

Seek First His Kingdom
Series: First Things First #1
Matthew 6:25-34

INTRODUCTION: Story of: The Little Red Wagon

Years ago, a small church in Kentucky made headlines when it closed its doors after 102 years of ministry. The final members, just five elderly individuals, held one last service, singing "Blessed Assurance" through tears. One former member, when interviewed, said this: "It wasn't that people hated church. They just started putting other things first. First it was baseball, then it was lake weekends, then jobs got busier, and before long, church was an afterthought." He looked down and whispered, "We lost our church one little red wagon ride at a time."

That small red wagon stood in the foyer of their church, once filled with food for the needy. But over time, it gathered dust, no more peanut butter jars, no more rice or beans, just cobwebs. A forgotten symbol of what happens when people forget to put God first.

In 2024, Barna reported that 42% of pastors considered quitting full-time ministry. Church closures in America reached over 4,500 that year alone. One Tennessee pastor who lost his church to foreclosure said, "We had good people, but they stopped participating. Nobody wanted to teach, give, or show up midweek. They loved the idea of church-but not the cost."

As we face 2026 with all its uncertainties, remember the encouraging words of Corrie Ten Boom, "*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*" She wrote "*If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if look at Christ, you'll be at rest.*"

Yogi Berra said, "The future ain't what it used to be," but Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." We can trust Him!

It's the beginning of a new year and people are availing themselves of thousands of self-help books to fix their finances, lose weight, eat healthier, exercise, enrich relationships, etc. There are things they want to change.

The subtitle of one such book I saw is **'How to get from where you are to where**

you want to be.” One of the first chapters deals with this whole issue of priorities and the author takes a very typical approach. He says the key to getting from where you are to where you want to be is simply to know two things: **Where are you now and where do you want to go. In other words,**

What do YOU want to accomplish?

What do YOU want to experience?

What possessions do YOU want to obtain?

He says there are seven areas where you need to focus your priorities: work, finance, recreation, health, relationships, goals, and community participation.

The author’s whole approach is summed up in a quote he gives from Ben Stein, the actor and author, who said, ***'The indispensable first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: Decide what YOU want.'***

I am sure he gives some good advice, but there is one thing missing from this book and most every book of its kind: **There is absolutely NO mention of God.**

Just so you know, the bible has a lot to say about priorities. In fact, if you make Jesus’ priority your priority, He guarantees that every part of the rest of your life will fall into place.

Here is what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 ***" But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*** (NIV)

Amplified Bible: "But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides:'

IB. Phillips: "Set your heart first on His kingdom and His goodness and all these things will come to you as a matter of course

Weymouth: "But make His kingdom and righteousness your chief aim and then these things shall all be given to you in addition."

Barclay: "Make the Kingdom of God and life in loyalty to Him, the object of all your endeavor, and you will get all these other things as well."

I'm beginning this year with a series called: **First Things First**. Today's message is:
SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM LET'S PRAY

If you could ask the Lord how to make the rest of your life the best of your life, what do you think He would say? ***"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*** (Matt. NIV)

Take Away: The key to getting what you need out of life is to focus on what God wants for your life.

There are plenty of people out there, gurus, consultants, and motivational speakers who make millions of dollars telling you how to get what YOU want. But Jesus said if you will put God first and don't just say it, but really do it, God will give you everything that you need.

Illustration: There's a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, a guy by the name of Ronald Heifetz who has done some lengthy studies on the topic of how people change. Heifetz draws the distinction between technical change and what he calls "adaptive" changes. Technical changes are changes that can take place quickly and with the right combination of resources. For instance, you get a flat tire. You fix that problem by simply changing the tire. That would be a technical change.

Heifetz says adaptive change is a bit trickier, and it occurs when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge. An example of adaptive change might be a person who has a heart problem and has been told by their doctor they need to lose some weight, and exercise.

