

# **GODFIRST:**

## Kingdom Priorities for Christian Living 1; “Making GODFIRST in our Life”

*“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” Mt 6:33 NLT*

Over the course of this year we are going to be exploring the concept of making, putting and keeping GODFIRST; in all the various aspects and areas of our overcrowded lives. This word, this concept is more than just a cute catchphrase, or annual theme; it is a hope, a desire and a heartfelt prayer that each of us would perfect the ways we Make, Put, and Keep GODFIRST in our life, our church, our family, our work etc, etc.

In this simple verse; *Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God...*we get God’s perspective on the prioritization process of our lives. In the context of worrying about what to eat or what to wear; the elementary ‘needs’ of our lives; Matthew reminds all of us that God’s priority is for us to seek GODFIRST, and all those other things...ALL THOSE OTHER THINGS, will be added unto us.

Throughout the year and specifically in this series covering the next 8 weeks, we are going to try and discern the Kingdom Priorities for Christian Living as we attempt to put, make, and keep GODFIRST. The Kingdom of God is often misunderstood as being heaven, in fact, Matthew, being a good Jew and cautious about naming God, often used that phrase instead; The Kingdom of Heaven. But the Kingdom is more than a place. The Kingdom of God is simply the **reign** and **rule** of God, in the **hearts**, **minds**, and **lives** of those who seek to follow and love God. The Kingdom of God is not a place as much as it is a way of life. The Kingdom of God is as much a reality today as it was 2000 or 6000 years ago! The Kingdom of God was a primary subject of Jesus’ life and teaching, he spoke of it more than 100 times in the Gospels, many of his parables were illustrations of it, and will illuminate our understanding of it as well.

We must get this foundational point firmly fixed before we begin, probably each week; GODFIRST, means living according to the Kingdom of God priorities and principles. Here is what I mean for this week as we consider Making GODFIRST in our life:

A “Kingdom” perspective of life is recognition that we are creatures of God, not accidents of nature or evolution. As such, we are created in the image of God, which means, that part of the nature/character of God is implanted/imprinted or created within us. What are those parts of God that are in us? That’s what we are going to discover today. Making GODFIRST in our life becomes then a matter of living in harmony with the way that God has created us to live/function. In a nutshell, making GODFIRST in our life involves recognizing and acting in accordance with the way we were created.

#### **1. WE ARE CREATED TO BE SPIRITUAL BEINGS THAT WORSHIP GOD**

*You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. Exodus 20:5*

If I had to reduce the essence of God that has been created into us as human beings, this would be it! I know there is much more, but in an ultimate, bottom line way, the essence of God that has been transferred to humanity through creation, is that we (like God) are spiritual beings. It is the one thing that most closely links us with God, and most glaringly distinguishes us from the animals, and the rest of creation. We have a spirit, we are a spirit, we have a conscience, we have the ability to distinguish right and wrong, we are not victims of our genetics, we are not the masters of our genetics, we are the product of God’s creative and spirit infused genetics.

As such, we are not mini-gods, or ‘gods in the making’, as some cults teach, we just have the capability of becoming more and more like God. In fact the more we become like God, the more authentically human we really are. Chew on that a bit!

C.S. Lewis observed, 'The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become – because He made us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...it is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.'

If then we can accept the fact that we are spiritual beings, how has God created us spiritual "kin" to relate to each other? Are we best buddies, text messaging, and emailing, or is there a deeper relationship available? Are we phone friends, or face to face friends? Are we long distance lovers or constant companions? And what means shall we use to contact and relate to a God we cannot see, from a world which fills our every waking moment with distractions? Worship is the key.

Worship is not just singing songs, or reciting prayers, or hearing sermons. Worship in the Kingdom of God is always a two-way street; offering something (everything) to God, and receiving something (everything) from God. Worship in the Kingdom is about encountering and being encountered by the Living God, who is Emmanuel, God encountering us!

Therefore, let's remember what Kingdom Worship looks like? And this is it: Humbly maintaining **attitudes** and openly performing **acts** of devotion, respect, and adoration of God, in every area of our lives.

Eugene Peterson captures it well in his translation of Romans 12:2;

*Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to work, and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering. Rm 12:2 Message*

## **2. WE ARE CREATED TO BE SOCIAL BEINGS THAT LOVE ONE ANOTHER**

*I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. 2 John 2:7*

As noted in our discussion of being Spiritual beings, we are enabled to relate to God...we are also expected to relate to one another.

Note that 4 of the 10 commandments deal with how we relate to God, and the other 6, how we relate to our fellow human beings! Accident? I don't think so!

From the Garden of Eden to Eternity's Gallery, we humans are a social bunch; some more social than others, but social none the less. And how are we, as such social beings, to relate to each other?

