man. He took his duties as a high priest seriously. During the time of the judges, people came to worship God from everywhere. Eli was always ready to protect the tabernacle and lead people in worship.

Thousands came to the tabernacle every year and Eli was ready to help them. One day he prayed with a woman who was asking for a child and God answered their prayers. Once that child was born, his mother Hannah decided to put God first and bring the boy to serve in the tabernacle .

Eli taught Samuel everything he knew about God and the priestly service. Then one day, God spoke to Eli through the boy. You might remember the story of God calling Samuel three times in the middle of the night. What we often forget is the content of the message that God wanted to deliver.

Eli had been so focused on the people of Israel that he had not paid enough attention to his own sons. God had previously impressed on Eli the importance of educating his sons to put God first. Instead, Eli refused to discipline and educate them. The results were terrible.

Eli's sons became priests who refused to put God first. They had no respect for the offerings

brought to the tabernacle by faithful Israelites. In fact, the Bible says:

“This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord’s sight, for they were treating the Lord’s offering with contempt” (1 Samuel 2:17).

This is a devastating expression. Treating the Lord’s offerings with contempt meant they despised the offerings and had no respect or reverence for them. God didn’t take that lightly and eventually both of Eli’s sons were killed by the Philistines. Eli died on the same day when he collapsed after hearing the news about the capture of the Ark of the Covenant.

Sometimes we don’t give our tithe and offerings the respect and reverence they deserve. They are a reflection of our connection and respect for our Creator.

Eli’s sons refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Eli’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



May 8, 2021

WHEN SAUL REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Saul, who refused to put God first?

Saul was tall and handsome. He stood head and shoulders above other men. He was the perfect candidate to become the first king of Israel. Saul was 30 years old when he became king and he reigned for 42 years.

During this time, Saul did many things right. However, he constantly refused to follow God's instructions completely. Saul seemed to know better, to find a different path, to improve on what God had said.

Some of us are always tempted to rationalise our own desires. Others provide internal explanations why they follow their own plan when it comes to tithe and offerings. Putting God first was not easy for Saul and it certainly isn't easy for us.

Saul continued on this path until God rejected him as king. God stepped back from protecting Saul to the point that an evil spirit tormented him. God grants us the free will to reject Him and His blessings. Saul turned evil and spent much of his energy and resources pursuing his loyal servant David.

David had been an amazing soldier and musician from the first moment Saul met him. Saul's son Jonathan was best friends with David. Even though David did nothing against Saul, Saul still

wanted to kill him. The reason? Jealousy.

Later in his life, Saul turned to necromancers, hoping to hear God's voice again. But God doesn't speak through spiritualism. Even as Saul tried to return to God, he used methods forbidden by God. When we refuse to put God first in the small things, eventually we will always go too far.

Perhaps you have not been putting God first in your tithe and offerings or in another area of your life. God is merciful and will always forgive you immediately. You can start putting him first in your life today.

Saul refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Saul's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



20

May 15, 2021

WHEN SOLOMON REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Solomon, who refused to put God first?

Everything started well for Solomon. The weight of the crown led him to ask for wisdom—the one thing he needed most. His request was fulfilled. And God also blessed Solomon's reign with wealth, health and prosperity.

In time, however, Solomon's wisdom turned into rationalisation. He used his intelligence and intellect to provide rational excuses as to why he broke many of God's established laws.

Solomon used forced labour to build the house of the Lord as that must have seemed more efficient. Solomon married princesses from many other nations, so he could forge peace treaties with his enemies.

Solomon built altars to his wives' gods as a way of welcoming them into his kingdom.

Solomon built his palace to be three times larger than the temple so he could accommodate his large household.

All of these rationalisations seemed to make sense and, at first, brought much wealth to the kingdom. However, they led to high taxes and injustices that were not sustainable. God has given the laws that lead to long-term prosperity and peace, but Solomon used his intellect to bend them according to his pleasure. Solomon did

not put God first and Israel was divided into two kingdoms within months of his death.

Today it is still common to find highly intelligent and knowledgeable people rationalising the breaking of God's law. Putting God first means taking His word seriously and following it. The simplicity of a child following the instructions of a loving parent is perhaps the best antidote to our own demise.

God stands ready to open the doors to health, wealth and prosperity to many of us, according to His plans for our lives. Sometimes God keeps a door shut because our faith and future would be compromised if we were to walk through it.

God's faithfulness evokes our own response. If we are faithful with the small things, God will put us in charge of greater things. We are stewards, glad to serve the Master in taking care of His resources.

Solomon refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Solomon's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



May 22, 2021

WHEN ISRAEL REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Israel, who refused to put God first?

When Moses returned to Egypt to free the people of Israel, it was clear that they weren't ready. Centuries of slavery had corroded their vision of God and themselves. Nonetheless, God delivered on His promise to Abraham.

Once in the desert, they were technically free. Except they had no idea how free people lived. They would sooner return to bondage than rely on a God they could not see. But God was patient with them, demonstrating His love daily through the cloud, the fire and manna.

God's law was the set of instructions they needed to learn how to be free. This was especially true of the Sabbath, which clearly outlines how to worship God and how to respect human beings and creation alike.

But their most decisive moment as a people wasn't related to the Sabbath or the law. They were to be tested on their reason and their faith. When the 12 spies were sent as representative of the tribes to survey the land, they did not return with conflicting reports. All spies agreed about the quality of the land. It was exactly as it has been described.

But they diverged in their interpretation of the facts. Joshua and Caleb were rational. They built their case on the fact God had freed them already from the most powerful nation on earth at the

time. This mighty salvation was clear evidence that God would continue to fulfil His promises. They were willing to put God first because of the evidence they had seen.

Along with the rest of the people of Israel, the other 10 spies were overtaken with irrational fear. They refused to put God first because they chose to ignore the evidence of how God had led them in the past. The consequences were devastating. God decided to keep that entire generation wandering in the desert until their death. Only their children would inherit Canaan.

Sometimes we are like those 10 spies. We have already seen first-hand how God is faithful when we take our tithe and offerings seriously. Sometimes, however, we are still tempted to ignore the facts and give in to fear. Putting God first in our tithe and offerings means trusting the evidence of what we have already seen.

Israel refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the world around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Israel's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



22

May 29, 2021

WHEN THE PHARISEES REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from the Pharisees, who refused to put God first?

Pharisees and teachers of the law were among the most respected people in Israel in the early first century. They had dedicated their lives to the study and practice of scripture. Most could recite the Torah by heart and tried to follow each of its precepts. Their ability to follow the Bible with extreme precision gave them a sense of safety and pride. After all, God promised to bless those who keep His commandments.

When Jesus started preaching, however, he turned the law from something difficult to follow to something impossible to follow. Jesus pointed to the principles of the law, such as love and compassion. This was a profound disruption to the hierarchy of the Pharisees who valued wealth and positions of authority. On one occasion Jesus addresses them directly:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23, 24).

The Pharisees would go to the extreme of counting how many new leaves of mint grew in their garden and would take the 10th leaf to the temple. Jesus was very direct with these religious leaders who followed the law to the minutest degree but failed to see justice, mercy and faith as the reason the law was given. Jesus was clear:

continue counting the leaves of mint but seek justice, mercy and faith.

In light of this, two things are no longer surprising. The first is the fact that Pharisees were the main force behind killing Jesus. They could not bear a teacher who rejected the hierarchy they had established for themselves. The second event that is no longer surprising is how many marginalised people followed Jesus. These were the people who had been told they weren't good enough for God and should stay out. Jesus reminded everyone that no one is good enough, and God was ready to accept them exactly as they were and then transform them.

It is easy to see these same dynamics in every church today. Some are extremely faithful to God in everything. Others seem to struggle to keep up. God reminds us that none of us are good enough. We are welcomed into the Kingdom of God through Jesus and His Spirit is transforming us to be like Jesus. Putting God first means that we should count our mint leaves and act with compassion.

The Pharisees refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the Pharisees' example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



23

June 5, 2021

WHEN THE RICH YOUNG RULER REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from the rich young ruler, who refused to put God first?

When Jesus met the rich young ruler, the disciples might have been excited to have someone with financial wealth join the group. That didn't last long as Jesus asked the man to sell everything he had and give to the poor. Here is the story of what happened:

"Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'" (Matthew 19:21-26).

What the rich young ruler did not realise was simple: the experience of salvation and full connection with God and humanity required the giving away of his possessions. The Bible would refer to this experience as Shalom, a total harmony and peace with God, humankind, oneself and nature.

To those of us who have accumulated wealth, regardless of how small that wealth might be, we are also tempted to keep it safe. Wealth can give us a feeling of security and power. In itself, wealth is a blessing from the Lord. As soon as we begin to believe it is the result of our work and should not be shared with anyone, it can turn into a curse.

The rich young ruler put his wealth first. Jesus wept when that happened because it was a tragedy for the sincere and greedy young rich ruler to miss out on salvation because of his wealth. Putting God first means putting our wealth in second place. Generosity is a non-negotiable characteristic of the Kingdom of God.