Before that person decides to change their eating habits and their exercising habits, they must first address the underlying fundamental value that is the source of their behavior. They must first determine if they value longevity and wellness over KFC or Golden Corral buffet. Only when they choose life as the superior value will they be able to change their behavior in a way that will be life changing. Heifetz's conclusion is we cannot create adaptive change using technical means. It will lead to frustration. A person does not change their weight the same way they

change a tire. We cannot achieve the most important changes in our lives, like becoming more compassionate, more forgiving, more generous, and more Christ-like using a quick-fix technical method.

As brilliant as this Harvard professor is, his ideas about change are not original. For instance, when Jesus calls Levi the tax collector, he doesn't say, "Levi, get your act together, stop stealing. He says, "come follow me."

Jesus' advice is so much better, because He goes beyond what we want to what we need. He goes past what is inviting to what is important. He goes further than what is temporary to what is eternal.

I want to tell you that if you, would consciously, continuously, and consistently seek first His Kingdom, and His righteousness, it will absolutely transform your life. Here's how to get started:

I. Set Proper Priorities

The very first two words that Jesus gives are crucial if you are going to have the right priorities in your life. 'Seek first.' The word 'seek' means literally 'to strive for diligently' or "to desire extremely strongly." The action is continuous. It literally says, 'keep on striving for', 'keep on seeking', and 'keep on desiring on a daily basis.' In other words, 'Do this before you do anything else.'

We are to "Seek first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness", FIRST. If my number one priority in life is to seek God's Kingdom and to seek God's righteousness, then everything I do will be filtered through those two things. Where I work, how I spend my time, how I care for my family and treat others, how I spend my money, and in the things, we do, ***'Is this for His Kingdom? Does it relate to His righteousness?'***

Do you understand how powerful this is? Do you understand if you were to make sure that everything you did was either for the glory of God's Kingdom or to express His righteousness, think how it would transform your marriage, your workplace, your classroom, and how it could transform your decisions? There is a first step to the first step. The only way you can know what God wants is:

A. **You must Experience a Connection with God.**

That is why it is so important daily that the first thing you do in your life is experience that connection with God.

King David understood that. He said in Psalm 5:3, **'In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.'** (Psalm 5:3, NIV)

Jesus understood that. Mark 1:35 says this, **"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."** (Mark 1:35, NIV)

The greatest king in the Bible and the King of kings, both understood the necessity of connecting with God before anything else took place in their life.

To seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness,

1. **You must first seek the King.**

It is not enough just to say, 'Well I will seek Him when I can'. You must seek Him first. I am not trying to be legalistic here and I am not trying to tell you how to run your life, but I will guarantee you one thing. Even if you get up fifteen minutes earlier than you do right now, to spend time reading your Bible, and connecting with God, your days will go better, your life will be smoother, and your Christianity will be much more vibrant, if you will make your priority connecting with God.

If your priorities are not in order, your life will not be in order. If your priorities are not right, you won't be right.

Now you don't have to pray about what your number one priority in life ought to be. You don't have to think about it. You don't have to discuss it. You don't have to look for it. **You just must do it.** Because Jesus has already told us what our priority ought to be, **"seek first His kingdom and His Righteousness."** James 4:8 says, **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."**

God promises in his word, **"You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for**

Me with all of your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13)

It is not enough to seek the Lord; you must seek Him First. Jesus does not want a place in your life. **Jesus does not even want prominence in your life. Jesus wants preeminence in your life.**

The Lord is not interested in being the first runner-up in your beauty contest. He is not interested in being vice-president in your corporation. He is not interested in being second in command of your army. He's not your copilot. He wants to be the King of kings and Lord of lords on the throne of your heart.

Every kingdom has a king, and every king has a throne and that throne is the seat of authority from which the king rules and reigns. What do the subjects of a kingdom do? They do one thing - they do the will of the king. In a kingdom the king is in control. His is the only word that matters.

Get this picture in your mind. Your heart is a throne. Someone is going to sit on the throne and rule over your life. At any given moment in your life there will always be one of two people on that throne - you or Jesus. In every decision that you make, daily, you will either decide to do what you want to do or you will decide to do what God wants you to do.

When you seek God's control over your life, He will lead you to say "Yes" to the best things and "No" not only to the bad things, but even to the good things that could become a substitute for the best things.

