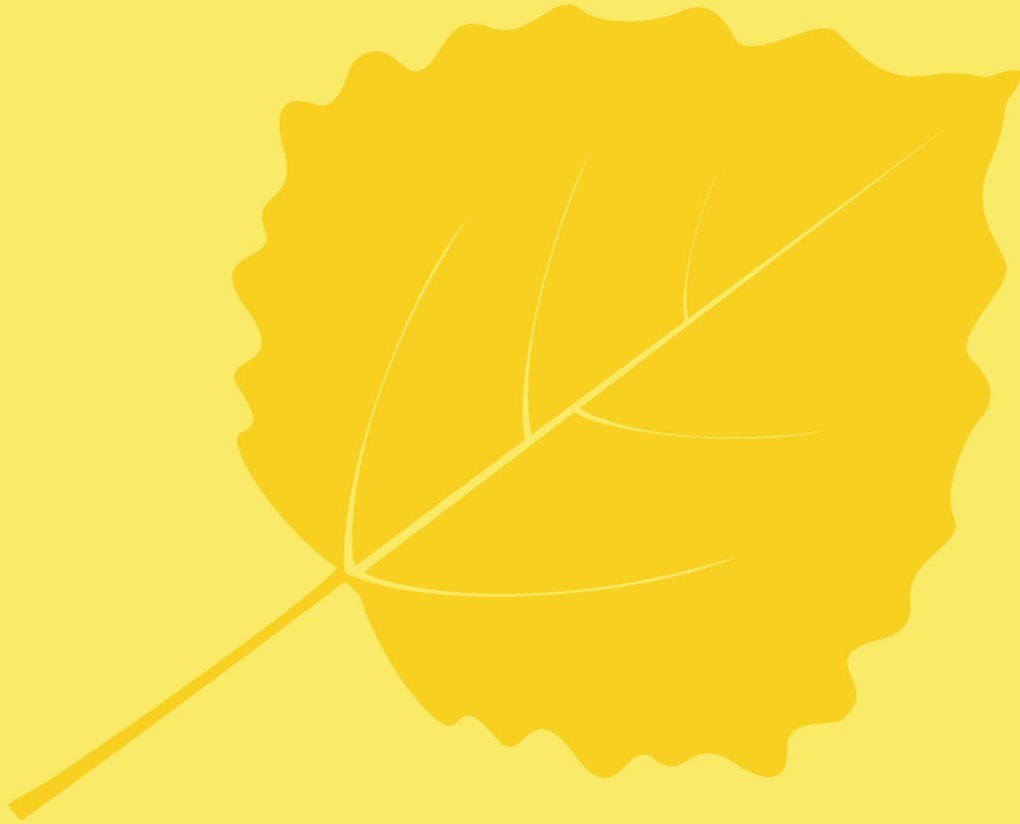


# 1stTHINGS1st



**W**hat'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 - First at Home • Colossians 3:15-21 • Tim McConnell • September 17, 2017

Today is my actual birthday. Forty-four years ago, in Wurzburg Germany, I entered the McConnell family and that little family found its true purpose—me. I'm pretty sure I'm the center of the universe, so it was kind of me to reveal to this family that I was the reason why they were there and the center of all that is important to the world and life and all that. At least that's what I thought, and I let them know about it as soon as I had the vocal chords to do it. That's what all infants think, isn't it? What else could possibly be the center of the universe but me? Here I am! It's all about me. The problem comes when the parents buy it.

We are halfway through our series, First Things First, learning about the power of priority and how to put God first in every aspect of our lives; "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33) With Jesus first, all else falls into place. God is first on our calendars—first appointment of the day, first commitment of the week. God is first at work. Last week we put God first in our minds and beliefs—the Word of God is our first authority. This week we talk about keeping God first at home, keeping Jesus first in our families. Jesus first at home. With Jesus at the top, everything else falls into place.

This is the typical American story. A young couple meets and gets their first exciting jobs downtown in the city. They start to build a life together. Sometimes they get married; if not as Christians wanting to make vows before God, then just as a way of symbolizing they have figured it out—"It's not all about me. It's about us." And just when this relationship starts to beat that into their head—"It's not about me, I'm not the center of the universe"—along comes a little bundle of joy. But this little screaming bundle of fulfillment isn't playing by the rules. Little Junior *does* act like the center of the universe! And maybe he is, they think. Isn't maturity about responsibility for our children? With little else to guide them, soon every decision revolves around one question: What is good for the little one? "What do you need, Little Booboo Buttons? Whatever it is, Daddy's going to get it for you." Soon they change careers, move out to the suburbs, arrange everything on the family schedule to propel Little Booboo Buttons into the Ivy League. There's nothing more important in the whole universe that what the little treasure needs. But the little treasure wasn't meant to carry such weight. The little treasure doesn't have the mass of the Sun; he can't be the center of gravity for the universe, or

even for a family. Soon the parents are left helplessly wondering, why does my child suffer more and more the more we try to do for him?