The young rich ruler refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the young rich ruler's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.





PRINCIPLES GUIDING OUR GIVING

A token of a life surrendered to God.
Lev. 1:4,9

An exercise of trust in God's ability to
provide. Ps. 34:8-10; 1 Chr. 29:14

Must come from a heart at peace
with others. Matt. 5:23, 24

Following Jesus pattern, who
sacrificed all for our sake. 2 Cor. 8:1, 9

An expression of gratitude, trust,
praise and honor to God for His
blessings. Prov. 3:9, 10; 2 Cor. 9:12, 13



24

June 12, 2021

WHEN ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Ananias and Sapphira, who refused to put God first?

They really wanted to put God first. They believed in Jesus and are likely to have been baptised with the Holy Spirit. But Ananias and Sapphira found it difficult to keep their promises to God.

At first, they said they would give all of the funds they received for their land. This is a generous offer, above and beyond what God had asked. Before the sale, they must have been happy to make this promise. Perhaps it was the peer pressure of watching many other people sell their possessions and give it all to the apostles.

The problem came when Ananias and Sapphira had the money in their hands. Greed set in. They started to imagine all of the things they could buy with that money. Greed birthed the plan and the plan led to their death.

They agreed to tell the church that they only received a lesser amount than they were expecting.

By the end of that day, both Ananias and Sapphira were dead and buried. Why did God treat them so harshly? Was money a sufficient reason to end their life?

God is serious about honesty and integrity. This is as true in our tithes and offerings today as it was for Ananias and Sapphira's sale money. God doesn't force anyone to promise to give a certain amount as offering every month. But once we promise Him, it is clear that God expects us to keep that promise.

But what if we have failed in the past? Let's not continue lying to ourselves and to God. We can be true to our promises anytime, including today.

Ananias and Sapphira refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Ananias and Sapphira's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



June 19, 2021

WHEN THE LAODICEAN CHURCH REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from the Laodicean church, who struggled to put God first?

We are told that the church in Laodicean really struggled to put God first. They never rejected God, but God certainly wasn't first in their lives. Jesus called their state lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. Here is the full biblical passage:

"These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:14-22).

God is fully aware of our actions and our motives. He knows our failures and our successes. Jesus knows when we pretend to be faithful. He can see through our masks. He knows.

That is why God doesn't reject us. Jesus continues knocking at the door of your heart day after day, week after week, year after year. Once we allow Jesus to come in, putting God first will be easy.

The Laodicean church refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the Laodicean church's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



26

June 26, 2021

WHEN LUCIFER REFUSED TO PUT GOD FIRST

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Lucifer, who refused to put God first?

Sometimes we wait until everything is perfect with our finances and our lives before we are faithful in our tithes and offerings. We tell ourselves: "If only the environment was right, I wouldn't struggle to put God first. If I were promoted, if interest rates lower, if I felt closer to God, if, if ..."

One of the most beautiful and powerful angels lived in the most perfect environment and saw God every day. This perfect setting didn't help him remain faithful, because this is a decision each one of us must make in whatever circumstances we are living through at each moment.

Lucifer became too proud to put God first. His ego was too important for that. Lucifer's needs were more important. He wanted to become his own god. To make his own rules. To get the most out of life, without God interfering with his freedom. Why should God get the best of his worship and his service?

These motives are still at the root of our own difficulty in putting God first in our tithes and offerings. Our ego and our needs always try to get in the way. We think of ourselves and how much more we may need the money compared

to the church. We argue: "God doesn't need this money. The church has enough. I had better use it myself."

On one dimension, this is correct. God and the church aren't desperate for your money. Our giving has less to do with need, much more to do with faithfulness and humility. God is God and we are not. In part, God asks for the tithe for our benefit. Our tithe and offerings are a great antidote to greed and selfishness.

Waiting for the perfect set of circumstances is a sure way to avoid putting God first in our lives. God is calling us to surrender our ego today and allow Him to open the floodgates of heaven in blessings.

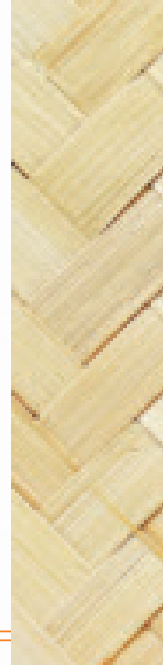
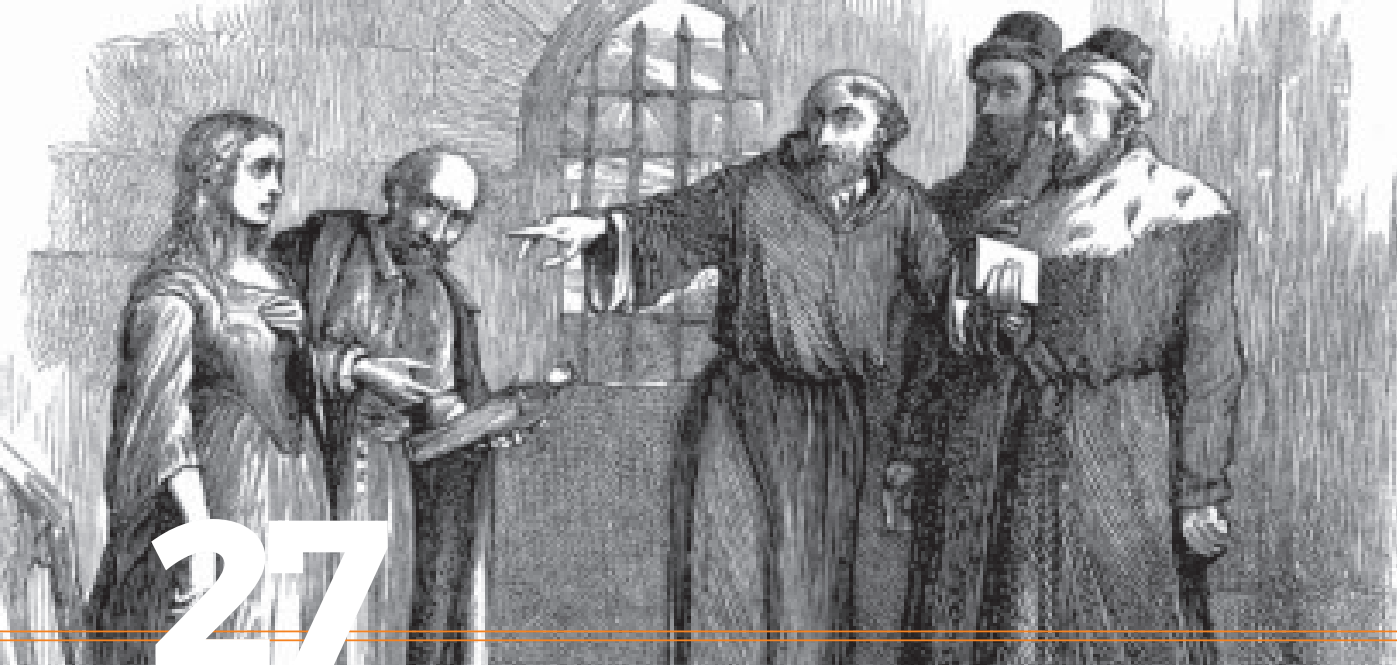
Lucifer refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him, as well as angels and humans alike. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Lucifer's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



3RD QUARTER

**REFORMERS, PIONEERS
& MISSIONARIES THAT
DECIDED TO PUT
#GODFIRST**



July 3, 2021

WHEN THE WALDENSES PUT GOD FIRST

The Waldenses lost everything when they put God first. Even then, they didn't give up. What can we learn from the Waldenses today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Church had prohibited the Bible from being read and understood by regular people. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, Peter Waldo renounced his wealth and dedicated himself to helping others. A movement started in France as lay preachers voluntarily renounced earthly wealth and lived in strict adherence to the Bible. A key emphasis of the Waldenses was to make the Bible accessible in the common language.

In 1179, Waldo and one of his friends went to Rome, where Pope Alexander the Third and the Roman Curia welcomed them. They had to explain their faith before a panel of three clergymen. The results of the meeting were inconclusive, but the Third Lateran Council in the same year condemned Waldo's ideas.

Waldo and his followers developed a system whereby they would go from town to town and meet secretly with small groups of Waldensians.

There they would confess sins and hold worship services. A travelling Waldensian preacher was known as a barba. The group would shelter the barba and help make arrangements for him to move on to the next town in secret.

They lost their positions in society and eventually had to flee to the hills and caves. They continued to put God first by explaining scripture to anyone they could find. Eventually they understood their movement to be a light in darkness. They were precursors to the Protestant Reformation and represented a remnant of people who absolutely refused to put their own comfort above the Kingdom of God.

We are called to be the remnant today—men, women and children who continue to be faithful to the Word of God by always putting the Kingdom of God first.

