

What Will I Put First?

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We all know that there is a simplicity in God's way. People try to complicate it, but there is a simplicity in God's way. Albert Einstein had an interesting quote. He believed that there was a God and he said this, "When the solution is simple, God is answering." And we know from 2 Corinthians 11:3, there is a simplicity in Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3b. ... *the simplicity that is in Christ. (KJV)*

The concepts are simple. I'm not saying they're necessarily easy to do, but they are simple.

God's requirements of us as Christians are equally simple. Let's go to Matthew 22 and start in verse 34. People overcomplicate things and sometimes overthink things, which can get them in trouble, go astray. "Fall into the ditch," as Christ said.

Matthew 22:34. *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.
35) Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, ... (KJV)*

The King James says, "tempting him." It means to test Him, to try to trip Him up.

*35b) ... and saying,
36) Master, which is the great commandment in the law?
37) Jesus said unto him, [You shall] love the Lord [your] God with all [your] heart, and with all [your] soul, ... (KJV)*

That means with all of your life and all of your being.

*37b) ... and with all [your] mind.
38) This is the first and great commandment. (KJV)*

Now this is not some new concept. With that, let's go back to Exodus 20 and begin reading in verse 1. This was the giving of the law, the giving of The Ten Commandments. And this was the very first thing Moses said in this regard.

Exodus 20:1. *And God spoke all these words, saying, (KJV)*

He is saying this directly from His spiritual mouth.

2) I am the Lord [your] God, which have brought [you] out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (KJV)

Verse 3, this is the key.

3) *[You shall] have no other gods before me. (KJV)*

Put these two scriptures together, loving God with all our being and not putting anything in front of God. This is a very simple concept but we know it is hard to execute some times. It is hard to do. It's easier said than done, as we say today.

So, from time to time all of us, each one of us, come to a crossroads in our life. It could be a moment in time. It can be something that happens over a period of time. We come to a crossroads in our life where we have a decision to make, where we are tempted to put something in front of God. Sometimes we don't realize it. Other times, we get in a snit carnally and we just do it. We know it's not God's will and not according to God's law, but we just do it because we're carnal at that moment. We put something ahead of God.

What we're going to find out today is that when that happens—when we put something ahead of God—in all cases, it means that we put ourselves before God. We're going to cover some examples today. In every case, it means putting the self before God. That's the real danger.

1. Now, putting the self before God has happened down through history, but it was prophesied to be a characteristic, a defining characteristic of the end-times.

Let's go to 2 Timothy 3 and verse 1. Putting the self before God is as if you wanted to have a poster for the Laodicean Era. Then, "Selfishness" would be the title of the poster. 2 Timothy 3 verse 1, Paul says to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:1. *This know also, ... (KJV)*

Now, he sets the time.

1b) ... that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2) For men shall be ... (KJV)

This is the first characteristic, the prime, the fundamental characteristic.

2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... (KJV)

And that's manifested by covetousness, by boasting, and by pride. Jumping to verse 5. These lovers of their own selves:

5) [Have] a form of godliness, but [deny] the power [of God] ... (KJV)

Now how do they do that? How, by being lovers of their own selves, how do they deny the power of God? How does that happen? It happens by putting the self first, by

putting the self in front of God. By looking to the self and not God, we deny the power of God. We deny His power. We rely on our power, and, thereby, we deny God's power.

So the question we have to ask ourselves today, as we get closer and closer to the end-time and the world is going crazy all around us, "What will I put first in my life?" If we don't know the answer to that and if we don't do it, we're not going to be here when Christ sets up His kingdom.

The first thing we want to do is look in the Bible to see some examples of putting the self first so that we can learn from these.

I gave a sermon on Samson a while back and, if you recall, what did he do? He repeatedly went after pagan women. It was against his Nazarite vow. It was against the commandments of God and, yet, he did it over and over and over. And guess who he put first? Himself. His lusts. His desires.

What about David and Bathsheba? That's obvious, but let's go to 2 Samuel 11 and verse 1 because I talked a minute ago about crossroads. Let's see David's crossroad here, 2 Samuel 11 and verse 1. We're going to see that, yes, there was a crossroads, but there was a buildup to it. It just didn't happen out of nowhere.

2 Samuel 11:1. And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, ... (KJV)

We see that today over in the Middle East because our troops over there talk about "the fighting season." It starts after the cold and the snow of winter, and it starts in the spring. It is called a fighting season today and it was called a fighting season back then.

1b) ... when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. (KJV)

The fact that David stayed behind sends a huge message here. It tells us that David was not in a correct frame of mind. Up until that point, he was leading the charge. He was out leading the troops. He was leading the country. But now David sends people out to fight major battles and what is he doing? He's back in Jerusalem. He was not fulfilling his role as a king. He was not fulfilling his role as commander of the armies of Israel. Verse 2:

2) And it came to pass in an evening tide, ... (KJV)

The Hebrew means *dusk, as the sun was going down, twilight.*

2b) ... that David arose from off his bed, ... (KJV)

The Hebrew can mean *couch*. It wasn't as though he was asleep and then got up.

