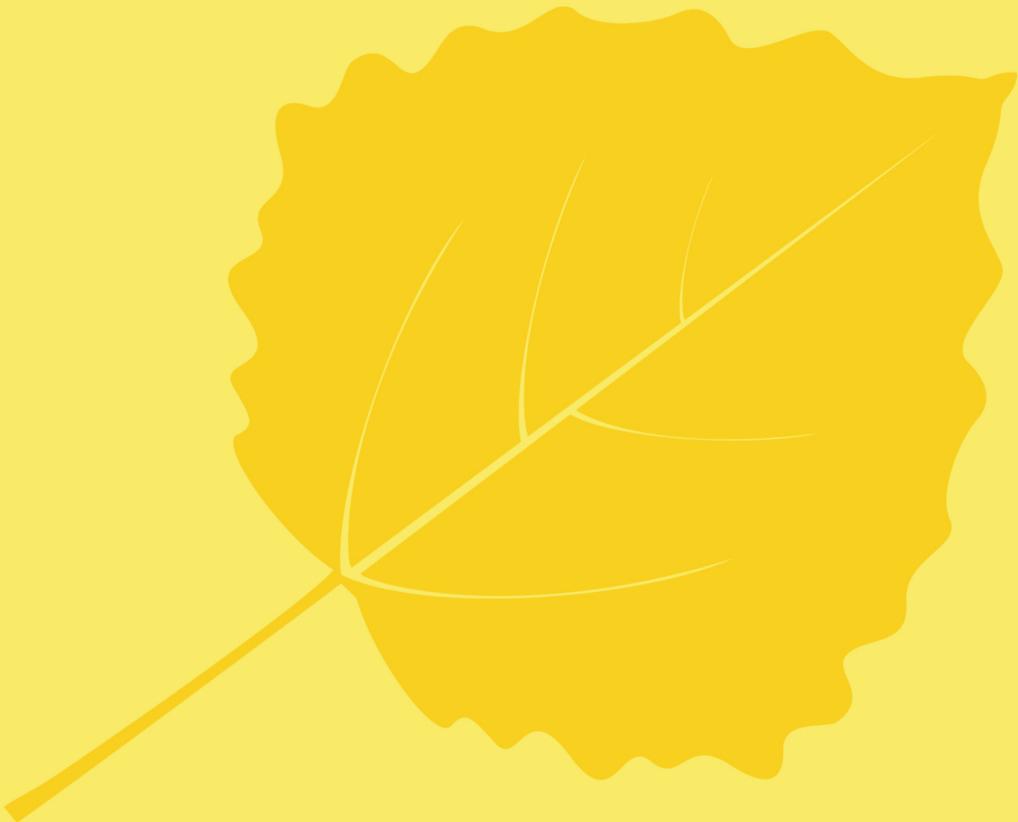


1st THINGS 1st



What's really in first place in our lives? We say God is first, but our schedules, commitments and finances tell another story. Setting God in the highest place is not just right, it's good! When God is first, everything else falls into place. It's time to let God be God. Let's study our priorities until God is at the head of our lives and order everything around Him through worship, obedience, service, prayer and generosity. God in first place—let's put **First Things First**.

First Things First - God Is First • Colossians 1:13-20 • Tim McConnell • October 22, 2017

Today is what we call Commitment Sunday. It's time to commit. Committed. I want you to commit. I want you to make a commitment and then be committed. It's about passion. It's about devotion. Later on we will have the opportunity to walk forward and make a commitment—a pledge—to support the work of the Lord in the coming year. But it's bigger than that. See I don't want you committed to First Pres, not primarily. I don't want you committed to some budget or operations plan. I want you committed to Christ. Are you committed to Christ today? Have you made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Today is the day to see that Jesus is first in your life.

We come to the end of our fall series, First Things First, and I believe God has really been doing some work in us. I've heard great stories of how priorities have changed, of how putting Jesus first has altered lives, altered calendars, changed marriages. Praise God! A lot of us made a commitment to worship ten weeks in a row, to honor God with one hour of worship a week for ten weeks. I've heard great stories of how that has changed people. It all began with Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We looked at what it means to seek God first in all things, in all aspects of our lives. If we don't give God the first thought, we won't give God a second thought. We put God first on our calendar, first in our appointments. We looked at God first in our families and marriages, first in our work lives and careers. We put God first in our finances. We saw that Scripture is our first authority, that our mission and purpose begins with the first step, and that we love our neighbors first before ourselves. In everything we have seen the power of priority, that with first things first everything else falls into place. Finally, today we take a minute to say—did you get it? Do you know? Do you truly understand that in everything, in everything, Jesus is first?