Now comes the hard part. Do you want to know just how much He really is in control over your life? Keep an eye on two things every day- your calendar and your checkbook, how you spend your time and how you spend your money. *But not only are we to seek the King...*

2. **We must seek His kingdom.**

The word kingdom literally means rule or reign. **To seek first the kingdom of God is to seek the rule and the reign of God over your entire life.**

Now when you truly seek the King, and you truly seek His Kingdom, you are automatically seeking three things.

First, you are seeking the glory of the king. Every part and parcel of your life, every minute and moment of your time, every ounce and pound of your strength, every muscle and fiber of your body ought to be given for the glory of God.

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (I Cor. 10:31)

Secondly, it means to seek the guidance of the king. A loyal subject always wants to do whatever the king would have him to do. There is no higher calling in life than to find out what your King wants done and then to do it.

Every morning of your life ought to begin by asking the Lord what Paul asked Jesus on that Damascus Road, ***"Lord, what would you have me to do?"***

Thirdly, it also means to seek the government of the king. We realize we are Kingdom people. We see things in a kingdom way. We live in light of eternity. The Sermon on the Mount gives us guidance as to the rule and reign of the king; ***"love those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you."***

When we talk about priority, we are speaking of that which has precedence over any other matter in our life. The root of the word "priority" means to "set before." A priority assumes that there are other things in our life, but a priority places a particular matter before them all. It is what is most important. It is what is placed first. Everything in our life is subservient to God being first.

The word "first" that Jesus used is the Greek word "*proton*" and means "***firstly***" or "***at the beginning***." It speaks of that which is first in time, place, order and importance. He is King and we are the subjects of His kingdom.

To put God first in your life means that He is first in:

a) Our Plans

In James 4:13 we read of those who had big plans in their life. James states that they were saying, ***"Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell."***

James was describing certain traders who had plans to go to a certain city, spend a year there buying and selling to make money.

James gave them this admonition, ‘... ***you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15***Instead, you ought to say, “***If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.***” (James 4:14-15, NIV).

James was not rebuking them for their ambition of having a desire to work and make money. His rebuke was because they left Him out of their plans.

Seeking First the Kingdom *means that we will put Him first in our plans, secondly,*

b) Our Possessions

Randy Alcorn in his book *Money: Possessions and Eternity* said, "**There is a powerful relationship between our true spiritual condition and our attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.**"

Our giving and attitude about money is a tattletale of our heart. It tells us what is first in our life, rather than who is first. The simple reason people have trouble tithing and giving is because the Lord is not first in their life.

Many young couples wonder why they are in such a financial mess. It may be in part due to unwise spending habits and a lack of discipline, but it is largely because they do not put God first. Most people do three things with their money, **spend, save, and give**. But the bible says the order should be to **give, save, and then spend. And not just give, God wants the first or our giving.**

For some, all they think and care about is their possessions. They are like one fellow who I read about who wrecked his Mercedes. He was found standing beside the road with his left arm severed from his body. When a man stopped to help him, he was saying over and over, "My car! My car!" The helper said, "Mister, you have just lost your left arm and all you can worry about is your car." The driver looked down and said, "Oh no, my Rolex! My Rolex!"

#1 - Set Proper Priorities

II. Seek Personal Purity

Not only are we to seek His kingdom, but we are also to seek "His righteousness." This will naturally happen because if God is ruling over you then His righteousness will be within you. Your character is simply the outward expression of whatever controls you on the inside.

When you seek God first, privately, people will see God in you publicly. If there is anything this world needs to see in those who claim to be followers of Christ, it ought to be the character of God in the lives of those who claim to be His followers. We are never going to make a difference in this world until the world sees a difference in us.

Not only are we to be seeking God's control over us, but we are also to be seeking God's character within us.

The righteousness of God is inwardly experienced and outwardly expressed.

You see, if God is ruling over you, then His righteousness will be within you. Faith is always seen by its fruit. Character is always seen by its conduct.

So, what does it mean to seek the righteousness of God?

A. We Must Desire It

Jesus said in Matt. 5:6, "***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.***"

You ought to desire to be right, to do right, and to live right, just as much as a hungry man desires food, and a thirsty man desires water.