The apostle John in his second letter; echoes a concept he introduced in his Epistle; that friends lay down their lives for each other...because they love each other. Who in your life loves you enough to die for you? Who in your life do you love enough to die for? Great questions that we might want to consider before we find ourselves like the guy this week, in NYC, standing on the subway platform when a stranger goes into a seizure and falls into the path of an oncoming train. The man on the platform leaves two small daughters and jumps on the man pinning him between the tracks as the train passes within millimeters over their heads. I think that might be a snapshot of what Kingdom love looks like. Here is how I would define it: Authentically **caring**, about the welfare of other people. It's not profound by definition, just by application...ask the guy recovering in a NYC hospital today! The best use of life is love, the best expression of love is caring, and the best time to love is NOW!

### **3. WE ARE CREATED TO BE SENSIBLE BEINGS THAT GROW OUR FAITH**

*And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.* Ephesians 3:18

I don't believe that we as humans will ever fully and completely know or understand everything there is to know about God, but in order for the Christian faith to be a player in our world, even in our own life; it must make sense! We were created with minds and given a will that are used to make sense of God. The Christian faith must be logical and reasonable, and it is!

Though there is plenty of room for mystery in the midst of our faith life, there is also enough certainty and surety that we can build our life on the trustworthiness of God, and the truthfulness of God's Word; in spite of the multiple things we'll never fully understand.

That being said, there are two foundational assumptions we must first settle, or "reason" in our minds. 1- What will be the ultimate, final authority of our life? Will it be the daily news, or weekly weather, or the monthly horoscopes? If so, we'll be constantly fearful, often disappointed, and ultimately chasing stars. Will we be the final arbiter of truth in our lives? Will you determine what is true for you, and allow me the same courtesy? That's the tolerant thing to do, but it would also be the wrong thing to do. You see, in the midst of the logical, reasonable, sensible Kingdom God has created, and in the middle of the illogical, unreasonable, and relativistic world in which we live; there is an objective, unalterable, unflappable, unchangeable standard of Truth; it is God's Word. Each of us must decide what will be the ultimate authority of our lives, God's Word or some illegitimate imposter?

The second assumption we must conquer, is that we are always to be growing. We never arrive at the destination, we never learn it all, we'll never know it all, we will never achieve it all, but we must keep growing; it's a vital part of our created ness! And here is what real Kingdom Growth looks like? **Constantly** learning, and **consistently** applying what God is **continually** teaching you.

#### **4. WE ARE CREATED TO BE SHARING BEINGS THAT WITNESS TO OUR FAITH**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8*

God started with Adam; expecting him to tell Eve, about the God Adam knew better. It became an overlooked and ignored part of the covenant God established with the Jews. It has also fallen on hard times in our world today.

We get most of the rest of this, but we are just too shy, just too unassuming, just too worried about offending someone. Heck, we are more concerned about offending someone than we are that lost people are going to hell!

I've been accused of being so hell bent on heaven, I was of no earthly good; a title I earned by my insensitive and misguided enthusiasm for "saving souls". It is not now, and never has been our job to save souls; that belongs only to Jesus. But it is created within us (deeper in some than others) to be witnesses for God and to the Love of God.

For years I've loved this quote from Francis of Assisi: "Preach always and if necessary, use words." I've used, and some of you have likely used this as an inspiration to let our lives tell the story of our faith; and they will, but it is now time that we engage our mouths again along with our lives. Our culture and world are dying for a word of Good News, a word of Hope, a word that there is a Light at the End of the tunnel, a word that Someone is still in control; Someone still loves us, that Someone can still save us! It doesn't mean we have to be skilled apologists, just willing witnesses. It doesn't mean we have to be polished preachers, just willing witnesses. It doesn't mean we have to be emphatic evangelists, just willing witnesses! It doesn't mean we have to go to Bolivia, or Bangkok, just go across the room, around the corner.

What does Kingdom Witnessing look like? Honestly **living** and occasionally **speaking** about what God's love means to you. We can do that!

##### **5. WE ARE CREATED TO BE SERVING BEINGS THAT HELP ONE ANOTHER**

*Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way. 1Peter 2:5*

We talk of it often in the context of money; that we give, because God first gave. It applies to serving as well. Jesus said...*think not that I the Son of God came to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many...*

Serving is part of the character of God created into human beings. I know that selfishness is also a natural trait, but service is a Godly trait. I also know that serving others is one of the greatest ways to discover yourself! Serving others often produces better results in the server than the one being served; am I right! I want to encourage all of you who will seek to make GODFIRST in your life, to consider how you are serving, God and others. The apostle Peter gives us a good insight as to how: do it diligently, do it to please God, do it not for what you get out of it, do it spontaneously, do it gently and do it by being a good example!

If you're not involved in any service or ministry, what excuse have you been using? As Rick Warren reminds us; "Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was a prostitute, David was an adulterer and a murderer. Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had his doubts, Paul had poor health and Timothy was timid. That's quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in his service. He will use you too, if you stop making excuses!"

So what does Kingdom Serving Look Like? Selfless and helpful acts done for **God** while directed to other **people**.

GODFIRST; recognizing and acting in accordance to the way we have been created: Spiritual, Social, Sensible, Sharing, Serving. Worship, Love, Grow, Share, Serve...sound familiar? I hope so.

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The Kingdom of God is simply the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of God, in the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ of those who seek to follow and love God.

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