We changed the bulletin each week so, if you wanted, you could make a mobile to see how everything hangs from Jesus at the center. Children's ministries made me one! See how things get off balance. Life tilts, gets off balance sometimes. Sometimes we just can't find the center. When the wrong thing is at the middle, there's no end to the energy we spend trying to hold things in place, trying to hold everything in balance when it just will not hold. Do you ever feel that way? Like you are trying to keep all the plates

spinning? As soon as one area seems okay you're running to the next. Today, with this profound passage from Colossians in front of us, we ask: Are you ready to change your thinking about Jesus? Maybe you are ready for a change in your life. Change comes when we change our thinking about Jesus. Jesus is not another branch to add to your mobile. Jesus is the center. See, I'm not going to ask you to put Jesus at the center. I'm not going to say "I'd like you to consider putting Jesus first." What I want you to understand is this: Jesus *is* the center. Jesus is first. We don't put Jesus first; Jesus is first. Stop damaging your life by pretending otherwise.

Colossians 1:13-14, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." What has Christ done for us? What has God done in his Son Jesus Christ? I want to underline four words here. First "rescued." He has rescued us. We are the ones saved by him. If Jesus is a firefighter, we are the ones plucked from the embers. If Jesus is a deep sea diver, we are the pearl pulled up from the mud in His hands, under His strength, straining His breath. He rescued us. Second, underline "brought us into." This is one word in your original Greek: transferred, moved from here to there. It is a change in citizenship. Look now, from the dominion, the authority, the government, the rule and reign of darkness, into the Kingdom of the Son. I'm changing your citizenship, he says. You are no longer a citizen of the tyrannical reign of darkness. You have a new citizenship now under Jesus. I've never attended a citizenship ceremony, but my friends who have always say it is surprisingly powerful. There's a moment that grabs you almost unexpectedly, when you take your Oath of Allegiance and are handed your Naturalization Certificate and you realize, I'm an American now. I'm not British, I'm not Canadian or Ghanaian or Pakistani any longer. I'm a U. S. Citizen. That's what this is like—only eternal. No more do you belong to the tyrant Darkness. You belong to the Kingdom of the Son in Love.

Underline "redemption." In whom we have redemption, it says. Redemption is the payment made. You were bought with a price. This is the ransom Jesus paid to gain your freedom, the price paid to transfer your citizenship from darkness into His eternal light. The price was His own life given on the Cross; peace through His blood shed on the cross. In whom we have redemption. Then underline "forgiveness." You

see, when you gained your new citizenship in Christ and you crossed the border from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the light of God's Son, you carried some bags. The word here for "forgiveness" means "to send away." Jesus doesn't keep our baggage from our past mistakes, He pays for them and sends them off. Back to the dark country with them. Now you are free.

All of this we have in Christ. All of this we are given in Jesus Christ. This is what God did for us in His Son Jesus. But listen now, Jesus did what He did because He is who He is. Jesus could do what Jesus did because Jesus was who Jesus was. And who was He? Who is He? Jesus is God. We spend a lot of time talking about how human Jesus was. Jesus was just like us. Jesus walked around like us. Jesus got hungry like us. Jesus got tired like us. Jesus got frustrated like us. Jesus got hurt like we get hurt and cried like we cry, and laughed like we laugh—Jesus was one of us. Yes, but Jesus was one of us because He chose to be. He emptied himself and became one with us to rescue us. But Jesus was, Jesus IS God.

Look at the rest of our passage. "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:15-17) Was Jesus at creation? I thought Jesus was born at Christmas. Do you see who this is? Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus was with God, Jesus was God. This is, as we say, the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus was at creation. All things were made through Him and in accord with Him. He is before all things. Jesus always was Jesus and always will be Jesus—Son of God, Son of Man. Not only did Jesus exist before the world came to be, not only was Jesus at creation, but look at the end of verse 17: "in him all things hold together." Jesus is the one holding the universe together! He is the center and unity of all things. He actively holds this universe in place and without Him at the center all things would spin apart into pieces. So it is Jesus, the same Jesus who was there at creation, the same Jesus who holds the entire universe together, the same—who was incarnate, made flesh, at Christmas, to draw near to us, to enter and restore the universe He made and owns, and you and me in it. This is the Jesus who grew to be a man, and who demonstrated love, and who died on the cross to redeem us from the kingdom of

darkness and eternal death. Same Jesus. He did what he did because he was who he was.

This passage might be difficult to understand. It fascinates me! Wow. But it's difficult to understand and I don't understand all of it. But if it says anything at all, what it says is this: it is impossible to over-praise Jesus. You can't praise Jesus enough. You can overpraise others. You can overpraise your kids, you can overpraise your pastor, you can overdo it heaping honor on someone—but not Jesus. Jesus is God. Along with the Father, along with the Spirit, He made this world, He holds this world together, and He entered this world to begin the process to make it new. He is the firstfruits of new creation, and the Head of the church that follows Him into eternal life in a renewed world soon to come. Do you think about Jesus like this? To change your life, change the way you think. To change your life forever change the way you think about Jesus. "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Colossians 1:18) I'm not asking you to put Jesus first. We don't put Jesus first. We don't put Jesus anywhere! Jesus IS first. I'm telling you stop pretending otherwise. First things first. Nothing comes before Christ.