2 continued) ... and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. (KJV)

Guess what? Here's the crossroads. David looks down and sees her. He can either turn around and go back in the house, or verse 3:

3) And David sent and inquired after the woman.... (KJV)

It was a spur of the moment action, yes, but it was indicative of his wrong state of mind that had been building up for who knows how long. By not turning away, who did David put first? He put himself first.

Now let's look at Hezekiah. Hezekiah was king of Judah in the early 700s BC. In his early years, he followed after God. We're going to break into the story where Hezekiah was told that he was going to die. Isaiah told him, "Get your house in order because your time on earth is done. God's going to take you." So, Hezekiah appealed to God and God added, we're told, fifteen years to Hezekiah's life.

The boldness of Hezekiah—I don't think any of us would be quite that bold—he asked for a sign that God would do this. Isaiah said, "You can have the sundial move forward in the path it already was going quickly as a sign or you can have it go backwards." So, Hezekiah said, "It's easy enough to go forward. Let's make it go backward. Make it harder" (the shadow on the sundial, obviously). God granted Hezekiah's request and that is what happened. With that in mind, let's break into this story in 2 Kings, chapter 20, verse 12.

2 Kings 20:12. *At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present [Hebrew means a "gift"] unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.*

13) And Hezekiah [listened] unto them, ... (KJV)

Adam Clarke said, "he rejoiced and was glad." He was doing a happy dance that these people came.

13b) ... and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not. (KJV)

This included what was inside the temple of God at that time. This was a bad, bad mistake. Verse 14, after this occurred:

14) *Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and [where do] they come [from]? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.*

15) *And he [Isaiah] said, What have they seen in [your] house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in [my] house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them.*

16) *And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the [Eternal].*

17) *Behold, the days come, that all that is in [your] house, ... (KJV)*

Meaning everything the Babylonians had seen.

17b) *... and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, [says] the [Eternal].*

18) *And of [your sons that shall issue from [you]], which [you shall] beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs ... (KJV)*

Meaning, "They will be castrated."

18b) *... in the palace of the king of Babylon. (KJV)*

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary says this:

... at no distant period [meaning fairly soon, Babylon], would return and pillage his country, and transfer all the possessions he ostentatiously displayed to Babylon, as well as his posterity to be court attendants in that country.

And we know that was fulfilled in 585 BC.

Now, let's turn to 2 Chronicles chapter 32 and see the parallel account in Chronicles because it adds some information that tells us about Hezekiah's state of mind. We'll begin in verse 24. This recounts some of what we just discussed.

2 Chronicles 32:24. *In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spoke unto him, and he gave him a sign.*

25) *But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; ... (KJV)*

He didn't repay God for the blessings.

25b) *... for his heart was lifted up: ... (KJV)*

Selfishness. Pride.

25 continued) *... therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. (KJV)*

Verse 31, I'll read out of the New King James.

31) However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He [God] might know all that was in his [Hezekiah's] heart. (NKJV)

God let Hezekiah do it just to see if Hezekiah was going to play the big cheese or whether he was going to have humility. As we see here, Hezekiah failed the test. Clarke's commentary says this about the entire episode.

He [Hezekiah] showed them through a spirit of folly and exultation, all his treasures, and no doubt those in the house of the [Eternal].... this trial proved that in his heart there was little else than pride and folly.

A sad, sad situation. Hezekiah showed what was in his heart by exalting his riches, thereby exalting himself. So we have to ask the question: Who did Hezekiah put first? He put himself first.

Now let's jump to the New Testament to the apostle Peter. Let's go to Luke chapter 22. Christ will be taken captive. This was His last night. Christ was giving some last minute instructions and trying to prepare the disciples for what was coming in a few hours. Luke 22:31.

Luke 22:31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan [has] desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

32) But I have prayed for [you], that [your] faith fail not: ... (KJV)

Now notice this.

32b) ... and when [you are] converted, ... (KJV)

Meaning Peter wasn't converted at that moment. Pentecost had not come. God's spirit was with Peter but not in Peter. Christ says:

32b) ... and when [you are] converted, [I want you to] strengthen [the] brethren. (KJV)

That is the walking orders, the walking papers for any elder or deacon. Strengthen the brethren. That is your job on this earth. Verse 33:

33) And he [Peter] said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with [you], both into prison, and to death. (KJV)

As we'll see, those words are easy to say, but they're hard to do. Verse 34:

34) And he said, I tell [you], Peter, the cock [rooster] shall not crow this day, before that [you have three times denied] that [you even know] me. (KJV)

And we have to remember to cut Peter some slack. He didn't have God's spirit in him at that time, but, as we see, it's one thing to say the words and it's entirely different to actually do them. Verse 54 of Luke 22.