The Waldensians put God first, even when it cost them everything. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Memorial of John Huss at Prague's Old Town Square; Prague, Czech Republic

July 10, 2021

WHEN JOHN HUSS PUT GOD FIRST

John Huss lost his life when he put God first. What can we learn from John Huss today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 14th century, the Roman Catholic Church sold indulgences to families who wanted a guarantee that their loved ones were in heaven rather than burning forever in hell. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, John Huss was a preacher in Prague, in the Czech Republic. He spoke openly against the lies and defended the truth as found in God's word. Even in exile, he continued to put God first.

When the Council of Constance assembled, Huss was asked to be there and present his views. When he arrived, he was immediately arrested and put in prison. He was eventually taken in front of the council and asked to recant his views. He replied, "I would not for a chapel of gold retreat from the truth!" When he refused, he was put back in prison. On July 6, 1415, he was burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines of the Catholic Church. As he was burning, he could be heard singing Psalms.

There are many ways in which the truth has been ignored and rejected today. We are constantly

challenged to compromise our beliefs in small and large ways. God continues to invite us to have a commitment to the truth, come what may. Sometimes this commitment will lead to persecution and death. For most of us, it might simply represent an inconvenience. However, we must have the courage from the Holy Spirit to put God first no matter what.

We are blessed with the stories of men and women who sacrificed their earthly comfort for the mission given to the church by Jesus. The good news of salvation might not have reached us if it wasn't for their courage and determination. Now it is our turn to put God first and fulfil this mission.

John Huss put God first, even when it cost him everything. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

29



Monument of Martin Luther in Eisleben

July 17, 2021

WHEN MARTIN LUTHER PUT GOD FIRST

Martin Luther lost everything when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from Martin Luther today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church led people to believe that they needed the church to reach Christ and receive salvation. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, Martin Luther was a devout Roman Catholic priest. While reading scripture, he realised that each person could connect with God directly, without a human mediator. Under the authority of the Bible, Luther challenged the authority of the most powerful person on the planet at the time, Pope Leo the Tenth.

Luther taught that salvation and, consequently, eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin. His theology challenged the authority and office of the Pope by teaching that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge, and he opposed the exclusive concept of priesthood by considering all baptised Christians to be a holy priesthood.

He was excommunicated and persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Emperor. This did not stop him from putting God first

and standing firm to his convictions. In his own words, Martin Luther wrote how he felt about this struggle in the famous hymn: "A Mighty Fortress"

That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther put God first, even when it cost him everything. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



William Tyndale of Tindale handing jailer packet to John Rogers

July 24, 2021

WHEN WILLIAM TYNDALE PUT GOD FIRST

William Tyndale lost everything when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from William Tyndale today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church had prohibited the Bible from being read and understood by regular people. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, William Tyndale was a light that helped change the course of human history by making the Bible accessible in English.

Tyndale's translation was the first English Bible to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts. It was also the first English translation to take advantage of the printing press, the latest technology at the time for spreading a message. This brought him into direct conflict with the church, which believed that the general population didn't have the skills to understand the Bible and therefore needed the church to do it for them.

Fleeing England, Tyndale sought refuge in the Flemish territory of the Catholic Emperor Charles the Fifth. In 1535, Tyndale was arrested and jailed in the castle of Vilvoorde (Filford) outside Brussels for more than a year. In 1536, he was convicted of heresy and executed by strangulation, after

which his body was burnt at the stake. His dying prayer was that the King of England's eyes would be opened.

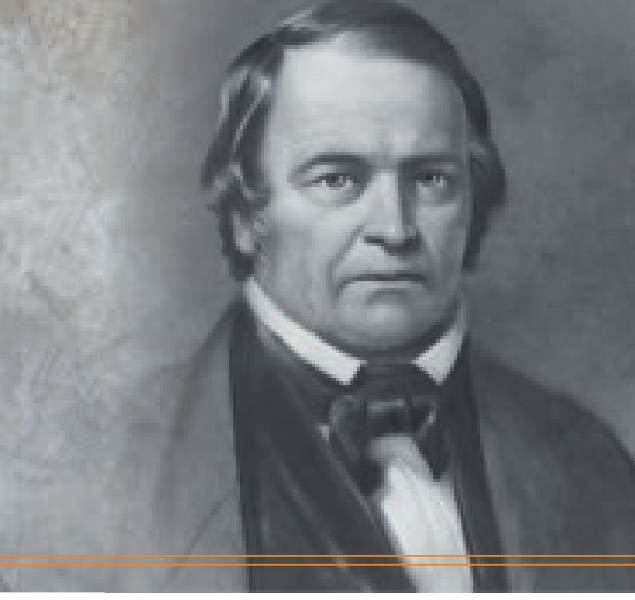
His prayers were answered. Not long after he gave his life for putting God first, the King James Bible would be compiled and sanctioned by the king of England. The Bible is the foundation of western society and Tyndale truly helped change the world by bringing the inspired text to the average person who could now understand it.

We are called to help people understand the Bible so they can find freedom, healing and hope in Jesus. When we are faithful with our tithe and offerings, we are helping to take the Three Angels' Messages to the entire world as God commanded. Putting God first by sponsoring missions is crucial. However, we should also invest our time and energy with the people around us, inspiring them to know more about the love of God.

William Tyndale put God first, even when it cost him everything. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

31



July 31, 2021

WHEN WILLIAM MILLER PUT GOD FIRST

William Miller was considered a mad man when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from William Miller today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

He was a man of integrity who could not bring himself to believe the Bible to be true. But, after an unexplainable event during his time at war, Williams Miller's world-view was shattered. He asked himself, "If the laws of nature are the only possible forces acting in the universe, how did I not die when the bomb exploded so close to me?"

He decided to start a deep study of scripture. Back at his farm in Whitehall, New York, Miller committed to reading and understanding the Bible, one verse at a time. This endeavour took him two years—1816 to 1818—during which time he absolutely fell in love with his saviour, Jesus Christ.

One of the most significant discoveries Williams Miller made during this time was the prophecy of the 2300 "evenings and mornings" found in Daniel 8:14. The prophecy foretold a significant event to take place about 1843 or 1844 and he was compelled to share this knowledge with as many people as he could. However, he was not a preacher and refused to do it.

As the Holy Spirit kept impressing him to tell others what he had discovered, he asked God to be abundantly clear in this calling. If someone would ask him to share these findings, it would be a sign between him and God that he should do it.

Less than an hour later, a family member arrived at the farm to ask him to share his findings.

At first, Miller was upset because God had sent this invitation immediately. But he was the kind of man who kept his word. That day Williams Miller put God first and started preaching this beautiful message that God had not abandoned the world and would soon do something great.

His preaching led to a great disappointment on October 22, 1844. Hundreds of thousands of people expected Jesus to return that day—but Jesus didn't. Instead, He started His ministry in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. It was from this disappointment that God called the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Today Seventh-day Adventists are preaching the good news of the soon coming of Jesus in more than 200 countries. Millions of people are now hopeful because of Miller's determination to put God first.

William Miller put God first, even when he was laughed at. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



August 7, 2021

WHEN JOSEPH BATES PUT GOD FIRST

Joseph Bates was considered a mad man when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from Joseph Bates today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

He was a retired sea captain when he first heard William Miller's message of Christ's soon second coming. He was convinced it was true. Bates was the kind of man who put God first in everything, so he gave his energy, his money and even sold his house to help spread the news of the Second Coming.

However, great personal sacrifice followed as Bates' son rejected the message and left home angrily to start a career on the high seas. Bates doesn't give up even when everything he hoped for didn't happen. The year 1843 came and went—and Christ did not return. Then the Great Disappointment of 1844 shook the faith of Bates and the other Millerites. They were a laughingstock for those around them and were forced to rebuild their lives in utter poverty, having sacrificed everything for the cause.

Bates and others returned to their study of the scriptures to find that instead of signalling Christ's return, October 22, 1844 was the date Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to intercede before the Father on behalf of believers.

