

First

Preface

First is designed to provide you with the encouragement and hope that is found when we put God first in every single area of life. Each day starts with a passage of scripture followed by an inspiring and practical devotional thought. Inside the back cover, there is a journaling area where you can write down what the Holy Spirit is saying to you and your thoughts and prayers.

The Baptist Children's Home and Family Services leadership created this focused devotional during the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020. With all the unanswered questions, confusion, and distractions that have taken place during a challenging time around the world, one thing became clear; we must put God first in all areas of our lives. Spend time today and over the next few days with God. Ask him to reveal more of his nature to you. Join us at BCHFS as we work to place God first in our lives.

Presented by:

Baptist Children's Home and Family Services
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Providing Christ-centered services that protect, heal and restore.

Day 1

In the Beginning God...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

“In the Beginning God....” Four simple words that communicate a profound truth. In the beginning –before anything or anyone else existed – God was there. He was and will always be first. There is no time before God. He always has been and always will be. God is the central character. He commands center stage in everything – existence, creation, time, life history, redemption and eternity. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, God is first.

From the moment we take our first breath, we act and think like the universe revolves around us. History is full of examples of mankind’s insatiable quest to make our names, fortunes, fame and kingdoms as vast and enduring as possible.

In his book, *It’s Not About Me*, Max Lucado says, “God does not exist to make a big deal out of us. We exist to make a big deal about Him.” Acknowledging that fact and embracing it frees us to experience life and life more abundantly – the way God originally intended for it to be.

Everyone at BCHFS is working not to put God above every area of our lives, but instead putting Him first in every area of our lives. It is easy to fall into the trap of compartmentalizing all the areas of life into two nice, neat little boxes. One is the sacred (which contains everything related to the church) and the other secular (which includes everything else). God desires to be a part of every aspect of our lives – not just the “religious” or the “sacred.” The Bible never makes a distinction between the sacred and the secular. Paul says. “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Colossians 3:17). Not only do we need to put God first in our faith, but also in our relationships, stewardship, and time.

Placing God first in every area of our lives – where He rightfully belongs – brings us assurance and peace. As a result, our lives will have meaning and purpose in something more significant and grander than we could ever imagine.

Day 2

First in Family

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: REVELATION 1:8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

This devotion is about God being first in families, so the above verse may seem unusual. I will try to explain how reliance on God begins with accepting: God's lack of limitation and our lack of being God.

Of course, it is admirable to say: "Put God first in your life," or "I am trying to put God first in my family." However, I would like for us to consider how it might strengthen our resolve to be Godly parents, better neighbors or less anxious in a crisis, to fully accept that God is already first. Therefore, our job is not the impossible task of moving God or "putting" him anywhere, but rather to acknowledge that he is where he belongs, has always been and where he will forever remain: first. This is more than mere semantics, it represents heart change leading to increased reliance upon God. God is entirely in control. Apart from him, the futility of our struggle for independence is revealed; the absurdity of our idolatrous need for more self and less God becomes painfully apparent. What happens when we attempt to rule our own lives and those of our family? We fall flat, which isn't always bad, considering humility is something God can work with. From this humble perspective, we realize that any good we do in service to our family is empowered by God. He calls us to keep our eyes on his son, to follow him and model the grace and wisdom of Christ to those we care for and love. Our freedom in Christ is a gift from God!

How might our everyday family life change as we acknowledge God first in all we do and say? How will our worship together be affected? How might our conversations with our children improve? How might our anxiety be reduced as we parent during difficulty? Will releasing control from self to God strengthen our marriage and friendships?

Are we strong enough to make this remarkable life-changing move in our lives? No, but God will empower us to make it.

Day 3

First in Ministry

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 4:12-13

Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."

Most of us have probably read Exodus 3 and 4 about God's call to Moses to go to Egypt and lead His people out of captivity. In these chapters, we witness a conversation between God and Moses in the form of a burning bush and God's audible voice. God is giving Moses instructions, but he refuses to listen. Moses attempts to give God every reason not to choose him.

Finally, after God has responded to every barrier that Moses tries to throw at Him, we see something significant. Moses gets to the point and tells God to just send someone else.