Luke 22:54. *Then took they him [Christ], and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.*

55) And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

56) But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, ... (KJV)

She was thinking, "I've seen this guy before. Wasn't he with Him?"

56b) ... and she said, This man was also with him.

57) And he [Peter] denied him [Christ], saying, Woman, I know him not.

58) And after a little while another saw him, and said, [You are] also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. (KJV)

The second time.

59) And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. (KJV)

So, they knew he was a Galilean by his accent.

60) And Peter said, Man, I know not what [you say].... (KJV)

Mark's account says that Peter swore and Peter cursed (Mark 24:71), if you can imagine that.

60b) ... And immediately, while he yet [spoke], the cock [crowed].

61) And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock [crows], [you will] deny me [three times].

62) And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. (KJV)

I can only imagine how bitterly he wept. So, who did Peter put first? He put himself first, his safety and his security first. We need to remember that.

Now, let's look at another example in the New Testament. Let's go to Acts chapter 5 to look at those who attended the early New Testament church to see if that wasn't a problem. Acts 5, we'll begin in verse 1.

Acts 5:1. *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, (KJV)*

That's okay, fine and good. In those days, the brethren were selling possessions and turning the money into the apostles and they were funding the church and they were living off that money—food, clothing, and such. So, Ananias sold his possession but in verse 2, we find:

2) [he] kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and [they] brought a certain part, ... (KJV)

The Greek for "certain part" means *some*. They didn't bring all of it. They brought some of it.

2b) ... and laid it at the apostles' feet. (KJV)

Of course, they laid it at the apostles' feet saying, "This is the entire amount," but it wasn't the entire amount. It was only part of the amount. Peter understood that. Christ revealed it to him.

3) [And] Peter said, Ananias, why [has] Satan filled [your] heart to lie to the Holy [Spirit], and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4) While it [was in your possession, wasn't it [yours]? [It was entirely yours,] and after it was sold, [wasn't] it in [your] own power [to do whatever you wanted with it]? [Why have you] conceived this thing in [your] heart? ... (KJV)

Here is the key.

4b) ... [You have] not lied unto men, but unto God.

5) And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the [spirit]: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. (KJV)

Now, we know the same thing happened to his wife, Sapphira. They were seeking to aggrandize themselves by saying, "We're giving this big sum of money, it's all that we have, and it's all from this possession that we have sold to benefit the church. Look at us." Who were they were aggrandizing? They were aggrandizing themselves. They were putting themselves first.

So, today, we can do the same thing in essence. We can do various things to put ourselves in front of God. One example is when we credit something or someone other than God for a blessing, a healing. I've heard several times over the years when somebody had a sickness, they were anointed. They later went out and took some herb or some vitamin, etc. When they came back, who did they give credit to? They gave credit to the herb or to the vitamin and not to God, who created the herb, who created the vitamin.

Or another example is when people give themselves credit for some accomplishment. "I have overcome so much. I have really changed," as though they did it rather than God and Christ in them doing it. By whose power did the change occur? Not our power. Not a human power, but God's power.

So, closing out this first point, we need to be on constant guard against putting the self first. We've seen Old Testament and New Testament examples of that.

2. Now, for the second point we want to look at two examples of putting God first, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament.

If you think about it, it's easy to come up with those examples. Let's go to Genesis chapter 22 and look at the account of Abraham and Isaac. God has an ability to bring circumstances to pass to show who or what we are going to put first in our lives. Genesis 22, I'm going to read this out of the New King James, beginning in verse 1.

Genesis 22:1. *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."
2) Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, ... (NKJV)*

The Nelson Study Bible says:

Moriah was in the general area that included the hills on which Solomon later built his temple in Jerusalem.

That's where they were going. The latter part of verse 2:

2b) [go there, the land of Moriah] and offer him [Isaac] there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I [will] tell you." (NKJV)

So think about this. Abraham only had one son. He was told to take his son and kill his son. And, if that wasn't enough, burn his son. Now, think about that as we go through this. Verse 3.

*3) So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.
4) Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.
5) And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, ... (NKJV)*

Notice this.

5b) ... and we will come back to you." (NKJV)

Abraham says "we." Now, was that hope? Or was it certainty? Someday, we'll find out. Verse 6:

6) So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; ... (NKJV)

Because Abraham was an old man and his son could carry the wood.

6b) ... and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. (NKJV)

So Isaac, in verse 7, began to wonder. He said:

7b) ... "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (NKJV)

Isaac was wondering. Abraham was very smart and he said:

8b) ... "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. (NKJV)

But can you imagine if you're a father, the human turmoil that's going through you at that time. His gut must have been in a knot. I'm sure he didn't sleep. He probably didn't want to eat anything because he knew what was ahead. Verse 9:

9) Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood [on the altar]; ... (NKJV)

Now, where's the offering?