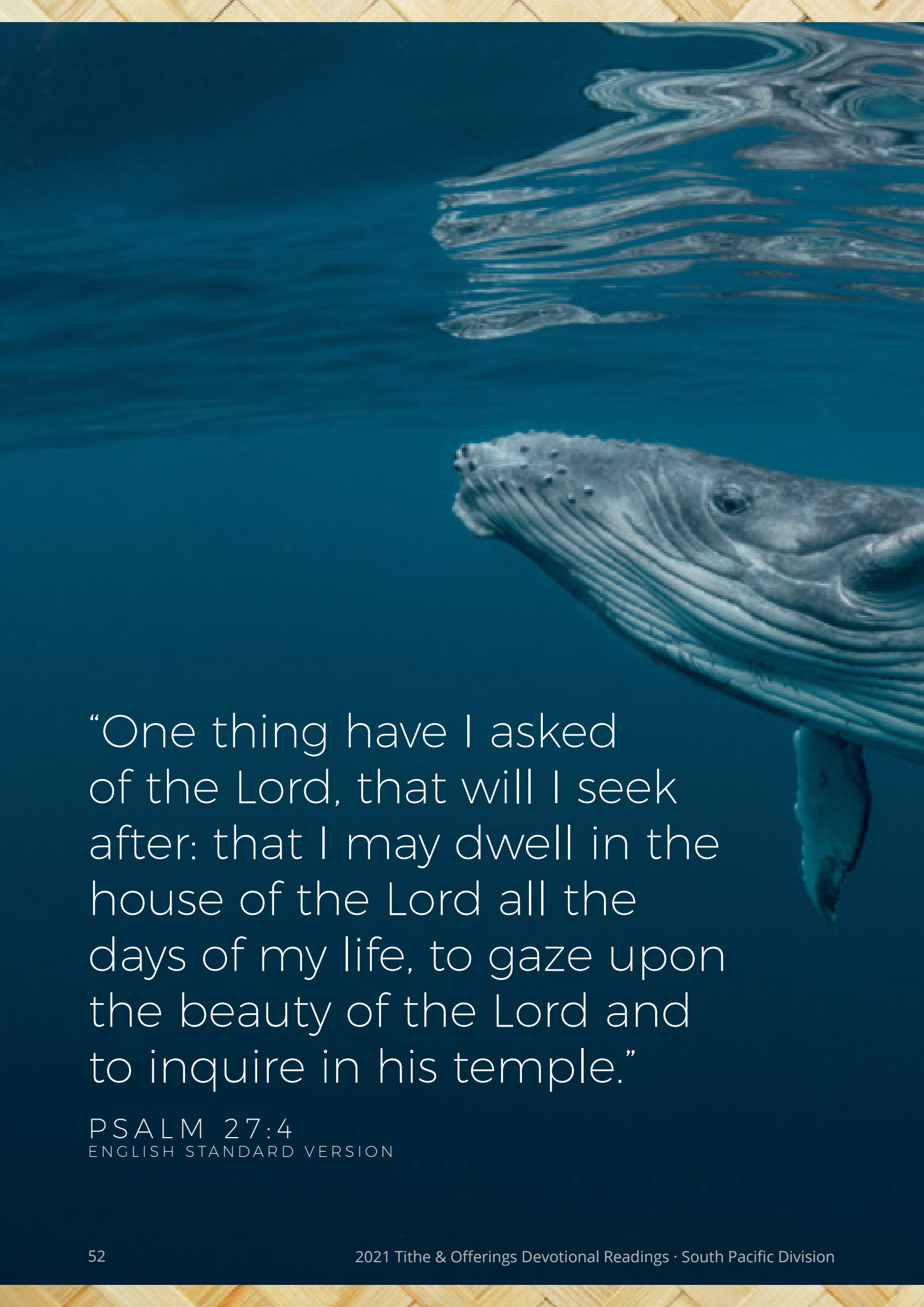
But hardships were constant. One day Bates didn't have anything to eat at home. He pled with God and promised to remain faithful no matter what happened. That day an envelope

arrived with enough money to sustain him. God had inspired someone to send this money in preparation for the day Bates needed it most.

As he continued to study with friends, Bates discovered the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath and shared this with his fellow believers, James and Ellen White. This small group of leaders soon established the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has grown into a worldwide movement today.

Joseph Bates put God first, even when he was laughed at. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

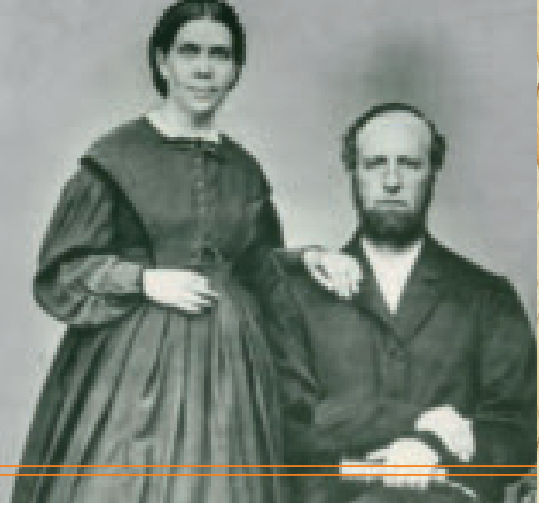
A humpback whale is shown swimming in deep blue water, viewed from below. The whale's head and back are visible, with its characteristic white markings and a large, curved hump. The water is clear and deep blue, with some ripples on the surface. The whale is swimming towards the left of the frame.

“One thing have I asked
of the Lord, that will I seek
after: that I may dwell in the
house of the Lord all the
days of my life, to gaze upon
the beauty of the Lord and
to inquire in his temple.”

PSALM 27:4
ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION



33



August 14, 2021

WHEN JAMES & ELLEN WHITE PUT GOD FIRST

James and Ellen White were young when they decided to put God first. This cost them everything they had, but they didn't give up. What can we learn from James and Ellen White today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

James White was ordained as a minister in 1843 after 1000 people joined the Advent movement through his preaching. He worked tirelessly to spread the good news that Jesus was coming back in 1844.

Ellen was a debilitated young woman who had suffered an accident in her childhood. Her family made a decision to believe the Bible rather than the traditions of their church. Because they put God first, her family was forced out of the church and community they had known for years.

James and Ellen met just after the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, and were married in 1846. Because of their dedication to the truth, the Whites did not have a home of their own for the first six years of their marriage, living at times with her parents or with friends.

In November 1848, Ellen White was shown in vision that James should begin to print a paper, and that it would grow until its light would shine around the world. Printing was expensive and seemed impossible for them. But they decided to put God first and the funds began to come in from the readers whose lives were transformed.

Beginning in 1849, James published *The Present Truth*. It became *The Review and Herald* in

1850. Through the sacrifice of the small group of believers, the movement that focused on the whole Bible began to grow. In 1863, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was organised.

James White put God first in everything. He never finished high school but went on to found four journals, two publishing houses, and one college, now Andrews University. He organised a denomination, served as its leader and published its hymnals. As a spare time entrepreneur, he bought and sold real estate, ran a nursery and drove mules from Texas to Kansas on the Chisholm Trail.

Ellen White was a visionary in more ways than one. She was instrumental in confirming the study of scripture and strengthening the administrative structure of the fast-growing Adventist Church. But putting God first always requires sacrifices. James and Ellen White didn't give up even when they lost two beautiful sons to illness.

James and Ellen White put God first, even when it cost them everything. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



August 21, 2021

WHEN JOHN ANDREWS PUT GOD FIRST

John Andrews was so competent he could have become wealthy and powerful. Instead, he put God first and sacrificed everything to take Present Truth to the world. What can we learn from John Andrews today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

John Andrews was a very capable man. When he was 13 years old, he was converted and accepted Jesus as his Saviour. He cultivated a love for the Bible early in life and he taught himself to read the Bible in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

When he studied the Sabbath message, he became convicted of its truth and decided to dedicate his life to understanding and preaching it. He helped to formulate many of the doctrines and structural documentation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. By putting God first, John Andrews dedicated his intellect and energy to serve the remnant church of Bible prophecy.

When the church decided to sponsor a missionary to Europe, John Andrews was the most capable man to do it. Despite mourning the death of his wife, Andrews gave up everything he had built and answered the call to take his family overseas. He understood the risk of poverty and disease. He was aware of the hardship to be faced. But John Andrews persevered.

In 1874, he sailed to Europe with his two children, Charles and Mary. Even though they were only teenagers, the children proved to be extraordinary young pioneers in Switzerland, editing, translating, setting type, helping tirelessly

to establish the international missionary journal, *Les Signes des Temps*—The Signs of the Times.

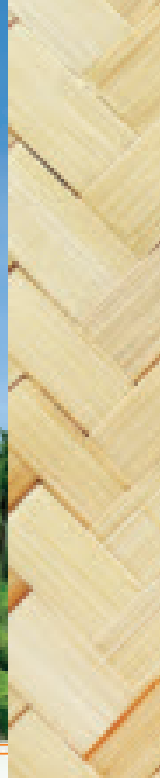
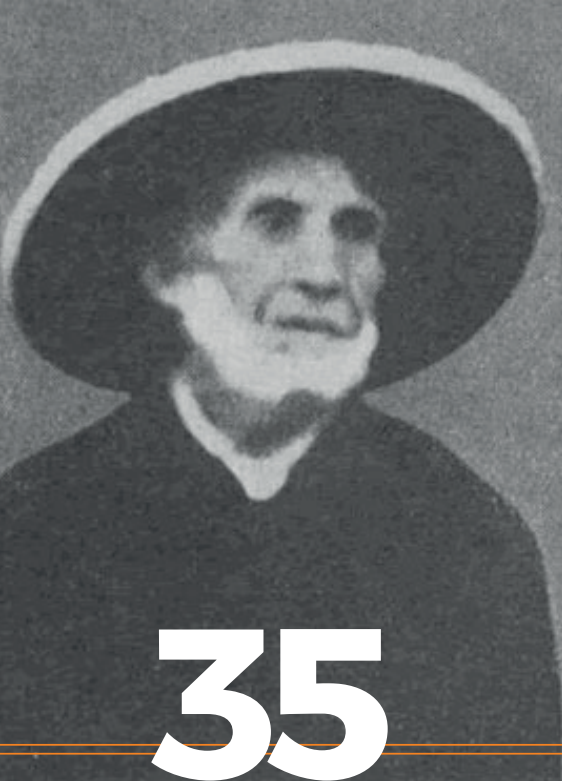
In 1878, John Andrews attended the General Conference session and took Mary with him because he was certain that she had contracted tuberculosis. As soon as he arrived at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, his fear was confirmed. Alone in Europe, Charles wrote to his father “Our separation will be but short and then if faithful we shall meet our loved ones. So Pa, don’t feel discouraged. We pray much for you.”

