**First**

**Part 5**

**Opening text**: **Proverbs 3:1-10 – Living Bible (TLB)**

*“My son, never forget the things I’ve taught you. If you want a long and satisfying life, closely follow my instructions.****3****Never tire of loyalty and kindness. Hold these virtues tightly. Write them deep within your heart.****4-5****If you want favour with both God and man, and a reputation for good judgment and common sense, then trust the Lord completely; don’t ever trust yourself.****6In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success. 7-8****Don’t be conceited, sure of your own wisdom. Instead, trust and reverence the Lord, and turn your back on evil; when you do that, then you will be given renewed health and vitality.* ***9-10****Honour the Lord by giving him the* ***first*** *part of all your income, and he will fill your barns with wheat and barley and overflow your wine vats with the finest wines.”*

***6In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success***

**Introduction**

The word of God is so emphatic about what happens in our lives when we put God first. Each time we read about this principle, we also read about blessings that come with it.

With so many blessings to enjoy why is it then that to some, ‘putting God first’ is such a hard thing to do?

Firstly, because it takes faith, secondly because it involves obedience and thirdly because it’s really all about love. Let us start with the first reason:

1. **Because it takes faith**

It takes faith – trusting God and what He says.

1. It takes faith to do verses 9 (*Honour the Lord by giving him the first part of all your income).*  Naturally speaking, it is a lot easier to succumb to our survival instincts than to trust God. However, the results of trusting will always exceed anything we could achieve by our own efforts.
2. **Hebrews 11:4** - ***4****By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

In what way was his sacrifice more excellent?

Firstly because of his faith: “*by faith Abel*” He gave it in faith. Faith is not mentioned in relation to Cain. Secondly, Genesis 4:3-4 says that Cain brought an ‘offering’ but Abel brought the ‘*firstborn of his flock*’. **His first was for God**.

1. **2 Chronicles 16:12-13 - *12****In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet—until his disease became very severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but relied on the physicians.* ***13****And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign.*

The problem with Asa was that in his need, he did not even look to God at all. God was not in the picture.

**2 Kings 1:3** – … “*is there no God in Israel” …*?

It takes faith to put God first.

1. **Because it involves obedience**

Another reason why some find it hard to put God first is because obedience is involved.

Obedience is alignment with God. Obedience implies adjustment and actions which may feel uncomfortable to the flesh.

Here’s a couple of examples:

1. **Matthew 5:23-24** - **23***Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,****24****leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.* ***First*** *be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Obedience in this case, is accepting as ‘first’ what God says ‘first’. In this specific text God shows us that the nature of our relationships is crucial. It is the pre-requisite to make everything else work – even our relationship with God. This is ‘first’ in the eyes of God!

1. **Matthew 23:25-26 - *5****“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.****26****Blind Pharisee,* ***first*** *cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

According to this passage, attention to our inner life comes first (our thought life, our motives, our hearts).

**Matthew 7:4-5** - ***4****Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye?****5****Hypocrite!* ***First*** *remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*

Obedience is required for everything that God calls ‘first’. For that reason, some find it hard to completely surrender. However, blessings will always follow surrendering and putting God first.

1. **It’s all about love**

It is not hard to prioritise something or someone you love. It is not even hard to trust or obey when you love. How hard can it be to put God first when we truly love Him?

# Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (AMPC) 4*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord [the only Lord].5And you shall love the Lord your God with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being and with all your might. 6And these words which I am commanding you this day shall be first in your [own] minds and hearts; …*

# Loving God is the foundation for everything else. When love is present, trust is easy, obedience is not hard, and God is surely number one.

# That is why we spoke in previous messages about returning to our first love. Love is the key, love is the foundation, love is the true expression of the preeminence of Jesus in our lives.

# Jesus said that to whom much is forgiven, that one loves more (Luke 7:47).

# When we remember what Jesus has done for us, how can we not love Him? That is why I shared last week’s message about the beauty of what Jesus has done for us – and of what He is still doing. We have been forgiven of so much and blessed in so many ways!

# In the story of Easter we find a woman who loved more. Her name was Mary Magdalene. She was the first at the tomb where they had laid Jesus and, as a result, she was also the first to see the resurrected Jesus!

# John 20:1 - *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.*

**Mark 16: 9** *-* ***9****Now when He rose early on the first day of the week,* ***He appeared first*** *to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.*

On the first day of the week, she sought Jesus first, ahead of anything else she had to do that day, ahead of all others – and to her Jesus appeared first.

# It takes love to put God first. Stir up your love for God. Let there be no deficit of affection in your heart for Him!

# Conclusion

# Let us end today by remembering our opening text: *6In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.*