9b) ... and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. (NKJV)

So Isaac, now, is getting the message as to who is the sacrifice. The fact that he cooperated and allowed it to happen speaks to Isaac's conversion, speaks to Isaac's dedication to his father, his loyalty to his father, his obedience to his father. Can you imagine a kid doing that today? It's not going to happen, but back then, this was a testimony to Isaac and how he viewed his father. Verse 10, so after Isaac was bound and he was on top of the wood, on top of the altar:

10) And Abraham [laid] out his hand and took the knife to [kill] his son.

11) But the Angel of the [Eternal] called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" ... (NKJV)

I am sure no one in the history of mankind was ever so glad to hear these words.

11b) ... So he said, "Here I am."

12) And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (NKJV)

Those who believe in predestination have a hard time explaining this scripture because God did not know until that moment what Abraham would do. Verse 13:

13) Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

14) And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided." (NKJV)

So, here we see Abraham as a type of the Father. Isaac is a type of the Son, a type of Christ because as a father, Abraham offered up his only son just as the Father did. The son, Isaac, was a type of Christ because he willingly submitted to the will of his father. In doing so, who did Isaac put first? He put God first. He put his father first.

Now, the ultimate example of putting God first, we obviously know, is Jesus Christ. Let's go to Luke 22 and we'll begin in verse 39. We pick up the account after the Passover. Christ had spoken His last words to the disciples and Christ needed to pray because he knew what was ahead of him.

Luke 22:39. And he [Christ] came out, and went, as [his custom was], to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

40) And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that [you] enter not into temptation.

41) And he [withdrew] from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, (NKJV)

Notice what He prayed.

42) Saying, Father, if [you are] willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but [yours], be done. (NKJV)

Who was Christ putting first? Talk about putting God first, Christ is sublimating not just His will but also His life to His Father.

We understand that Christ at that moment had God's spirit without measure. He was God in the flesh. Let's go to John 3 and we'll look at verse 34 to see that. Christ had an unlimited supply of the holy spirit, which we don't but we're seeking to have.

John 3:34. For he [referring to Christ] whom God [has] sent [speaks] the words of God: for God [gives] not the Spirit by measure unto him. (KJV)

The Greek word for "measure" is Strong's #3358. And the word is "metron." We get our English word "meter" from that. It means *a limited portion or a limited degree*. So you could say, "A meter is a limited portion of a length."

But we see here that God gives not the spirit by meter or by measure to Christ. Therefore, Christ had an unlimited amount of God's spirit that was motivating, leading, and guiding Him. On the flip side of that coin, Christ knew in great detail what was ahead of Him. He and the Father had been planning it for an eternity. He knew what scourging was. He knew what crucifixion was. He designed the human body and He knew the level of pain that could occur in the human body. Despite all of that, He chose to put His Father first.

So, as Christ set the ultimate example of putting God first, we need to follow that example. We need to put God first in every facet of our lives, always giving Him the credit, always aggrandizing and glorifying God and not ourselves, always seeking to do His will and not ours.

3. Now the third point, which is the last point and we'll spend the rest of the time of the sermon on this. We're going to look at four areas that will help us put God first in our lives.

Humanly we don't want to do that. Humanly we want what we want. Humanly we want to be satisfied. Yet, once God calls us, once the call comes to us, we committed ourselves at baptism that we would put God first. Not a man. Not ourselves. Not any other human.

3.A. The first of the four, we need to recognize God as our spiritual Father.

This sets the stage for being able to put God first if we recognize Him as our spiritual Father. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 8 and we're going to read verse 6. We are told here that He is our spiritual Father. If we have that in mind that He is far more than a physical father, it helps us put Him first. If we know who He is, it helps us put Him first.

1 Corinthians 8:6. *But to us there is but one God, the Father, ...*

We have to keep that in mind.

6b) ... one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him [through the holy spirit]; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him [through His death and through His resurrection]. (KJV)

Also, just as an aside, this would be the perfect place to insert the trinity. And it's not there. The perfect place to give, as the Trinitarians use, the third being of the "holy trinity." It is not there and it isn't in the Bible.

So, we are seeing here that God is one God, the Father. The Greek word for "father," Strong's #3962 is "pater." The Catholics yell out, "Pater! Pater!" to the Pope. Listen carefully to this. It means metaphorically *the author of a family animated by the same spirit as himself*. What a great definition! A second definition is *one who has infused his own spirit into others, who actuates and governs their minds*. All of that is true for us as we look to our spiritual Father, God Almighty.