John Andrews kept a vigil by her bedside during Mary’s last days. Mary Andrews passed to her rest at only 17 years of age. He returned to Europe but also died of tuberculosis a few years later.

John Andrews was the foremost intellectual in the early Adventist movement and his contributions were largely responsible for the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today there are more than 162,000 Adventist congregations in 207 countries and territories. Our hearts are grateful to this man who always put God first.

John Andrews put God first, even when it cost him. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



35

August 28, 2021

WHEN ABRAM LA RUE PUT GOD FIRST

Abram La Rue put God first, even when others thought he was too old to be a missionary. What can we learn from Abram La Rue today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In 1883, Abram La Rue was a 65-year-old shepherd and woodcutter from California. He had an ambition to take the gospel to China. When he wrote to the General Conference, they said he was too old. They also said that they didn't have the money to send him. Still determined to go, La Rue negotiated his way onto a ship where he could work his way to Hong Kong. He arrived there in 1888 and began working as a colporteur for the next 14 years.

From 1888 to 1902, Father La Rue, as he was now generally called, stood alone. On February 2, 1902, Brother and Sister J. N. Anderson and Miss Ida Thompson arrived to help him. Soon after, nine people who had been led into the truth largely through Brother La Rue's efforts, were baptised. It was time to take Present Truth to China's mainland.

La Rue was a true follower of Christ, dedicated to prayer and devotion. He was patient, sympathetic and constant. His standing for 14 years alone in a distant land, carrying on a self-supporting

work, shows that he had the stamina needed in pioneering work. Despite the difficulties, La Rue put God first. A few days before his death, he willed most of the little money he had to the mission in China. He gave his all to the cause he loved.

Abram La Rue was buried in Hong Kong where he had worked for 15 years. Although he did not actually set foot in China as a missionary, his pioneering work played an important role in laying the foundation for the entry of Adventism into this great land of the Orient.

Abram La Rue put God first, even when other didn't believe in him. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



September 4, 2021

WHEN C. F. E. THOMPSON PUT GOD FIRST

C. F. E. Thompson put God first, even when uncertainty was a constant reality. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

C. F. E. Thompson was a young Jamaican man who migrated to Sierra Leone where he became acquainted with the Adventist message. He was baptised in 1907 by D. C. Babcock and served as a faithful worker for the church in Sierra Leone.

Soon after his baptism, Brother Thompson visited Ghana for a short mission trip in 1909 to conduct a series of meetings among the Nsimbia people in Kickam and Axim, but returned to Sierra Leone after the meeting.

Meanwhile, things were not going well in Ghana. The missionary teacher—Mrs French—passed away from a fever. Her husband was advised to go home and take care of his health. Disappointment set in as it seemed that there would be no one to carry on the work in Ghana.

Who would continue spreading the Advent message in Ghana? Thomson responded: “I will go.” He was advised to drop his work in Sierra Leone and go to Ghana to continue the work

that had been done by the French family. This wasn’t an easy decision as there were many uncertainties. But Thompson was the kind of man who put God first.

Brother Thompson arrived in Ghana to take his post in February, 1910, where he worked honourably for two years. He was only 36 years old when he gave his last breath in 1912. He died from Bright’s disease on March 25, 1912.

After putting God first in his short life, Brother Thompson now sleeps in the Lord. Soon he will come back to life so his eyes can see the second coming of Jesus.

C. F. E. Thompson put God first, even when uncertainty prevailed. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



37

September 11, 2021

WHEN GEORGE KING PUT GOD FIRST

George King put God first, even when the church rejected him as a preacher. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

George King believed God had called him to preach the good news of salvation to every person alive. This was 1880 and James White was still alive, so King decided to ask him.

James and Ellen White invited him to their home. They were certain Brother King was devoted to God and his calling, but were uncertain that the young man had the education or talent to become a preacher. Two weeks later, James White approached Richard and Hulda Godsmark after a worship service and shared his concerns, asking them to take Brother King and determine whether he could become a preacher.

George King moved in with the Godsmark family and they arranged a time when the young man would preach to them in their family room. These were agonising times for him. His supplications could be heard before sunrise and he would practice in the barn for hours, despite the cold.

The day came and the chairs were arranged. The sermon was a disaster. They made it clear to him that he could not be a preacher.

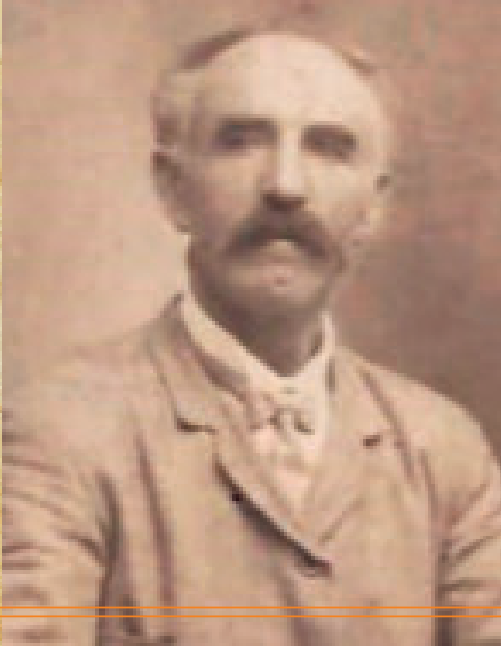
Rejection isn't easy. But George King was the kind of man who put God first in everything, even when it means being humble enough to accept

rejection. It would soon become clear that George was called to become a fireside preacher. Armed with saving literature, he began visiting house to house to share the good news of salvation and sell the tracts and books he carried with him. This was called colporteuring and Adventist mission would never be the same again.

For nearly 30 years, until his death in 1906, George King trained hundreds of book salesmen in North and South America and the West Indies. King's methods influenced pioneering leaders in literature ministry around the globe, including William Arnold in Australia, Abram La Rue in Hong Kong, Albert Stauffer in Brazil, Herbert Meyers in Burma, and Robert Caldwell in the Philippines. By 1886, when the church's ministerial workforce was still counted in dozens, 400 Adventist colporteurs around the world sold books and penny tracts door to door.

George King put God first, even when he was rejected as a preacher. His courage and humility inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



38

September 18, 2021

WHEN ALBERT STAUFFER PUT GOD FIRST

Albert Stauffer put God first when he left his own country to become a missionary. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Albert could have continued to enjoy the safety and comfort of his home. But Albert was the kind of person who put God first, so he accepted the call from the General Conference to travel to Brazil to sell Present Truth literature.

This was 1894 and success was uncertain as he had to survive from the sale of the books and tracts he had with him. However, his task was even more difficult because they were not printed in the native Portuguese language. Thankfully, other missionaries establish a printing press and created a system to write, translate and print new materials.

Two years later, Albert and a fellow colporteur went to an evangelical church service in Curitiba, the capital of the State of Parana, in the south of Brazil. Mrs Ana Diedrich Otto was a much sought-after midwife in the city and was present at the worship service. She was disturbed when she saw two young people attending the service whom no one knew. Clearly they were not from the city.

The following weekend, Mrs Otto noticed that the two young men were present at the church again.

She then listened to them and decided to buy the book they were presenting—"Life of Jesus" in German.

The following Sunday they met again and spent the whole morning studying the Bible. As a result, Mrs Ana and her husband Oscar Emilio Otto accepted the Adventist faith.

Colporteurs have dedicated their lives to distributing life-saving literature throughout Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and many other countries in South American and the world. Every morning, from house to house they put God first with their lives. Without them, the Three Angels Messages would not be present in more than 200 countries and territories as it is today.

Albert Stauffer put God first everyday as a colporteur. His courage inspires us. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

39



September 25, 2021

WHEN WILLIAM A. SPICER PUT GOD FIRST

William A. Spicer put God first as he travelled the world and set the DNA of Adventist mission. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Spicer was only 22 years old when he sailed to England to establish the work of the church there. He then returned to the United States to serve the General Conference as the foreign mission secretary where he actively pursued various expansions like securing the land in Zimbabwe where Solusi University operates today.

