

# FIRST

by Anna Gerhauser @ Church on the Park  
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The Best New Year's Resolution you could ever make: **Put Jesus first.**

"First things first" means that you should do the things that are most important before doing other things... make the things that are most important your priority... give them your attention before anything else.

"First" - in first place, begin with, most important, above all, before anything else... you get the picture.

eg. In the funny Christmas movie, "Jingle All the Way", Arnold Schwarzenegger goes out of his way to answer the needs of all his customers when they call. He ends every call with, "And don't forget - you're my #1 customer!" His wife calls him up, worried he'll miss his son's Karate award ceremony, like he has in the past. He assures her: "Don't worry, honey; I'll make it. And don't forget - you're my #1 customer!" But he got distracted, he was late, and he missed it... disappointing his son once again.

When we try to make everyone #1 - the person who *should* be #1, *won't* be.

Our actions must match our words. It's not enough to merely say or sing, "God you're number one to me." How we live our lives, what we prioritise, reveals our heart and what/who is most important to us.

*"These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me... You have let go of the commands of God and are holding onto human traditions." (Mark 7:6, 8)*

It all starts with this:

## 1. FIRST LOVE

*"To the angel <sup>a</sup> of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. **2**I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. **3**You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

*4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first (first love). 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. (Revelation 2:1-5)*

What/who do you think about when you wake up in the morning?

*“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by its craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3)*

*Genesis 3:1-10 Eve listened to the enemy's lie that God was keeping something good from her, when the opposite was true. The whole garden was a reflection of God's goodness.*

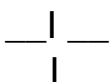
Don't listen to the lies of the enemy. His aim is to bring you shame and separate you from the life-giving presence of God. Guard your heart and mind.

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40)*

Sometimes God will take away the people we look to for encouragement, love or comfort, so that we return to Him as our source. Our first love.

**CROSS illustration.** Our relationship with Him must be first - He must be our primary source - so that our other relationships can be healthy and life-giving.

The vertical line represents your relationship with God. The horizontal line represents your relationship with people.



this, first seeking human love, you are going to be constantly disappointed and will have no spiritual stability in your life.



I But if you live like

Re. Dealing with the demands of people (eg family).

*“Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house. Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.”*

*Psalms 45:10-11 NIV*

Your greatest witness to your family is You loving Jesus above all else, running after Him with all your heart and putting Him first in your daily life. You are telling them, He is worth something! (Illustration: leaving digging for gold to dig for dirt).

**If you have lost your first love**, ask God for forgiveness. Repent. Stop looking at other things and look at Jesus. Remember what He saved you from, remember His great sacrifice and how much He loves you. How much He has done for you. Ask Him to fill you with His love again.

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

Also, pray through the Psalms (make it personal, from you to the Lord) and learn from David's intimate love-relationship with God (eg Psalm 24). In Psalms we hear David’s continual longing for the presence of God, for His justice, for His ways, for His house, for His voice. Ask God to give you the longing that David had.

The next two points - Seeking first the Kingdom and giving first to God - are like **two streams that flow from the well of *first love*** - your love relationship with the Lord - but also flow back into that same well, only increasing your love for God (and your experience of His love).

**If they don't flow out of a love relationship with Jesus, they will be dead religious works and there will be no life in them.**

## **2. SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM**

*“But (continually) seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”(Matthew 6:33)*

*Read Matthew 6:19ff. Verse 33 is the antidote to worry. God promises to care and provide for us.*

“**Seek**” = look for, desire, strive for, aim at, try to obtain, ask for, request, demand, search for, pursue (not passive - intentional, directional, focussed, requires action)

Seeking people first to meet our needs will always disappoint. We may think, “If only I had parents who loved me, if only I had a spouse, if only I had friends who understand me... I would feel happy, I would be confident.” But only JESUS can meet the needs of your heart. People will disappoint you at some point - even the best people - but God never will. Come to Him first with your needs.

Daily Seek first the Kingdom. Don't worry about tomorrow. Daily pray "Your Kingdom come, your will be done." Jesus must be first. His voice must be the voice you listen to above all.

You can not have the King without His Kingdom. He must be on the throne of your heart and life. Whoever is calling the shots in your life better watch out - there is only one King and He wants to invade your life with His Kingdom.

God is not a good-luck charm we add to our lives to bless our plans. You cannot have the King without His Kingdom. God is not like an idol that you can control or put wherever you want. He is an all consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). He wants full control.

In the Kingdom of Heaven, **everything revolves around the King**. The people of that Kingdom are **blessed** because they live in the life-giving presence of the King.

Above all else, seek His Kingdom (Kingship, His rule and reign, His ways) in your life and on the earth. When you live like this, the divine attributes of the King become part of your nature. And, like Jesus said, we receive all the blessings - the provision and protection - to people who belong to the King and His Kingdom.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached, “**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.**” The first step to receiving God's Kingdom is REPENT. Turn from your own ways - all sin - and turn to His ways. Put Him at the centre.

Glen's last two messages both relate to first seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness:

**“HIS PLAN”** - lay down your agenda for God’s agenda

It’s also about laying down other people’s agenda for you. **Live to please the King**, to do His will FIRST (not other people’s will for you).

### **“PRAY WITHOUT CEASING”**

Seek continually = Praying continually

That's how you keep Jesus first in your life.