The problem is, as human beings many have a hard time viewing God as their spiritual Father because of what they have experienced with their physical fathers, because of the examples of their physical fathers. Some have had fathers who were just absent. They weren't there. The father left, never to return. So they never experienced what a physical father should be.

We have others in the church that, yes, the father was there, but he was inattentive. He had his hobbies. He had his work. He went fishing, hunting, whatever, but he just wasn't around. So that colors one's view of a father.

We have others whose fathers were critical, micro-managed them. You hear it so many times, "I could never make my father happy. I could never please my father." So that colors one's view of God as our spiritual Father. And some have had fathers that rather than love them, horribly abused them. If you take someone like that or any of these examples and ask that individual to have a concept of God as their spiritual Father, it's a muddy picture because they've never experienced it. They've never had an example of it.

So, what do we do about that? All of our fathers were imperfect. All of our fathers sinned and made mistakes. Some were much better than others were, however. God has an answer for that. God tells us we can learn about Him by looking at the world around us. We don't have to look to a physical father. We don't have to look to a man. God says, "If you want to know about Me, look at what I've built. Look at My creation." Let's go to Romans 1 and read verse 20. I'll read this out of the NIV because it's a good translation. We need to keep this in mind if we've had a less than upstanding father as an example.

Romans 1:20. *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, ... (NIV)*

How?

20b)... [by] being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (NIV)

This tells us that you can clearly see God if you look at what He's created. Look at the variety of the flowers and the beauty of the flowers, with the different smells of the flowers. It is just awesome. I never smelled a flower until Dorothy and I got married. She would always stop and smell the roses. Since that time, I've been awestruck by the

different smells, different looks. And this is just a rose! Think about the rest of creation. The streams, the lakes, the mountains, the clouds in the sky, the variety of the weather, the beauty of sunsets and sunrises. It just goes on and on and on.

We cannot let humans define God. You can't let your father define God to you. We can't let that happen, but God's creation defines God as we just read. Therefore, God should be more real to us than our physical fathers ever were. My physical dad is dead. Whether your physical father is alive or dead, God should be more real than your physical father.

Maybe our fathers were mysterious. We just didn't know who they were. Maybe they were distant. Maybe they were not involved, but our spiritual father is not that way. The fact is all of us should be closer to our spiritual father than we ever were with our physical fathers.

I'll have to say that with my dad, I knew him. I understood parts of him, but there were parts of him that I just didn't have a clue. I didn't understand. And I think that's probably true for all of our physical fathers. There are certain areas we just don't know, but with God that's not true. We know God. We know God's nature. We know God's intentions. We know God's character. We know God's history as much as He has revealed to us.

So, we should be closer to God than our physical fathers in time spent together, in time communicating one with another. We should be closer and spend more time that way. When we say to ourselves, "I don't have time to pray right now" (and I think we've all said it), what we're really saying is, "I don't have time for God right now." And that is a slippery slope. That is a scary proposition. You're telling God Almighty, the one who created the universe, who called us, and gave us His spirit, "God, I don't have time for you right now. Sorry." We can't do that.

Remember our perfect spiritual Father does everything for our benefit, for our blessing. Now, He never does anything for our harm. Even though sometimes we have to be spanked or we have be caught up short and talked to very sternly, it's for our ultimate benefit. Let's go to James 1:17, closing out point A of helping us put God first by recognizing Him as our spiritual Father. This is something we can't forget, especially those who are going through horrible trials. Maybe their lives are on the line.

James 1:17. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,*

God engineers it. God gives it.

17b) ... and cometh down from ...

What?

17 continued) ... the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, ... (KJV)

Unlike our physical fathers, there is no variableness:

17 continued) ... neither shadow of turning. (KJV)

God is the same yesterday, today, and will be forever.

3.B. The second point that would help us put God first is we need to talk to God about anything and everything.

We have to ask ourselves the question. Can I talk to God about anything and everything? Or do I censor what I say to God? Are there some things that are off-limits, that I'm embarrassed to mention to God? Or I'm ashamed to mention to God? Or that somehow I want it hidden and I don't want to bring it up before God?

That's really kind of silly when you think about it. Isn't it? God knows everything about us. Let's go to Hebrews 4 and look at verse 13. People over the years in God's church that I've known have behaved in ways that they thought somehow God wouldn't notice. They thought they could lead two lives and one life God would pay attention to—the church life—but then somehow God would turn a blind eye to this other life that they were living.

Hebrews 4:13. *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest [made apparent] in his sight [God's sight]: but all things ... (KJV)*

"All things" includes us.

13b) ... are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (KJV)

Everything. We are just naked as jaybirds in front of God. There can be nothing hidden. We learned that with our kids. We potty train our kids. We've seen it all with our kids. The good, the bad, the ugly. Now, if we have no secrets with our kids in the sense that we've seen it all as they were growing up, then, God is even more so with us because He knows our hearts. He reads our minds. So, we can't keep any secrets from God.