Pastor Spicer then went to India in 1898, where he was one of three ordained Adventist ministers in the whole of Southern Asia. He founded the Adventist periodical there and established a good foundation for church growth.

Returning to the United States in 1902, Spicer became the secretary of the General Conference. One of the key responsibilities of the Secretariate is sending missionaries abroad, which Spicer did for 20 years. This is a difficult task because of the logistics of sending and returning families to and from every continent. Spicer created the infrastructure that allowed the Seventh-day Adventist Church to expand.

God then called Elder Spicer to become the president of the General Conference for another

eight years. Spicer always put God first. Despite the difficulty and discomfort associated with global travel in the early 20th century, he travelled internationally in almost every year of his ministry.

Sometimes putting God first involves large sacrifices we make in a single moment. William A. Spicer showed through his ministry how a life dedicated to putting God first in everything has a tremendous impact in the world.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church still sends and supports hundreds of missionary families who are taking the Adventist message to every tribe, language and people group. Spicer created this infrastructure for mission, but you and I can maintain it through our tithe and offerings. What a privilege to put God first in everything we do.

William A. Spicer put God first year after year throughout his life. His resilience inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

4TH QUARTER

**CURRENT-DAY CHARACTERS
THAT DECIDED TO
PUT #GODFIRST
TODAY**





40

October 2, 2021

ACE & ROENNA SINTOS PUT GOD FIRST

Ace and Roenna Sintos decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. That's when their transformation began. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Ace and Roenna are from the Philippines. They built careers as government employees, holding high positions for many years. When Roenna suffered an ectopic pregnancy, their world of security and comfort came crashing down. Ace had no other alternative but to resign and take care of her.

When Roenna was well enough to return to work, she resumed her career in education. But Ace had another plan. He felt called by God to dedicate himself full time to media ministries. Unfortunately, this new calling didn't pay as well as his previous position. Nowhere close.

Ace and Roenna studied the possibilities and the math didn't seem to add up. If Ace dedicated himself to media ministry, they would have to sacrifice their quality of life. Even then, nothing seemed certain. Would they have the courage to put God first?

At first everything was as difficult as they expected. To make matters worst, they had to

invest in technology to be able to serve better. They were living a simple life in the full assurance that they were at the centre of God's will. This moved them to dedicate all their gifts to God.

Many years have now passed and the transformation is unbelievable. Both Ace and Roenna now serve full time as key leaders of the Digital Evangelism Initiative, a global project of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They still lead a simple life and are now in a much better financial situation than they were when working for the government. They even have all the technology necessary to work for Jesus.

Ace and Roenna put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



October 9, 2021

PAVEL & VALENTINA DMITRIENKO PUT GOD FIRST

Pastor Pavel and Valentina decided to put God first even through their struggles. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Pastor Pavel and Valentina had a 9 mile (14.5 kilometre) trek to serve the people in a house church. That risky trip made them tired and hungry. But it was impossible to find bread on store shelves in Sukhumi, capital of Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia.

It was 1993 and a months-long armed conflict between Georgian and Abkhaz forces had resulted in a major food shortage. Some bakeries sold bread at night, but they were sold out every time Valentina dared to make the risky trip.

One day after the worship service, Maya—a church member—gave Valentina bread, but she refused to accept it. Maya insisted and cried. So Valentina divided the loaf into two, half for her and half for Maya.

Valentina and her husband were happy since they had not eaten bread for six months. She was thinking of eating it with barley soup.

While walking home, they met an old, thin, and filthy woman begging for food, saying she was starving to death. Valentina remembered the joy Maya had experienced when she had shared the bread with her. Would they have the courage to share even in such a difficult situation?

Valentina gave the half loaf she had in her bag, and the older woman accepted it with tears of joy.

Valentina and Pavel continued on their way home, joyful smiles lighting their faces. They were happy they had been able to give their precious bread to the elderly woman. Sometimes, putting God first involves sharing what you have with others, even when resources are hard to come by.

Pastor Pavel and Valentina put God first despite the sacrifice. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



October 16, 2021

LEE YOUNG CHAN PUT GOD FIRST

Lee Young Chan decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Lee was baptised in South Korea when he was 17 years old, but it took another few years before he fully understood the transformative power of being a faithful steward. After finishing college, he decided to put God first from the moment he was offered a job.

Turning down job opportunities in order to faithfully keep the Sabbath, he eventually found work as a delivery man. Lee was certain God would provide everything he needed. This certainty didn't come from a bargain where God will bless only if Lee continued to be faithful. Rather Lee believed he should be faithful with his tithes and offerings precisely because God had already blessed him with those resources.

Putting God first in tithes and offerings was an acknowledgment of God's providence and blessings.

When Lee eventually had a family of his own, God provided a comfortable house and a car that he now uses for church ministry. Lee attributes all these blessings to earnest prayer.

If God is faithful to those who are NOT faithful to Him, imagine how much more faithful He is to those who follow and devote their lives to Him! Lee's story is a reminder that when we dedicate

our lives to putting God first, even the sacrifices bring meaning and learning. Like the prophet Daniel, it is possible to dedicate your life at a young age and keep true to that commitment.

Ellen White put it this way: "Every good thing of earth was placed here by the bountiful hand of God as an expression of His love to man. The poor are His, and the cause of religion is His. The gold and the silver are the Lord's; and He could rain them from heaven if He chose. But instead of this He has made man His steward, entrusting him with means, not to be hoarded, but to be used in benefiting others. He thus makes man the medium through which to distribute His blessings on earth. God planned the system of beneficence, in order that man might become like his Creator, benevolent and unselfish in character, and finally be a partaker with Christ of the eternal, glorious reward" (Counsels on Stewardship, page 15).

Lee put God first throughout his adult life. His determination inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



October 23, 2021

BRENTON JACKSON PUT GOD FIRST

Brenton Jackson decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Brenton was born in New Zealand to a loving Adventist family. He loved Jesus and understood how much God loved him. However, when he was 13 years old, his world started to collapse. His parents divorced.

This affected his life so profoundly that he left the church and lived for many years without any connection with Christianity. But his life took another turn when he found himself jobless, on the brink of homelessness, and with nothing left but \$200 to his name. "How did this happen?" he asked himself repeatedly.

But, at his lowest moment, he remembered the love of God he experienced as a child. He remembered the sacrifice his parents made in putting God first with everything they earned. Brenton realised they never lacked anything at home, so he made a decision that would transform his life.

Entrusting his future to God, Brenton donated his \$200 to a local Adventist Church. Like the widow in biblical times, Jesus watched as Brenton gave Him everything he had. What happened next was nothing short of a miracle.

Everything Brenton needed was provided . . . and it is still provided today. Brenton is a fully devoted

disciple, always putting God first in his life. He is thankful that everything he has comes from God.

Ellen White reminded us: "The Lord does not need our offerings. We cannot enrich Him by our gifts. Says the psalmist: 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of His mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no other" (Counsels on Stewardship, page 18).

Brenton put God first throughout his adult life. His determination inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



44

October 30, 2021

SARAH PUT GOD FIRST

Sarah decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from her story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

When her husband left her, Sarah knew she had to find a way to support herself. But she didn't know where to look for a job. She prayed for direction, and God impressed her to share His Word with the people living around her. India is not a Christian country, so this task was difficult.

Sarah began visiting her neighbours in their homes. "I prayed for the sick, and they got well," she said. "I prayed for those who had evil spirits, and the spirits went away. I prayed for those who couldn't have children, and they were able to start a family."

Not having a source of income was a tremendous sacrifice. But how could she abandon people who needed God so much? She put God first and hoped God would provide what she needed, even if it took a while.

Some people were happy for Sarah to visit them, but others didn't like someone coming to their home. One day, Sarah visited a family who was worshipping their god. They demanded that she join their worship, but she refused. Angry, a young woman plunged Sarah's hand into a pot of boiling oil.

"I prayed," says Sarah, "and when I removed my

hand from the oil, it wasn't burned at all."

The next day, the father of the young woman called Sarah to apologise. He told her that he had punished his daughter and asked Sarah to pray for his family. Sarah was happy to uplift this family in prayer.

"Now they are changed," Sarah says. "They have accepted God, and they worship with us in our church." There were five families who witnessed Sarah escape serious injury that day. They were amazed, and they too have requested her prayers.

Today Sarah works as a mission pioneer supported by the offerings given by Seventh-day Adventists from all around the world. Her ministry is introducing many people to Jesus and His saving grace.

Sarah put God first in her most difficult moments. Her courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



November 6, 2021

ABRAHAM PUT GOD FIRST

Abraham decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Abraham is a wealthy Maasai in Tanzania. This African tribe is well known for their cattle. There is nothing more precious to the Maasai than their cattle. It is common for a Maasai to mourn the death of a bull louder and longer than the loss of a family member. After all, the value of a bull is more than US\$1000.

When Abraham learned of the love of Jesus through Adventist World Radio, he decided to put God first in his life, despite the consequences. That's when he gave 100 cows as tithe to the Lord.