If you have to make a big decision, first pray - Lord what do you want?

If you need help- first pray. Go to the Lord before you go to anyone else.

Make Him your first response... the one you rely on the most. No one else will be more faithful to you, no one else understands you and knows you as intimately as Jesus - not even your spouse. No one can comfort your heart like the Holy Spirit. This is in the Word, but I'm also speaking from experience.

And pray when your heart’s not right. God doesn't want anyone doing stuff (eg coming to church) out of obligation. He wants you to come because you want to.

If not, we need to return to first love.

Pray, "Lord give me a love for your house. Cause me to seek you. Give me a love for your presence."

Pray about everything.

### **3. GIVE FIRST**

*And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. **2** In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. **3** For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, **4** they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. **5** And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. **6** So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. **7** But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. (2 Corinthians 8:1-7)*

The only way that we can give generously out of poverty (financial, emotional, physically), is to **first give ourselves to the Lord**.

God's most generous gift, His greatest work, was **the cross**. And yet it was given when Jesus was at His weakest point - overwhelmed by the weight of what He was about to face, abandoned by His friends, weak, exhausted, He gives Himself to the Father. "Nevertheless, not what I will, but Your will be done." This is when He receives grace to give.

I've never felt the depth of what Jesus felt. But I have felt like giving up many times, I have felt deeply discouraged many times. But every time I have run to the Father and poured out my heart to Him and yielded myself to Him afresh, He has given me grace to get back up and do His will... to give generously.

Daily, hourly, give yourself to God and to His will. Make sure His will takes precedence over the will of other people, and of your own will.

While this passage of Scripture encourages us to give ourselves first to God and then to people in service, it is primarily has to do with **giving financially**.

## **FIRSTFRUITS**

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

ie. Not giving to God as an afterthought, but as the first thought. Giving God your first fruit is the opposite to giving God your leftovers. We honour him when we give to Him first, not last. I am not saying this to make people feel guilty, I am saying this, like Paul said it, so that you can experience God's full blessing in your finances and in your life. I am teaching you the way of the Kingdom.

*"Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

*If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."*

*Genesis 4:2-5, 7 NIV*

In Scripture we see that God commands His people to give their first fruits to Him, to set them aside as holy for God - the first of their produce, their oxen and sheep and even their firstborn sons were consecrated to the Lord. It was not to be done as a sombre, legal requirement but as worship, in rejoicing and thankfulness, remembering all that God had done for them and provided (Deuteronomy 26). The first fruits were seen as sacred - belonging to God. Giving God our first fruits is declaring that He is our source, remembering how God saved you and that every good thing we enjoy comes from Him. Most of all, it honours Him.

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) says, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

God loves a cheerful giver; he doesn't want us to give to him resentfully. If you find yourself there, you need to return to your first love. When we put everything else first and give him the leftovers, we never have enough, but when we give him the first fruits, we will have more than enough.

**Tithing** is literally giving God the first tenth of our income.

\* Malachi 3:8-12

*Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear **21** so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord[a] will be my God 22 and[b] this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (Genesis 28:20-22)*

**18** *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, **19** and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.*

**20**

*And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."*

*Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)*

*The widow's mite.*

Don't wait till you feel wealthy enough to give to him; He will bless you when you put him first in your finances. He will bless you so that you can bless others.

Glen and I have done this as a way of life, even at times when we've been really poor. We don't have a lot of money, but God has always provided for us, blessed us SO MUCH, and we have seen many, many financial miracles.

*"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Psalm 37:25)*

## **CONCLUSION**

To live as the people of God means to put Him **first** - to **love Him first** - everything else flows out of this. To continually, daily **seek Him first** and long for His Kingdom and His ways in your life and in this world. To **give first** to Him in service and financially too.

As the people of God, our lives should revolve around Him (not the other way around).

Set aside time to be with Him - the first moments of your day.  
Set aside the first day of the week to worship Him in His house.  
Set aside the first 10% of your income to give in worship and thanksgiving to the Lord.

If you live like this, you will not be shaken. You are testifying to the world: Jesus is the most important thing in my life. He is number one. You will be blessed! This is the way of the Kingdom.

Today, God is calling us to return to Him with all our hearts.

## **END**

God cannot be your last resort; He must be the one you turn to FIRST.

*"When You said, "Seek my face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O Lord, I shall seek." (Psalm 27:8)*

*2 Corinthians 9:6-15 "Generosity Encouraged"*

### **The Cost of Following Jesus**

**57** As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."



**58** Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

**59** He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

**60** Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

**61** Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

**62** Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel **30** will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 9:29-30)

Side note: “first bind the strongman” We cannot tolerate anything in our lives that opposes God’s Kingdom. Tolerating the strongman is like allowing a guest to stay in your house who steals every good thing God gives you. God gives you something, then the thief steals it. Let His Kingdom come in. Let Him get rid of the strongman. If you want to be free, ask Him to come.

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: **26** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. **27** And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25-27)

The Lord wants to invade your life - not with laws and regulations, but with freedom from fear and shame.

Side note on discipleship: Discipleship is not making people dependent on you to solve all their problems. You never want to take the place of Jesus - only Jesus can truly satisfy them and meet their needs. We care and love one another, but we need to continually point people to Jesus and His ways - just like John the Baptist did.