Since we're naked before God in that sense, we can freely talk to God about anything, about everything. Our struggles. Our bad thoughts. Our hurtful emotions. Times we want vengeance against other human beings—those awful dark times. We can talk to God about all of that because He knows anyway. And we go to Him as a little child. When we say, "Our Father in heaven," basically we're saying, "I need some help here. Help me, please!" Let's go to Matthew 6 and look at verse 6. Matthew 6:6, the model prayer, but we're going to pick up just one point here.

Matthew 6:6. *But [you], when [you pray], enter into [your] closet, ... (KJV)*

Don't do it on the street. Don't make a show of it.

6b) and when [you have] shut [your] door, pray to [your] Father which is in secret; ... (KJV)

Meaning what you say is between you and God. Nobody else.

6 continued) and [your] Father ... (KJV)

Notice this.

6 continued) ... which [sees] in secret ... (KJV)

Meaning there's nothing we can hide from God.

6 continued) ... shall reward [you] openly.

7) But when [you] pray, [don't] use vain repetitions, as the heathen do: (KJV)

No prayer beads or that sort of thing.

7b) ... for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. (KJV)

It's amazing how the largest Christian denomination somehow just whites out this verse.

8) Be not ... therefore like unto them: for your Father [knows] what things [you] have need of, before [you even] ask him. (KJV)

He knows all the secrets. There is nothing we can't talk to God about. There is nothing that's off limits. And, if He wasn't a personal Father, He wouldn't care. He would give a hoot. But He cares about us, about every detail of our lives, every single detail of our lives.

So, what are we to do? We should start every day talking with God. We should never leave the house without talking to God. I had a minister say one time when I first came into the church, "If you don't pray before you leave for work, it's like you're walking out of the house naked. You have no protection. You have no armor. You have nothing."

As you get older, one of the things I thank God for when I open my eyes is that I have another day. Life for another day. When you're in your twenties and thirties, you don't give it a second thought, but, as you get older, you thank God for having another day. Now, when we're young, we take it for granted, but not so as we grow older.

And we thank Him when we start the day for a new day, because guess what? We get a do-over today. I don't care how bad yesterday was, how many sins we committed, wrong thoughts, wrong words. Today is a new day. It's a do-over day and we can thank God for that.

Then, we should end each day by talking to Him in a formal prayer, yes, but even with our head on the pillow talking to God and thank Him for the day that has passed and the blessings of the day.

I can remember when our son Britt was a little kid and we'd kneel down and pray. I'd tuck him in. Of course, he would want a story and then a second story and then another story as kids do. Then, it's time for him to go to sleep. I'd tuck him in and maybe telling him the third story his eyes would start fluttering. Pretty soon, they would close and he would be fast asleep, but the fact is his mind was on God at the time he went to sleep.

So, for us to be praying to God when we go to sleep or as we're drifting off, that's not disrespect to God. We won't close that prayer with "I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ," because we already conked out. Yet, it's pleasing to God to know that our minds are on Him at the very end of the day, just like a little kid's mind is maybe on his dad or on God at the end of the day.

So, this second point, point B, we need to talk to God about anything and everything. That will allow us to put Him first.

3. C. The third point is we need to involve God in everything we do, big and small.

It took me decades to learn this one. Involve God in everything we do, big and small. God should be on our minds constantly during the day. The problem is when I first came in the church, it was very strict. You had to spend thirty minutes in the morning praying, thirty minutes in the evening praying and then, you had to do thirty minutes of Bible study. It was like a check-off list similar to taking out the garbage or washing the car or something like that.

So, you did it in the morning, did your thirty minutes of prayer. It's easy to say, "That chore is done." Then, you put God up in His box. Put God up on the shelf in the closet and close the closet door. And you don't come back to Him until that night. That's the way I grew up in the church. During the day, yes, I thought about God but it wasn't as if He was right beside me every minute of every day.

So, let's go to Romans 12 and look at verse 12. That's why Paul says what he says here in Romans 12:12. Our minds should be constantly on God, involving Him in everything that we're doing, measuring what we do with His word. Paul says:

Romans 12:12. Rejoicing in hope; ... (KJV)

We need to rejoice in hope.

12b) ... patient in tribulation [as we go through trials]; ... (KJV)

But, here's the key, "continuing" through the trials, through our daily life:

12 continued) ... instant in prayer; (KJV)

What does the word "instant" mean? The Greek is Strong's #4342. Notice this. It means *to be steadfastly attentive to—steadfastly attentive to*, in this case, God. Secondly, it means *to give unremitting care to a thing—unremitting care to God*, involving Him in everything we do, asking God to inspire us, inspire us in our interchange with other people—it could be a bank teller. It could be a grocery clerk. It could be our boss or it could be somebody that works for us—to say the right things, do the right things, think the right things, make the right decisions. Ask God about that.