His neighbours and friends could not understand it. They were certain he had gone mad.

Immediately after Abraham returned the tithe of 100 cows, something unusual happened to his cattle. His cows started giving birth to twins. Cows usually give birth to only one calf at a time, but all of Abraham's cows began to give birth to twins. Abraham had given away 100 cows, and now he had more cows than before.

His neighbours were shocked. "Call your pastor, I also want to give a tithe," one neighbour said. "We want our cows to have twins, too," said another.

Abraham marvelled over the way God was

blessing him and decided he didn't want to return just one tithe. He wanted to give two tithes. He called the Adventist pastor to come for a visit.

Abraham took the visitors to his field and began to count out two tithes.

"One, two, three, four, five," Abraham counted the cows in his herd. "Six, seven, eight, nine." When he reached the 10th cow, he instructed a helper to put a tag on its ear so that cow would be set aside for tithe.

"That one is for the Lord," he said. Then he counted an 11th cow and told his helper to tag its ear too. This would be his second tithe. Then he started counting from "one" again.

Abraham put God first despite the opinions of his friends and neighbours. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



46

November 13, 2021

ZUKI & PALI PUT GOD FIRST

Zuki and Pali decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. That's when their transformation began. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Zuki and Pali are successful architects and property developers in South Africa. They decided to invest their savings in building a Seventh-day Adventist Church for the glory of God. But that's when things started going wrong.

The business experienced great difficulty and they couldn't see a way forward. Despite the risk of losing everything, they put God first and continued to invest in the church building. Their lawyer and accountant called them crazy but that didn't deter them.

Putting God first when everything is going well is difficult enough, but to put God first when things appear to be going wrong seems impossible. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can someone be faithful in the midst of adversity and uncertainty.

Zuki and Pali would constantly drive to the church construction site. "We would spend two hours there, just walking around as the people were working," Zuki says. "Then so much peace would come, and we would feel assured that this was what we must do, no matter the cost to ourselves."

But the situation was unsustainable. The bank had a set date to repossess their car and their

home. What would they do? Where would they go? How far would God allow this to continue?

Three days before the repossessions were set to happen, God stepped in. Zuki received a call that would propel them to deliver a large contract in Durban, South Africa.

The church building is now complete and people are worshipping there every week. Their business is booming again, and the couple's financial concerns are in the past. They continue to sponsor and help build other projects as God leads.

Ellen White wrote about this: "What if some become poor in investing their means in the work? Christ for your sakes became poor; but you are securing for yourselves eternal riches, a treasure in heaven that faileth not. Your means is far safer there than if deposited in the bank, or invested in houses and lands. It is laid up in bags that wax not old. No thief can approach it, no fire consume it" (Counsels on Stewardship, page 41).

Zuki and Pali put God first. Their faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



November 20, 2021

ADVENT PRESS PUTS GOD FIRST

Advent Press decided to put God first. What can we learn from this story that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Advent Press is the Seventh-day Adventist publishing house in Ghana. The company was heavily in debt to the government of Ghana, suppliers and the West-central African Division to the tune of US\$2 million. The whole compound was muddy and the machines were obsolete. It was unable to pay the salaries of its workers. Few saw the potential and they were set to auction their assets.

But new management agreed with the staff a series of drastic changes that would put God first in their lives individually and as a company. They made arrangements to pay their debt in 10 years, knowing it would take a miracle to achieve this. Yet the debt was paid in seven years and today Advent Press is a shining example of efficiency in both business and faith.

The first step was a collective and individual commitment to return tithe, even if they couldn't afford it. The second step was set up prayer bands in different places. They believed and trusted that God would answer their prayers. Another action was to cut salaries by 50 per cent and maintain this for five years.

The miracle wouldn't have happened without the staff, including management, putting God first in everything. To their surprise, God started to answer their prayers. A volunteer offered

to sponsor the printing of the Sabbath school quarterlies. This became the turning point for the press.

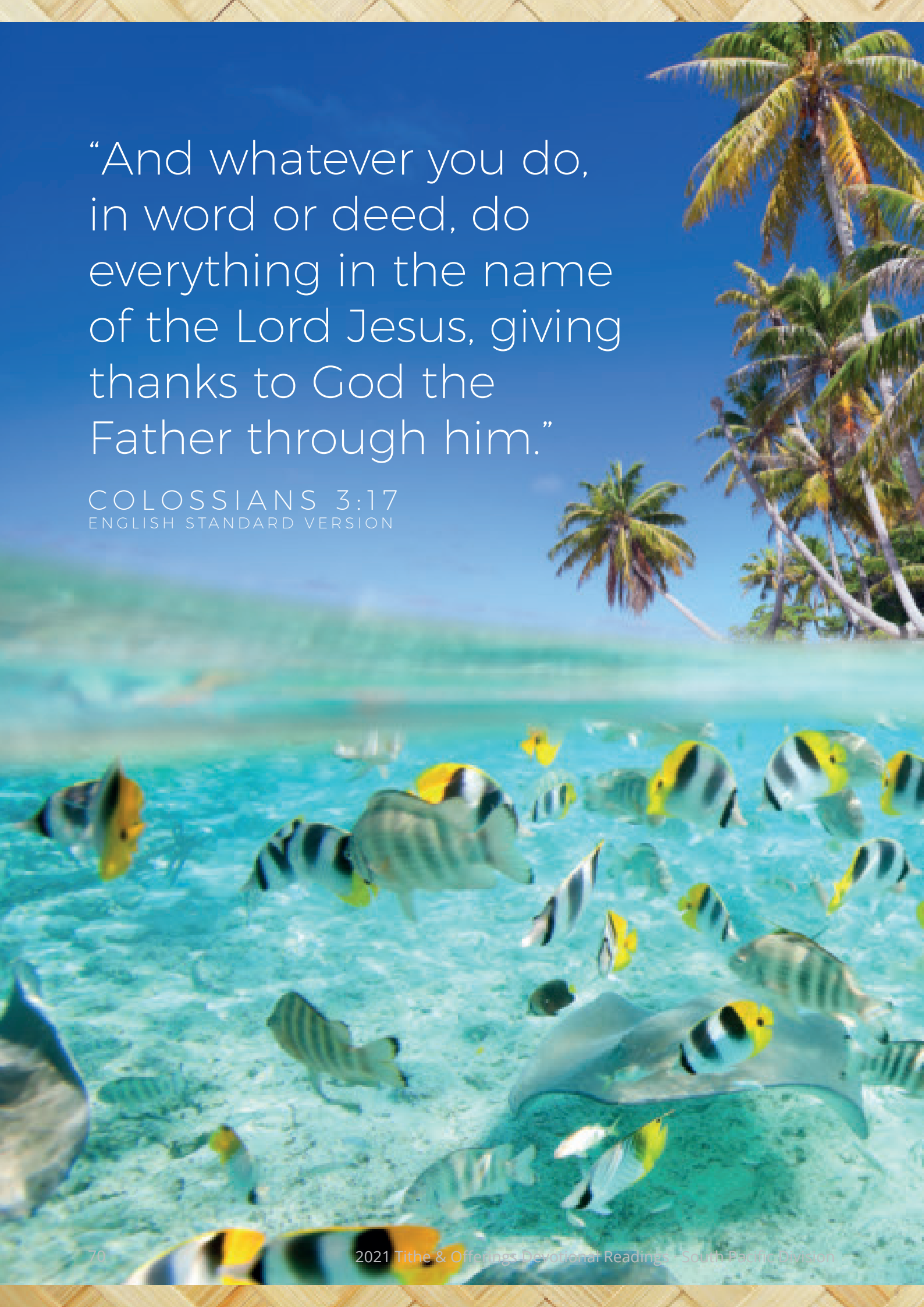
To the glory of God, the press, which was nearly auctioned off, is now one of the best Adventist publishing houses in the Adventist world—first in Africa and 13th in the world. It has sponsored one pastor at Valley View University into the gospel ministry. Currently, it is sponsoring another student at Adventist University of Africa.

All the obsolete machines have been replaced at the cost of US\$2.5 million. The once muddy compound is now paved, the buildings have been renovated and a six units have been built for staff accommodation. Today, payment of salaries is no issue, even in the midst of COVID19. The press has its own delivery vans and a standby generator.

Indeed, faithfulness in returning tithe, prayer, commitment and dedication has turned the fortunes of the press.

Advent Press put God first. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

A vibrant tropical scene featuring a clear blue sky, several tall palm trees on the right, and a large school of striped fish swimming in shallow, turquoise water. The fish are silver with black and yellow stripes. The background shows a sandy beach and a line of green vegetation under a bright blue sky.

“And whatever you do,
in word or deed, do
everything in the name
of the Lord Jesus, giving
thanks to God the
Father through him.”