Little Booboo Buttons wasn't meant to be the center of the family. You were not meant to be the center of the family. The career was not meant to be the center of the family. The money was not meant to be the center. Remember the mobile illustration? The family who grabs at anything other than Jesus and tries to make everything hang properly, the family who puts anything but Jesus at the center, will never find balance and will never know peace. Desperately try to add weight here, offer counterbalance there, call in experts to untangle this or that, but without Jesus at the center there isn't enough expertise in the whole world to bring balance to the system. The whole system suffers when Jesus is out of place. The end of Joshua 24:15 says "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Chip and Joanna Gaines have that up in their farmhouse. Good enough for them! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. That doesn't mean we disregard the needs of our children, or neglect their emotions or development or future or anything else. But it does mean, Little Booboo is not the organizing principle of my family. Jesus is first. When something is broken we say it is "out of order." Out of order means broken. Under Jesus means whole.

Let's look at Colossians 3. Most of the letters of the New Testament have these passages called "household codes." Table manners. New believers in Jesus need help. We've been arranging our homes according to the standards of the world in which we were raised. Now you're saying Jesus has different standards. What are they? We need this help. Husbands, wives, kids, pets—how is it all supposed to work? They usually include teaching about slaves too, which quickly, I want you to know was not the chattel slavery of early US history or other times where people were separated by race and sold as property like animals. This was more of an indentured servitude that often acted as a social safety net in the time. But what we see first and foremost, above all, is that the home is meant to be ruled and governed by one principle above all else—the rule of Jesus. Let Jesus come first at home.

So we get some detailed instructions, some details on how to run a "Jesus-first" kind of a home. Verse 18: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands,

as is fitting in the Lord.” (Colossians 3:18) I always like to just stop right there, don’t you? We might be running out of time. Can’t get any further than that today! Listen, there is a lot to work out about this verse and the others like it. What does it mean that Paul addresses women at all in this time in history? What does it mean that he address the wives first? The whole section of household codes, we need to understand, is not a limitation of rights but an expression of mutual duties. What does it mean that Paul always addresses the under-powered person first, then the powered and privileged person second? You need to take this home and wrestle with it. What I will say briefly is two things—one, this is not a verse to be ignored or dismissed. This is the Word of God speaking into our lives, to those of us living out these relationships of husband and wife. And two, it clearly does not mean that women are to set aside their gifts, deny who God has called them to be, or be ruled by dominating husbands. The verb is “submit yourself,” not be cowed. What does it mean to voluntarily, under the Lordship of Jesus, submit yourself? Might be a different pattern than we learn in the world.

But it doesn’t end there. The next verse is for the husbands. “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.” (Colossians 3:19) These are connected. The first injunction presupposes the second. No harsh domination here and certainly no devaluing of the woman. Husbands love your wives. There are different types of love. There’s love that consumes and love that builds up. You say, “I love this cheeseburger,” and you chomp and swallow it down. That’s not what this is talking about. This is “agape” love—love that selflessly and self-sacrificially builds up the object of love. In a similar Scripture in Ephesians 5 we read, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25) Love like Jesus loved. Love like Jesus who gave Himself, who spent His life, who poured out his life literally, poured out His life blood on the ground to make the object of his love whole. Love your wife like that. Might make for a different household than most on the block.

Children obey your parents. Parents don’t exasperate your children until they lose their enthusiasm for life. Again, most ancient household codes didn’t even mention children. Children were not an afterthought, they were never-thought! In the Jesus-first home children have a place. It just isn’t first place. Jesus is in first place. You see the point.