In the early years in the church, I tried to do things on my own. I'd go into an important meeting or whatever and I wouldn't even pray about it. I'd just charge on in, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, full of testosterone, thinking, "I can get this done." And I didn't involve God.

That's one of the benefits of getting older, by the way, because you realize as your faculties decline, as your stamina declines, as your strength declines, you have to rely more on God. You can't do it yourself. That's a real benefit to getting older.

We have to ask God to help us to make the right decisions. If our mind isn't on Him, how can we do that? How can we do that?

We learn as kids that our parents are at the center of our lives. When kids wake up in the morning, guess where they go? They go to mom and dad. Mom and dad provide food, clothing, shelter, inspiration, protection—all of that to the kid. So, our parents are like gods to us when we're little. Similarly, today, as we're adults, God should be at the center of our lives like little kids put their parents at the center of their lives.

We're told to examine ourselves—not just before Passover, but all during the year. Ask these questions. During an average day, how much time do I think about God? During an average day, how long and how often do I talk with God in a formal prayer or talk with God in an informal prayer, but speaking to God? How long and how often during an average day, do I study His word? Because I'm hearing God talking to me when I study His word. If we want God to be involved in everything we do, we have to talk to Him, we have to allow Him to talk to us, and we have to have Him in our minds at all times.

All we do should be related to God. Nothing we do should be outside of God—nothing. His laws should be foremost in our mind. In the very first Psalm—let's go there—David said that. David starts off with something so fundamental. Psalm 1, we'll read the first two verses. David knew the key.

Psalm 1:1. *Blessed is the man that [walks] not in the counsel of the ungodly, ... (KJV)*

Boy, is that true!

*1b) ... nor [stands] in the way of sinners, nor [sits] in the seat of the scornful.
(KJV)*

The Hebrew for "scornful" means *ungodly or wicked*. But verse 2 is the key.

2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law [does] he meditate day and night. (KJV)

Everything we do should be related somehow to God's law. We need to ask ourselves, "This decision I have to make, what does God law say about that? Or this thought that I just had? Or this reaction that I just spewed out of my mouth, how does that related to God' law?" So, God's law should be foremost in our minds.

We also need to ask for His mind to be in us. We all know Philipians 2:5.

Philipians 2:5. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (KJV)

If we have Christ in us and His mind, then we have the wisdom of Christ. We have the intuition of Christ. We have the discernment of Christ. We have the reactions of Christ. If Christ's mind is in us, nothing is going to catch us by surprise or trip us up. When something happens, often my first reaction is a carnal reaction. Over the years, that gets pushed aside. Hopefully, as we get older in the truth and in the faith, having more of God's spirit, our first reaction is a spiritual reaction, a Christ-like reaction because we have the mind of Christ. If Christ's laws and mind are a part of us, meaning they are in us, we will be thinking about Him continually during the day.

3. D. The fourth and the last point to help us put God first is we have to seek to be in harmony with God at all times.

We don't want to be a cross purposes with God. We don't want to oppose God because guess who is going to lose if we oppose God? We're reminded, the Bible says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). We need to remember that. We all want to be there. If we go against God and oppose God, at some point, we're going to fall into His hands. We'll have to pay a penalty.

We should strive to do nothing to disappoint God. We want our children to do the same. They fail at it. But when our children do something to please us, it is so joyful. We want to make God joyful as His children by doing everything to please Him. We don't want to disappoint Him. Therefore, we should always seek His will because if we seek His will, we're not going to disappoint Him. We need to have an open mind as to what His will might be because sometimes we go off half-cocked. We just know that we're right. And guess what? All of a sudden, we're out on a frozen lake and the ice is starting to crack

all around us. We say, "Oops! I shouldn't be here." We got there because we didn't have an open mind of what God's will was.

Again, look at Christ's example. He said, "Father, if You be willing, let this cup pass from Me, but, nevertheless, I want to do Your will. I want to please You and not Myself." We must always seek to be obedient, pleasing little children to God. I don't care how old we are. We are still little children to God and He looks at us as such. He guides us and shepherds us as a loving father. Let's go to 1 John 5 and we'll read verse 3. This is something we need to keep in the forefront of our minds as we seek to put God first.

1 John 5:3. *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: ...*
(KJV)

As we talked about before:

3b) ... his commandments are not grievous. (KJV)

The Greek means *burdensome*. His commandments are a blessing. They're not burdensome to us. The fact is this verse has two meanings when it says, "This is the love of God." The first meaning is that "This is the love of God" because by keeping His commandments, we express the love of God that we have in us through His spirit. We know that the first four commandments express our love to God and the last six express our love to our fellowman. So, we express the love of God by keeping His commandments.

