

## PUTTING GOD FIRST

A woman bought a parrot in a pet store. She wanted companionship, someone to talk with. The next day she returned to the store and said, "He won't talk." The store manager asked, "Does he have a mirror in his cage? Parrots love mirrors." She bought a mirror and left. The next day she came back and said, "The bird is still not talking." "How about a ladder? Parrots love ladders. When he is happy he will talk." She bought a ladder and left. The next day she was back complaining that even with the mirror and ladder the bird was not talking. The manager said, "I know what you need, the bird wants a swing. He'll be happy when he has a swing and he'll talk. She reluctantly bought a swing and left. Sure enough, the next day she was back. She had a sad face. "The parrot died," she said. "I'm sorry," the manager said, "please tell me did he ever say anything before he died?" The woman replied, "Yes, in a weak voice he asked me, 'Don't they sell any food at that pet store?'" Sometimes we forget the main thing.

During a past presidential election in the US, one person said, "It's now politically correct to believe in family values, but it's not politically correct to get specific about them." Because then, all of a sudden, you start dividing people up. Newsweek was right on with their cover a couple of weeks ago "Whose Values?" Whose family values? -- because there are a lot of different kinds of families. When you look on television whose family values are you going to follow? the Simpsons? the Cosbys? the Waltons? People say, "We've got to get back to traditional family values". You've got to go back a whole lot further than Ozzie and Harriet to get to that.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

God has lined up the universe by universal laws. There are certain physical laws that the universe operates by like the law of gravity. If you ignore it you only hurt yourself. You have to cooperate with it. If you jump out a ten story window, and you ignore the law of gravity, you don't break God's laws they break you. Likewise there are spiritual laws.

Today we are starting our series on the Ten Commandments. They are not the ten suggestions; they are the Ten Commandments. They're not optional. God says, you do these things and things will go fine in your life. If you don't do them, you're going to really mess up. Today I want us to look at the first commandment:

Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words: 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before me.

What's the principle? Put God first. In my life and in my family. God says, I demand top priority in your life. I'm not going to play second fiddle to anyone or anything. What does it mean to "have no other gods before Me"? No other gods? I thought there was only one God. There is. The word "gods" is written with a small "g". He's not talking about "the God"; He's talking about little gods.

What is a god? A god is anything that dominates your life, anything that controls your life. Can a career be a god? You bet it can. Can another person be a god? Yes.

Today, in Canada families are dropping like flies. They're falling apart faster than we can put them together. Why are so many marriages crumbling? Because they're built on the wrong foundation. Any builder will tell you that a good foundation is essential. It doesn't matter what kind or how big of a house you want to build, without a good foundation it will not stand. Today we want to look at the foundation of putting God first in my family, in my life.

The divorce rate in America is now one out of every three marriages. But Harvard University did a study: marriages where the wedding is in a church service and the couple attend church together, the divorce rate is one out of fifty marriages. In marriages where they're married in a Christian ceremony and they go to church every week and read the Bible and pray together the divorce rate is one out of 1,105 marriages. Would you say that's a little different than one out of three? Put God first. How do you do that?

### 1. Put God FIRST in your FINANCES

Put God first in your finances. Let's start with the most difficult one.

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

God says that your checkbook reveals what's really important to you. Not what you say is important, but how you spend your money.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

God says that the first 10% of all I make goes back to Him. Why 10%? That's just what He said. The purpose is simply to teach you to put God first. Why is tithing so important? God says that if I'm not tithing God is not really first in my life. If He's not first in your finances He's really not first in your life.

When should I do it? It says it is the first fruits. I give Him the first 10% of my money on the first Sunday of the month to show that He's first in my life. "If you put Me first, I'll direct you and crown your efforts with success."

I heard of a story about a man who was really rich. He was a lawyer and very proud of his possessions. One day he parked his expensive BMW on the side of a busy street. And as he opened the door to get out, a truck sped by, hit his door and tore it off completely. He surveyed the damage and cried out, "Oh, my beautiful car is now ruined!" A passerby on the street chimed in, "Sir, forget the car, look at your arm!" Sure enough his arm had been completely torn off with the door in the accident. When he saw that it was gone, he cried out "Oh, no! My Rolex watch is gone as well!" Bad priorities...

### 2. Put God FIRST in your INTERESTS

If God's really going to be number one, you put Him first in your interests. That means in my fun times, recreation, hobbies, pass times. In everything you do, you put God first. Do it with an attitude of gratitude. If you're out playing tennis, say "Lord, thank you that You gave me arms to play tennis with and thank You that you gave me hand/eye coordination that I wouldn't have had if it weren't for You." Everything you do with an attitude of gratitude puts God first in that area. So you like to make crafts or whatever? You enjoy the gifts and abilities He's given you with a grateful heart. Whatever you do.

You can tell what a person's priorities are seeing what they get excited about. What gets you excited? That's what's important to you. You can go to a 49-ers game and get excited and they call me a fan. But if you get excited about the Lord, they call you a fanatic.

Let me go off on a bit of a tangent. One interest that people have is politics. As a pastor I am always amazed at people when it comes to elections and voting. I hear all kinds of silly things when it comes to politics. I was watching television a while back and I heard on one show an African American say that they were a Democrat because "all black people are Democrats." Really? Isn't that the same as saying I am a Republican because all white people are Republicans?