COLOSSIANS 3:17
ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION





November 27, 2021

JOE & SUSAN PUT GOD FIRST

Joe and Susan decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Joe is an IT manager in Silver Spring, Maryland. Parking at home after a weekend camping trip, Joe Marcellino saw a trail of oil going up the street from his Isuzu Trooper SUV. Joe called his friend Eric for help.

Eric found the oil had spewed from the oil filter's rubber gasket and warned that the engine had probably sustained significant damage. He estimated that repairs could cost more than US\$3000.

Recently married, Joe and Susan had about \$3000 in the bank. But Joe was reluctant to spend the money on the SUV because the couple had fallen behind in returning tithe and owed about \$1500 for the past three months.

Susan saw no room for discussion. "We need to give our first fruits," she said. Joe and Susan prayed and decided to return tithe rather than repair the SUV.

After this decision, Eric contacted Joe and advised him to contact the gas station that had changed his oil shortly before the camping trip. The gas station sent a mechanic to Joe's house and, after an inspection, took responsibility for the damaged engine. The gas station's insurance paid them \$3000.

When the repairs were finished, Joe received the bill from his mechanic for \$1500. To his surprise, the \$3000 from the gas station's insurance had been enough to cover the cost of the repairs and

his tithe. Joe and Susan are certain that putting God first will lead to miraculous and unexpected results.

The next miracle was selling the same car. Within a week, Joe was approached by Wayne, the purchasing director at the Adventist Church headquarters. Wayne asked Joe whether he would be willing to sell the SUV.

"A missionary in Africa has asked specifically to buy an Isuzu Trooper," he said. "Are you willing to sell it?" He gave Joe a fair price and had the vehicle shipped to Africa. Seeing Joe's concerns, he promised to keep him posted on what happened to the SUV. The vehicle had 40,000 miles (about 64,000 kilometres) at the time of the sale. After about 18 months had gone by, Wayne shared with Joe the SUV had done more than 100,000 miles (about 160,000 kilometres). A few years later, Wayne said the SUV had passed 300,000 miles (about 480,000 kilometres).

"It is the Lord who kept it going for this missionary!" Joe said. Now 61, Joe said the experience taught him an important lesson about mission and the importance of returning tithe first.

Joe and Susan put God first. Their faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

December 4, 2021

JUNIOR & STEPHANIE PUT GOD FIRST

Junior and Stephanie decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Junior and Stephanie Roberts are owners of catering services in Jamaica. They committed their lives to God and were baptised together a month after their wedding.

The couple made a tough decision to put God first in their business decisions. Shellfish and wine were favourites and deciding to stop serving sea food and alcohol could represent the end of their business. Beyond this, they would need to stop all business activities on Sabbath. What if clients complained and went to their competitors instead? Did they have the courage to put God first regardless of the consequences?

Despite their fear and uncertainty about the future, they put God first in their business. At first, their business struggled. It's almost impossible to survive because most clients wanted exquisite seafood and alcohol. And the events mostly fall on Friday evenings and Saturdays. That took a cut in their income.

With their faith tried several times, they felt the Lord's leading. Today both of them had never been happier and their company is flourishing. Their income became more stable and they know what kind of clientele to look for. Ellen White wrote about this: "The world and the churches are breaking God's law, and the warning must be given, 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without

mixture into the cup of His indignation.' With such a curse hanging over the transgressors of God's holy Sabbath, should we not show greater earnestness, greater zeal? Why are we so indifferent, so selfish, so engrossed in temporal interests? Is our interest separated from Jesus? Has the truth become too pointed, too close in its application to our souls; and like the disciples of Christ who were offended, have we turned away to the beggarly elements of the world? We spend money for selfish purposes, and gratify our own desires, while souls are dying without a knowledge of Jesus and the truth. How long shall this continue? All should have a living faith,—a faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. Men and women are ready to do anything to indulge self, but how little are they willing to do for Jesus, and for their fellow men who are perishing for the want of the truth!" (Counsels on Stewardship, page 51).

Junior and Stephanie were tempted to put themselves first but they were faithful in putting God first. Their faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



50

December 11, 2021

FERNANDO PUT GOD FIRST

Fernando decided to put God first despite his fear and uncertainty about the future. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Dr Fernando is a physician in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. Our story begins when he watched a video about an Adventist missionary family in Mongolia. He longed to be a missionary himself, but his commitments in Brazil made it impossible for him to go.

He talked with his wife and she agreed to increase their mission offerings in their local Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was a difficult decision to make, but they soon discovered the joy of putting God first through mission offerings.

Six months later, they gathered as a family to watch another video sent from Mongolia. In the video, the missionaries were thanking his family for the sacrifice in their offerings. He saw the church and studio that was built from their offerings.

Fernando and his family consider themselves to be missionaries through their offerings and cannot imagine how they could go back to their lives before this commitment.

Ellen White wrote about this: “Has not the time come when we should begin to cut down our possessions? May God help you who can do something now to make an investment in the bank of heaven. We do not ask a loan, but a freewill offering,—a return to the Master of His own goods which He has lent you. If you love God

supremely, and your neighbour as yourself, we believe you will give tangible proofs of the same in freewill offerings for our mission work. There are souls to be saved, and may you be co-workers with Jesus Christ in saving these souls for whom Christ has given His life. The Lord will bless you in the good fruit you may bear to His glory. May the same Holy Spirit which inspired the Bible take possession of your hearts, leading you to love His word, which is spirit and life. May it open your eyes to discover the things of the Spirit of God. The reason there is so much dwarfed religion today is because people have not brought practical self-denial and self-sacrifice into their lives” (Counsels on Stewardship, page 51).

Fernando and his family put God first. His faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



December 18, 2021

WHEN YOU PUT GOD FIRST

Do you remember when you put God first despite your fear and uncertainty about the future? What can we learn from your story that will help the rest of us put God first in our own lives today?

Do you remember when you fell in love with Jesus for the first time? For each of us, there was that first moment when we were overwhelmed by the love of Jesus. Nothing mattered more to you than following Jesus and acknowledging Him as king over your life.

You made every sacrifice to keep the Sabbath holy. You ate the right things and read the right books. You watched the right videos and resisted the wrong music. You avoided bad websites and longed to pray and talk to your God.

Unfortunately for you and your family, that didn't last long. Your first love faded and a war began between guilt and grace that would last until today. What would you give to get back to that first love you once had?

As it turns out, there are things you can give that will take you right back in 40 days or less. Namely, your time and your money. These are your most valued treasure and, unless you put them in the kingdom of God first, there is no other way of giving your heart fully to Jesus.

Here is how Jesus himself put it: "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" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Hollywood has convinced many of us that our heart comes first. This is why we always wait to feel like doing something before we do it. We will never feel like giving tithe and offering unless we do it consistently, because our hearts will only be in the kingdom of God if that is where we invest our time and money.

If you want to experience that first love again, start returning God's tithe faithfully today; set a promise (offering) and keep to it; spend time with God's word and prayer; and dedicate your time to helping fulfil the mission of the church and also to alleviate the suffering of others. Tithe, offering, worship, mission, compassion. Start doing this whether you feel like it or not. Then observe over the next few weeks how much your love for God will increase and how much easier it will be to follow Jesus.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

You have put God first. Your faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



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December 25, 2021

WHEN GOD PUT YOU FIRST

Some 2000 years ago, God put you first and gave His only begotten Son so you could live forever. The birth of Jesus is a reminder that it was God who put you first, before you even knew He existed.

The gospel story is NOT the story of you loving God so that God can take you to a better place. It is no wonder many of us have struggled to believe God truly loves us.

The gospel story is the story of God loving you even before you were born. It's the story of God putting YOU first. It's the unbelievable story of the ruler of the universe giving up heaven to suffer on your behalf so you can have eternal life. The gospel story is a story of a Father: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus describes the church as His bride. For all of the failures of our church to fulfil the mission God has given us, the church is still Jesus' bride and we are called to love the church as Jesus does. We must be careful how we treat the church, always remembering how much love Jesus has for the church.

Jesus will always supply the resources needed by His bride to fulfil her mission. The interesting thing is how Jesus does this. He supplies the

church by putting the resources into your bank account and invites you to put God first by passing on the resources to the church.

Two things are clear: 1) if the church doesn't have enough resources, it may be possible it is because some of us are keeping her resources to ourselves; and 2) it explains why Jesus continues to send so many resources to those who are faithful in passing these resources to His bride.

You are also invited to realise that you are the church. Another analogy is that we are the body of Christ and therefore, when we use our best talents, we are building the body of Christ. This means Christ will interact with your community through you.

When Jesus was born some 2000 years ago, He declared to the universe that He was putting you first. Today God is pleading with you to put Him first. He cannot wait to bless you beyond your wildest dreams.

For this coming year, His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Pr Sam Neves serves as the Associate Director of Communication of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church. His main responsibilities are global branding and digital marketing. He was born in Brazil and moved to England as a teenager, where he later served as a local church pastor for 11 years. Today he lives in Silver Spring, MD in the United States with his wife Amy and their 3 boys. Pr Sam truly believes that Jesus is coming soon.



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