The second meaning is that when we say, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments," it means that this is what God loves us to do. We really please God. He's happy. He's joyous when we make a right decision. If David had turned around on that balcony, God would have been rejoicing. If Hezekiah had kept his mouth shut and not walked the Babylonian ambassadors through all his possessions, God would have been pleased. In both of those cases, God was not pleased.

So we want to please God. We want to be in harmony with God. The fact is when we're in harmony with God we get closer to God. When we're closer to God, then it's easier to put God first. We need to remember that. When we're in harmony with God, we're closer to God. When we're closer to God, it's easier to put God first. And the result is what? Joy, because we're doing the right thing and we know God is happy with us.

Let's conclude. In the beginning, we asked the question: What am I going to put first in my life? The fact is we can fill in the blanks as to what a human might put first in front of God. We can look back on our lives and fill in the blanks of all the things that we've done over the years to put something before God. We've all done it. And, as I said, in the beginning it always involves putting the self in front of God. We might think it's a thing or something else but it puts the self in front of God. As we have seen, to make it even worse for us in these end days, we live in an incredibly selfish world. Everybody

around us is selfish. And the poster child of that is the man who's running for president. Then, this is supposed to be who we're looking up to? If this isn't the Laodicean era and if this isn't happening in front of our eyes, I don't know what you could say to Paul telling Timothy "Men shall be lovers of their own selves." It's right there on TV every night right in front of our eyes.

We've seen examples of putting the self first. And we've seen that when we put something before God, it's always ourselves. We can kid ourselves that it's something else, but it's always ourselves. And, in every case that we've seen and, frankly, in every case I've seen in the church, when we put something before God, it ends badly. The fruit is not good and it ends badly.

Let's go to Matthew 10:33. This is the final scripture. We'll close with this because it basically says it all. Christ says:

Matthew 10:33. *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. (KJV)*

Now, if Christ denies us, we're not going to be in the Kingdom of God. It's very simple.

The Greek word for "deny" is Strong's #720. It occurs in the King James Version in the New Testament thirty-one times. It's translated "deny" twenty-nine times. Two times, it's translated "refuse." So what we're being told is when we deny Christ, we're also refusing Christ. The definition of that word means *not to accept, to reject, or to refuse something that is offered*.

When we're offered eternal life, when we're offered God's holy spirit to guide and lead our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, if we do something different, guess what we're doing? We're refusing that gift. And, we're refusing Christ. Ultimately, as we go into the lake of fire, we're refusing His sacrifice. Look at verse 37.

Matthew 10:37. *He that [loves] father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: ... (KJV)*

Putting them before God.

37b) ... and he that [loves] son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (KJV)

Putting sons or daughters before God.

38) And he that [takes] not his cross ... (KJV)

Meaning, the burden we are given as a Christian.

38) And he that [takes] not his cross and [follows] after me, is not worthy of me.

39) He that [finds] his life ... (KJV)

Hezekiah found his life. Didn't he? He asked to live longer and he was added fifteen years. Look what happened? He found his life in the sense that he was happy when he was showing all his treasures and God's temple. The men from Babylon were praising him and giving him accolades, attaboys, and all of that. He found his life all right. And, Peter, when he did what he did, he saved his physical life—in his mind, he did. He put his safety and his security first.

So, Christ is telling us here, "He who finds his life," as Hezekiah and Peter, ultimately is going to lose it, meaning eternal life. We don't want to stand before God and say, "God, I'm so sorry I did this or put that in front of You," and God says, "Hey, you had the chance. Too late. Time's up." Going on:

39b) ... and he that [loses] his life ... (KJV)

The word "loses" in the Greek means *to fully destroy*. This means we do the destruction. That brings us to Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 where it says we are to get rid of the old man and put on the new man who is created in the image of Jesus Christ. So, we lose our old life. If we lose our old life and we get rid of our old thoughts, deeds, and words, Christ says:

39b) ... and he that [loses] his life [the old man] for my sake shall find it. (KJV)

We deny the Father and we deny Christ by not loving Them more than all. And we do it by putting ourselves first. We deny Them both. We've seen examples of putting God first, which is pleasing to Him and the end result is eternal life for those who do so.

I'll just leave you with this thought. When we come to the crossroads in our lives, we have a decision to make. We can go this way or we can go that way. It might be an instantaneous thing that we just have to decide right this instant. Or it might be something that we either think about over a period of time or that, we, without our knowing it, leads up to a point in time like David did. He was in a wrong spirit. It must have been that way for weeks or months. We don't know.

When we come to that crossroads and we have a choice as to what we put first, we need to remember what God and Christ have done for us—the sacrifices both of Them have made. The Father watched His Son die. The Son willing gave Himself for us. We need to deeply understand that. We've been through the spring holy day season and that should be imprinted on our minds. When we deeply understand that, then, it will be easier to put God first in our lives.