What does look like to follow Jesus into His Kingdom, to be transferred from the dominion of darkness and conveyed into His reign with Him at the head? It means turning every part of your life over to Him and finding out how He wants things done. Every area. Every aspect. Nothing else comes first; nothing else is the center. That means everything hangs from Jesus at the core, so with every part you ask: How does Jesus want this done? You want to do it the way He wants you to do it. How He wants me to treat others. How He wants me to act in marriage. How he wants me to approach my job, my money, my career or non-career. How He wants us to raise our kids. How He wants us to fill our calendar. It all hangs on Him. And it means constantly finding new things, new areas to subject to His rule and influence. We find new things. Our entertainment. We think, "I never thought Jesus cared what movies I watched, what music I listen to, but you know what, I've never asked Him." Jesus is at the center. He gets to direct. I've never asked Jesus about my friendships. I've never asked Jesus about my love life. Well... Listen, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the center of the universe, He is the center of your life. Let Him be. Stop ripping your life apart pretending Jesus is less.

We all know how damaging it is when we pretend something is true that simply isn't true. Jesus called it building your house on sand. Entire regimes, think of North Korea, sometimes depend on keeping up a false universe through misinformation and careful omission of the facts. Think of the Marlboro Man. Most of the Marlboro Men died from...can you guess? Smoking. It's no good pretending something is good for you when it actually kills you. Jesus is the center. Jesus is preeminent in all things. Jesus is first. God first. You can hang your life on Him. In Him the center will hold. Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) So I ask you, is Jesus the center of your life? I want to give you an opportunity to say so. Not to make Jesus the center of your life; not to put the Lord at the center of your life. See, we don't put the Lord anywhere. He is the center. I'm saying, stop pretending He's not.

Acknowledge today that you know your Savior. Acknowledge today that you know your Lord. I want to invite you to pray, all of us together. And maybe for you it is the first time that you will pray, that you will talk to Jesus yourself, for yourself, and recognize who He is. He is the center of life. He is the first in all things. He made all that is and came to redeem it. He became a man to die for you, by Him we have peace with God and eternal life. He transfers us from the tyranny of darkness into the kingdom of His everlasting light, as we acknowledge Him, put our faith in Him; believe in Him and give Him our trust. I want to ask everyone to follow me in prayer today. Let's pray,

*Almighty God,
Thank you for this world you made,
Thank you for my life in it.
Thank you that you came in Jesus,
To save this world and save me with it.
You are the center of all things,
You are the center of my life,
You are my Lord and you are my Savior.
And all I am is yours.
In Jesus name, Amen.*

STUDY GUIDE

FIRST THINGS FIRST • God Is First

Colossians 1:13-20

Start It

- "When setting our priorities, it is important to understand that Jesus is the holding power of all that is good in our lives, according to Colossians 1:17. He should always be our first priority because He holds everything together. A couple cannot have a good marriage if Jesus is not holding it together. In fact, people have difficulty having good personal relationships with anybody if Jesus is not leading and influencing individuals to love each other. Our finances are usually a mess without Jesus. Our thoughts are clouded and confused without Jesus. Our emotions are out of control without Him...Life in our world can be a daily battle, but the key to victory is to remember that Jesus holds everything together and that we need to keep Him first in our lives." — Joyce Meyer

Study It

- Read Colossians 1:13-14. What is the "dominion of darkness" and what is the "kingdom of the Son"? How does God move us from one to the other?
- Read Colossians 1:15-20. Can anything but God perfectly reflect God's image? If Jesus was at creation, does that mean Jesus is God? Why? (Cf. John 1:1-3).
- Did you know that all things hold together in Jesus? What does that mean to you and how does it change your thinking?
- Why is Jesus both the firstborn of all creation (v. 15) and the firstborn of the church and the new creation (v. 18)? (Jesus was at the beginning and is at the end—which is a new beginning). What event stands as the turning point in history between creation and restoration? (Hint—it is the crux of salvation history).
- Thinking of the quote above from Joyce Meyer, what part of your life seems most difficult to recognize Jesus at the center? Is there part of your life where you are acting as though something else comes first?

Pray It

Lord Jesus, You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. You are preeminent in all things; for everything was made by You, for You, and holds together in You. You were at creation with the Father and the Spirit, and are worshipped as our Creator God. You entered Your creation to redeem us and make all things new. Help me today to see, and to believe, and to live knowing that You are at the center and You come first before all. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Live It

Write a list of parts of your life where God comes first. Expand the list.