Putting God first in your life means you vote for the person Jesus would vote for. You don't base your vote on who your family votes for or whether you like the person's smile or whether you think it would benefit your occupation. You do not vote for a person based on the colour of their skin or the colour of yours. You do not vote for a person based on your gender or theirs. When you vote for a person you are voting for the party they represent. You are voting for whether that party upholds the sanctity of life and marriage. You are voting for whether the church of Jesus Christ will be better off if they are elected. God first means He owns your vote.

### 3. Put God FIRST in your RELATIONSHIPS

A few years ago some university professors gave out copies of the ten commandments to their students and asked them to arrange them in order of importance. Ninety percent of the students reversed the order, putting the commandments about how we are to treat our fellow man first and the commandments about how we are to relate to God last. The first 4 commandments are the most important. Until you put God first in your life then everything else will be out of sorts.

Proverbs 12:26 A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

If you want God first in your life you're going to have to choose your friends carefully. What does who my friends are have to do with God being first in my life? Because you become like the people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with people who take God lightly, you will tend to become a casual believer. But if you spend time with people who are committed and take God and His word seriously you will become a stronger, committed Christian.

Whoever you spend time with that is what you're going to be like. Show me your friends and I will show you your future. This is why the bible says that we are not to be unequally yoked – that believers should only date and marry other believers. It is because the person's walk with Christ is the most important thing about them. So many young people today do not understand this. They choose a person to date based on how they look, and then their personality and then, hopefully, they are Christian. This must be reversed.

When Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac he told him to go back to his homeland first. Family was first – that means our faith, our relationship with Christ. Then he tested the young women who were coming from town to the well. He asked for a drink and looked for one who would go the extra step of watering his camel. That means heart – was she a giving and kind person. Only at the end does it mention that Rebekah was beautiful.

Relationship with Jesus comes first. If you want to find a spouse, don't look in a bar. The only thing you'll find in a barn is a cow. Look in places dedicated believers hang out! Personality comes second. Remember that beauty is only skin deep. Years from now the person you marry will not look the same as they do now but their personality will be the same.

One of the indicators I notice of whether people have made good decision in marriage is how they approach the wedding. Some people spend way too much time planning the wedding and not enough time preparing for marriage.

You have people who pick the perfect dress. They book a fancy venue for the reception. They plan out the table decoration and get a beautiful cake. They spend months planning the party but the week before call me to ask if I can do the wedding. Isn't that backwards? Putting God first means that worship is more important than the party. A wedding is when two people stand before making a covenant to love one another for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death do you part. It's not about the dress or the flowers or the reception, or the cake or the invitations. If people took half the time they spent on getting married and used it to prepare for being married there would be far fewer divorces than there are today.

#### 4. Put God FIRST in your SCHEDULE

Put God first in your schedule. How do I do that? I ask Him to help me use my time wisely.

Unfortunately, often God only gets the leftovers in our lives. Like with our money, we often wait and give God only what is left over instead of the best first. E.g. the Time Management consultant. You start with the big rocks, then smaller rocks, then sand and then water. The moral is not that there is always room for more, but that the big rocks go first. God is that big rock. Spending time in personal devotions and corporate worship are priorities. Find a place to serve. You will not have satisfaction in life until you can find a place to use your God given gifts in service.

Make a daily appointment with God. If God is going to be first in your family, in your life, you need a daily appointment with God. It doesn't matter when you do it. You just need to do it.

Even Jesus felt the need for daily prayer. If He felt the need for it we need it too. "Very early in the morning...Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place where He prayed."

## 5. Put God FIRST in your TROUBLES

When you face unexpected problems and pressures, when you have a crisis, who do you turn to? God says, "Turn to Me first when you've got a problem." Many people, when they're in a tight situation, prayer is the last resort, not the first option. They do everything they can physically to try to correct the problem then they say, "I guess now all we can do is pray." Like it must really be hopeless! Prayer should not be your last resort, it should be your first option.

Psalms 50:15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

This brings up an interesting point. How do you know when God's first in your life? You stop worrying. Worry is the warning light that God is not first in my life at this particular moment. When I start worrying, it says, I'm playing God, I'm assuming responsibility He didn't intend for me to have. When God is not first in any of these areas we begin to worry about it. When He's not first in my finances I worry about them. When God is not first in my relationships, I worry about them. When God isn't first in my problems, trials, troubles, I worry about them. When God isn't first place in my schedule, I worry about my schedule. But when I stop and do a priority check. "God, You be number one in this area, You handle it, You're in charge." I take a deep breath and relax.

Church bulletin said – "Don't let worry kill you. Let the church help." Well the church can't help unless we help you see that you need to put God first in, your marriage, your family, your work, your leisure, your life.

Matthew 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

A while back I had the chance to watch the movie Unbroken. It is the true life story of Louis Zamperini. He ran in the 1936 Olympic games. His time for the 4 minute mile was a record for 15 years. During World War 2 he joined the Air Force. His plane went down and he spent 47 days in a life raft. Then he was captured by the Japanese and sent to a prisoner of war camp where he was severely abused. While the movie captured all of these event in detail, this is where it ended. It left out the most important part.

After the war he wrestled with nightmares. He turned to alcohol to try and forget. In 1949 his wife took him to a Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles. Billy Graham spoke on forgiveness and Louis gave his life to Jesus. From that moment the nightmares stopped. He went on to boldly speak for the Lord. He died last year at the age of 97.