If some of this starts to paint a picture for you, if you’re beginning to see what a Jesus-first family looks like, how a Jesus-first family looks different from families you know or maybe from the family you were raised in—the question is, okay if that’s the What then what’s the How? How do we put Jesus first at home? Let’s go back to the verses that set the whole thing up, verses 15-17. It gives us three points to think about. First verse 15: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Let the peace of Christ rule. “Rule” here is the word for an umpire or a referee. Anybody think they could use a referee in their house every now and then? Can you imagine? Some guy in a black and white striped shirt in the corner of the kitchen ready to blow the whistle, “Prrrt! Personal foul! Unnecessary roughness. Un-Jesus-like conduct. Roughing the pastor.” Might help. The peace of Christ is the referee. The peace of Christ makes the outside judgement. Family can get a little competitive, like there’s a contest—maybe even a conflict. You don’t have to always win. You don’t have to always get your way. In a Jesus-first household there is peace from Christ. It changes the game. “And be thankful,” it says. That’s connected. When the peace of Christ rules you will be thankful.

Verse 16: “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Okay that’s the Word. “Message” is the Word of Christ. Last week we talked about the clarity that comes with the Word of God as our first authority. The Word of God is inspired, life-giving, clear like light, a great gift. The Word of God is able to make us “wise for salvation” 2 Timothy 3 says. Wise. Wisdom is when you are able to do the right thing at the right time in the right way. That’s shorthand for wisdom. A Jesus-first home is saturated in wisdom from the Word. It “dwells among you.” It lives in your house. There is room for it. When something lives in your house, you make room for it. The new baby gets a new nursery, the kids get their rooms, even the dog gets a place to sleep. What place does the Word of God hold? Let it live in your house with plenty of room.

Third, verse 17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” In a Jesus-first family, one way to make a Jesus-first family, is to put the name of Jesus on every act.

Whatever you do, do it in the name of Jesus. That will change the way you go to soccer, the way you make vacation plans, the way you go to the store, the way you talk to one another and say hard and meaningful things and share the things you own and care for the stuff you have and deal with family tragedies or deaths or marriages...or every single thing! In the name, under the name, in the authority and by the reputation of the name of Jesus. The peace of Christ, the Word of Christ, the name of Christ. Jesus first.

A few years ago a married couple came to me about to throw in the towel with their marriage. After a few months, praise God, things came back together and the marriage was saved. The wife said, "Tim, I thought I had it figured out. We fell in love and got married and things were great. Then they got hard. But I figured it out—I needed to put him first. So I did. Then the kids came along and I figured I needed to put them first. So I did. We both did. But there never seemed to be enough love to go around. Finally I realized what you were saying, that Jesus needed to be first. The amazing thing was that with Jesus first, I actually loved my husband better, with Jesus first we actually loved our kids better. Instead of only having so much love to spread around, with Jesus in first place it felt like love just started to multiply in our home." Still brings tears to my eyes.

Out of order means broken; but under Jesus means whole. There are a lot of things that throw our families off balance. A lot of wind can blow and rattle that mobile. Less than half of today's households are in that classic Leave It to Beaver family model now. Most of us are dealing with families making the best of it after things went off course. The marriage didn't last. The illness changed everything. The tragic death and the rebuilding after. Our homes take all kinds of forms, and each one is different. Here's one thing I can tell you. No matter where you are with your family. You may be single living apart from your relatives, you may be part of a blended family with step sisters and half-brothers and adoptions and foster kids and four dogs, eight cats and sixteen chickens. Something sits in first place. Let it be Jesus. Let it be Jesus. Let it be Jesus.

## STUDY GUIDE

### FIRST THINGS FIRST • First at Home

#### Colossians 3:15-21

#### Start It

- "To love you as I should, I must worship God as Creator. When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. In so far as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased."  
– C.S. Lewis

#### Study It

- Should God come even before your own children? Should your love for God supersede your love for your spouse? Should God come first before family?
- Read Colossians 3:15-17. Look at these three things: the peace of Christ, the word (or message) of Christ and the name of Christ. What role do each of them play? How does that apply to family life?
- Read Colossians 3:18-19. Why do so many New Testament letters have such specific rules about how household members are to act with one another? How do you understand the two responsibilities of husband and wife, one to submit and the other to love sacrificially? What challenges are there in applying these verses to our marriages?
- Read Colossians 3:20-21. Should a child always obey his or her parent? How do parents embitter or discourage children?
- Do the phrases "as is fitting in the Lord" (v. 18) and "for this pleases the Lord" (v. 20) teach us anything further about these mutual responsibilities in a Christian household?
- What does it mean to put God in first place in your home or family relationships?

#### Pray It

*O Lord our God, in Your lovingkindness and wisdom You place every one of us in a family of some kind or other. May our families be places we learn more of love, learn more of patience, and learn more of joy. Help us to place You in first place even over our most dear and treasured relationships. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

#### Live It

Think of one way to elevate the peace of Christ, the Word of Christ or the name of Jesus in your family. Give it a try.