Many years ago, I had a conversation with a pastor's wife. Her husband had been called to the pastorate after they got married. She was upset and frustrated because her husband was looking for another church. She said to me, "I don't care if he preaches, just as long as I don't have to leave my hometown." My response to her was, "Then he needs to get out of the ministry." Maybe a harsh response, but it was true nonetheless. You see, just like Moses or my friend above, there was a failure in their response to acknowledge that God should be first in their life and in their ministry. No matter how hard or even impossible it might seem, **GOD MUST BE FIRST IN OUR SERVICE TO OTHERS.**

There has been a time or two (or more) where I have said to God, "Oh, my LORD, please send someone else." Sometimes His call seemed too hard, or sometimes it just wasn't the right time. Sometimes it was that I didn't think I had the correct skillset, but those were the times where I failed. I had to realize that I failed because I wanted to do things my way. I failed simply because I did not answer my call to God's service on His terms.

The story of Moses's doubt and fear could simply be mine and maybe even yours. However, I am thankful for the promise that God gave to Moses to "go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." When we put God first in our service to Him and ministry to others, He will faithfully provide the fruit and the outcome.

Day 4

First in the small things

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: LUKE 16:10 (NIV)

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much....."

You may have heard the story of the youth pastor who arrived for church on a Sunday morning to find the sidewalks a mess. There had been a wedding there the night before, but the cleaning crew had forgotten to clean the sidewalks. He went into his office to prepare for the worship service when there was a knock on his door. The senior pastor, holding a broom, asked him to sweep the sidewalks before everyone arrived. Not wanting to be openly rebellious, he took the broom and went outside to clean, but he did so in a huff. As he swept, he began to remind God that he was called to influence the nations. Surely somebody with a "lesser call" should be the one to clean the sidewalks! As he swept though, his frustrations began to calm. His annoyance turned to peace and just as he pushed the last bit of trash in to the dustpan, he felt the whisper of God saying, "How can I trust you with the nations if I can't trust you with the sidewalks?"

God often orchestrates beautiful opportunities for us to see our own hearts. In fact, whatever you're doing right now has been orchestrated by God with two things in mind. First, He wants to see if you'll be faithful to things that may not seem to matter very much (to you). Second, He wants to prepare you for something greater. Through Scripture and our circumstances, God is continually teaching us to "not despise the day of small beginnings" (Zechariah 4:10).

When we think about stewardship, we don't automatically realize that part of what God calls us to steward is our scope of influence. Many of us would like a broader range of people to influence. In and of itself, that is not a bad thing. It's part of the being made in God's image and likeness. But what happens to most of us is that, during the day of small beginnings, we become convinced that God has forgotten us. Joseph was thrown into prison while God was preparing him to rule over the entire Egyptian Kingdom. David was watching sheep while God was developing him into a king. I'm sure it didn't feel like a kingly preparation for both of them at the time, but God always has a purpose in everything He calls us to.

Throughout Jesus's life, we can see how he was being prepared for his destiny. He had to learn obedience through the things that caused him to suffer. (Hebrews 5:8). Many of the things that caused Christ to suffer weren't recorded in Scripture, but they still hold incredible significance because they prepared Jesus for much greater plans later. Is it possible that the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are preparing us for something great? Could God be preparing you for partnering in ministry with Baptist Children's Home and Family Services? As a donor? As a volunteer? Or filling one of the positions that are critical to our operation?

What are the things in your life that seem small? Regardless of what it is, you have influence there. Remember the youth pastor who swept sidewalks? He learned a great lesson that day and now ministers around the world. His education that morning was in the classroom of humility, in a thing that seemed small to him but was significant to God. Do everything – especially the little things – as unto the Lord. You are being prepared for more substantial influence than you can ever imagine.

Are you putting God first?

Notes

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

First

From the moment we draw our first breath, we act and think like the universe revolves around us. The reality is that nothing could be further from the truth.

God is the center of everything. Before anything or anyone else existed – He was there. God was first.

Acknowledging that fact and embracing it frees you to experience life the way God originally intended. When you place God first in every area of your life – where He rightly belongs – you will discover a more abundant life than you can ever imagine.