

Seeking Him First in a World That Puts Him Last

It's more than just believing in God. It's actually following Him.
 By Sister Michelle Watson

You've heard it a million times. Maybe more. From the pulpit. In Sunday school. From godly mentors. We Christians say it all the time.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and..." What comes next? "all these things shall be added unto you." This oft-quoted verse basically means that when you put God first, He provides everything you need. That's a pretty comforting thought considering the fact that most of you have a lot of life ahead of you, and you may be wondering just how it's all going to fall into place: college, career, marriage, etc. Just put God first, and He'll take care of it. Sounds simple enough.

But wait, Bible scholars. Who can tell me what words are missing from the verse I just quoted? Anyone know?

What Exactly Are You Seeking?

Matthew 6:33 reads like this: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, **and his righteousness**; and all these things shall be added unto you."

I think it's very interesting that Christ adds this clarifying phrase. He's kind of saying, "Put the things of God



first. You can do this by acting like me. Be righteous by following my example."

Oh, my dear young people. It *really* is that simple — just follow in the Master's footsteps, and the path will lead you to unspeakable joy. But how difficult is it to *really* act like Jesus these days? I think it's becoming harder and harder, especially for people your age.

Hang Out With Us

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Compromising Positions

The world is constantly calling you to compromise your beliefs — Christ's teachings. Many times, you do compromise, thinking it's no big deal because "life's just that way nowadays" or "everyone does it." Then, things don't turn out the way you expect. You find yourself in a bad marriage, an unhealthy career, or in debt up to your eyeballs, and you wonder, "Why didn't God provide?"

I don't want you to find yourself asking that question 10 or 15 years from now. The key to preventing many of life's woes is right there in Matthew 6:33 — *put Him first*.

Your No. 1

Take a second and consider several areas of your life:

- Career/job/school
- Romantic relationships
- Finances
- Entertainment choices
- Personal relationship with God
- Commitment to the church and the saints

Now, honestly ask yourself, "Am I putting God *first* in these areas?" Phrased another way, "Am I following Christ's commandments in these areas?" It's all too easy to make little (or big) compromises here and there, leaning on popular logic and opinion to make decisions instead of looking to God's word.

For example, have you made it clear to your boss that you can't work Sundays? Have you joined a fraternity or club whose members engage in less than godly behavior? Perhaps you've found someone special, and your physical relationship is less than pure. "It just made sense to move in together. Plus, if I didn't, then she'd think I didn't love her." Do you tithe 10 percent off the top, or do give what's left over? Do you spend time with God before you spend time with the TV? "I'll watch this first and then read scripture..." except you don't. Do you make it a point to support church activities, or is there always something else going on when it's conference weekend?

I hope that you feel convicted reading that list of questions — sheesh, I feel convicted writing it! It's so easy to rationalize our behavior. Many times, we think, "God understands. He knows my heart." He understands the reasons why

I'm having sex. He knows I'm only watching that smutty TV series because I'm bored. He's privy to all the reasons why I don't give money to church. He knows that my heart was at the Sunday service even though I slept in.

Yes, He knows and understands. And He loves you regardless. But that doesn't mean He's happy about it. He wants something better for you.

I care quite a bit about the young people who I know, so I feel compelled to tell you — all of you — the *truth*. And here it is: you can't ignore God's commandments (ignore the "righteousness" part of the verse) and expect to enjoy *God's best* in your life.

Sticking to the Standard in a Changing World

Things that weren't acceptable when I was a teenager (a very, very short time ago) are now considered normal. You guys have access to so much more evil stuff than I did pre-Internet. Have you heard anyone say the following things?

- You can't expect to find a job where you don't have to work Sundays.
- Nobody stays a virgin till marriage anymore.
- You have to go into debt at some point. It's inevitable.
- This movie isn't that bad.
- I can worship God privately in my heart and leave it at that.

You guys, *no*. God says,

- Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8)
- Flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18)
- The borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7)
- If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness (Matt. 6:23)
- Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22)

Just because society changes its standards doesn't mean God changes His. We can't read God's word and twist it to fit how we want to live. We have to follow *His* path, *His* plan.

It's the *only* road that leads to the joy you're seeking. It will definitely require temporary sacrifice right now, but you will thank yourself — and God! — later when you're reaping the benefits.

Two Plus Two Equals...

You guys are smart, so you fully understand the laws of cause and effect. If you study for a test, you do well. If you don't, you bomb. If you work hard at your job, you progress upward. If you don't, you get fired. If you eat right, you stay healthy. If you don't, you have to buy bigger jeans.

It's easy to accept these logical cause-effect relationships, but, for some reason, we don't understand why life gets so hard when we stray from God's path. We wonder, "How did I get to this point?" Duh. Compromise your walk with God, and you tie His hands.

I don't know about your generation, but my peers often want to enjoy all the benefits of *believing* in God without actually having to *follow* Him. When we do this, we honor Him with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him (Isaiah 29:13).

Let Him Be Your Lord

I think most of us readily accept Christ as our savior. We recognize that we need His saving grace, and we gladly and reverently accept it. But are we willing to actually take the

next step and allow Him to not only be our savior but our Lord (our leader)?

I urge you all to consider this important matter. The patterns of behavior that you set now can follow you through the rest of your life, so pattern your life after Christ's example *now*. Keep His commandments even if they seem outdated. Follow His footsteps even if they lead you away from the crowd. Don't worry about what others are doing. Submit your will to His, even if you get weird looks.

I don't know anyone who ever regretted putting God first. Sure, they've walked through some very tough times, but God has always been faithful and provided "all these things" — all their needs — in the end. In fact, God often provides over and above anything we can ask or think when we let His Spirit have its way (Ephesians 3:16-20).

Just imagine feeling joy so great that it pales in comparison to any temporary or fleeting pleasure that you missed out on. I don't think you'll ever regret living for His honor and glory rather than your own satisfaction. My friends, there is *so much* joy in it! Don't settle for less.