B. We Must Derive It

We are to seek "His righteousness." God is not interested in your righteousness. He is only interested in His righteousness. God is not interested in what you can do for Him. He is interested in what He can do in you and through you.

There is a big difference between self-righteousness and the Savior's righteousness. Paul, after he was saved, made this one of the goals of his life. He said in Phil. 3:9 that he wanted to "***be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.***"

Now I want you to learn a lesson about righteousness. Righteousness must be imputed before it can be imparted. **In other words, before you can live it, God must give it.**

That is exactly why Jesus came and Jesus died, that we might have the righteousness of God. ***"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*** (II Cor. 5:21)

C. We Must Depict It

We must live it out. Will Rogers said, ***"We ought to live in such a way that we would not be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip."***

Did I tell you the benefits of making sure your priorities are in order? When your priorities are straight and when first things are first, you won't worry.

Let's read this verse in context...Matthew 6:25-34

" 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

(Matthew 6:25-33, NIV)

When your priorities are out of order you will be preoccupied by the wrong things, focused on the wrong things and the result is worrying.

Seeking first the kingdom of God means to: ***Set proper priorities, and seek personal purity, and the result is that you will:***

III. See Promised Prosperity

Now the Lord says that if you seek His kingdom and His righteousness, "all these things shall be added to you." Now what "things" was the Lord referring to? He was talking about all the things that people worry about.

In v.19 we are told that people worry about finances. ***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal."***

In v.25 we are told that people worry about food. ***"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"***

In v.27 we are told that people worry about their bodies. ***"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"***

In v.28 we are told that people worry about fashion. ***"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin."***

Now all of these are things that we need. That's why the Lord said in v.32, ***"...your heavenly Father knows that you need them."***

Now the Lord has promised that if you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, you will have all the things you need.

I am convinced there are four lessons parents ought to teach their children and that it would be good for even some adults to re-learn.

First, you don't need everything you want.

The second lesson is you don't want everything you need. I never wanted one spanking that I ever got, but I needed every one of them.

The third lesson is that God doesn't give us everything we want. I am so glad that He doesn't. You know, one of the greatest blessings of God is sometimes found in those things that He doesn't give us.

The last lesson is, God always give us what we need.

Story: I heard about two stores that were across the street from each other, highly competitive, always trying to get ahead. The manager of one store came out one day and nailed a great big sign over the front of his store that said, "**If you want it, we have it.**"

Well, the manager from the other store walked out and saw that sign, thought about it for a few moments, went back into his store, and came out with a sign he nailed over his store that said, "**If we don't have it, you don't need it.**"

Here is the confession of an unknown confederate soldier:

I asked God for strength that I might achieve.
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked God for health that I might do greater things.
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy.
I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for - But everything I had hoped for....
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered
I am among all men most richly blessed.

CONCLUSION: Do you want to make the rest of your life the best of your life?

Seek first the Kingdom. See life God's way...Give God the Highest Place...Hunger and Thirst after righteousness...Honor Jesus in all things...Remove all clutter from your life...Be ambitious for God's purposes...Submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit...Live every moment for Jesus, and He will take care of the rest.

If I could sum all of this up, I would tell you this - whatever priorities you choose will determine ultimately the quality and the productivity of your life. Whatever is in first place in your life, if it isn't Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone it is in the wrong place. If first things aren't first in your life, then your life will be nothing more than second best.

The solution to worry is simply putting first things first.

When you are focused on the right things you won't be worried about the wrong things. Jesus says there are two things you ought to stay laser-focused on in your life every day - His kingdom and His righteousness. To put it another way, I am to focus on –

a. God's rule over my life

b. God's righteousness in my life

I am not talking about focusing with your eyes. I am talking about focusing with your heart. Focusing with your eyes involves seeing. Focusing with your heart involves surrendering.

Proper priorities promote peace. Misplaced priorities multiply worry.

No matter what you say your priorities are in your life what you worry about is really your priority. But if your priority is His rule over your life and His righteousness in your life; Guess what happens? He takes care of your worries.