

SESSION 1

PLACE GOD FIRST

THE POINT:

GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

**EXODUS /// 20:1-6;
PSALM /// 16:1-4A,9-11**

Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words: ² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. ³ Do not have other gods besides me. ⁴ Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵ Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

Ps. 16:1 Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you. ² I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you." ³ As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them. ^{4a} The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely. ¹⁰ **For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.** ¹¹ **You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

a: Sheol (Ps. 16:10) – This is the abode of the dead (the underworld, "the pit," "the grave"), where it was believed everyone went after death. Even so, God is there (Ps. 139:8).

HOW CAN I PUT GOD FIRST IN MY LIFE?

Have you ever felt disappointed? Frustrated? Hurt? Confused? We all have. Life comes with issues—and these issues can show up in so many ways. When enough issues arise, life begins to feel like one big mess.

A man visited a doctor because his entire body hurt. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he felt pain. Every single place he touched brought great pain to him. The doctor examined him and said, “I don’t see anything wrong.” He asked the man to touch different places on his body. But each time, he cried out in pain.

After a few minutes of this, the doctor diagnosed the problem. “Sir,” the doctor said, “You have a dislocated finger.”

While it felt like everything was wrong, it was only one thing. This can be true for our lives as well. Even though it may seem like everything in life is a mess, the solution comes down to three words: Put God first. This one action affects everything.

God Alone Is God // Exodus 20:1-6

We put God first because He alone is God. This statement covers more than we realize. Some of us would say, “God is first,” but is He? For some people, what’s “first” in their lives is money, careers, pleasure, social media, sports, a person, or a special possession. When we give to anyone or anything the devotion, authority, and worship God alone deserves, the Bible describes that with one word: *idolatry*.

True, in our culture, we don’t bow down to wooden idols or statues. We don’t declare our devotion through rituals or sacrifice. Even though we don’t, it can be deceiving. Because we don’t physically bow to a person or a possession, we can blindly think they aren’t idols. The reality is, there are idols in our culture, and yet we mistakenly believe God is first in our lives.

God calls us to devote ourselves to Him first because He alone is God. In Him we find true life, both in this world and in eternity. As King,



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He sits over all. He rules over all. He governs all. God's rules are rooted in love, and He calls us to love Him. Jesus summed up what our devotion to God looks like: Love God and love others (Mark 12:29-31).

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PLACE GOD "FIRST" IN TODAY'S CULTURE?

To put God first means to live a life punctuated by a love which stems from a spirit of gratitude. Many who study the Ten Commandments skip the important opening verses of Exodus 20, when God first reminded the Israelites what He had done for them. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (v. 2). He reminded the Israelites of the redemption and freedom He had provided. Their gratitude to God for what He had done would serve as their foundation for putting Him first. Their gratitude displayed what was in their hearts and their desire to put God first.

It is the same today. When God asks us to put Him first, He's asking for our hearts. If we give Him our hearts, He knows our actions will follow.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUTTING OTHER THINGS BEFORE GOD?

God Alone Is Good

// Psalm 16:1-4a

When David said he had "nothing good besides" God, he wasn't making a blanket statement that everything was terrible. Instead, he was focusing on an important truth: God alone is good and He is the originator of all that is good. Based on this truth, we know two things: Good has one source: God. And if something is not good, it doesn't come from God.

This doesn't mean that if something doesn't "seem" good, it doesn't come from God. A lot of things may not "seem" good to us, but God uses them to create good (Gen. 50:20). Yet Satan seeks different ways to use these seemingly bad things to plant doubt in our hearts concerning God's goodness.

1. In trials or difficulties, Satan wants us to focus on the pain rather than the purpose. Satan sought to confuse Paul by giving him a "thorn in the flesh" to torment him. Paul could have blamed God for the difficulty rather than looking to God in the midst of the difficulty. He could have turned His back on God, but Paul chose to look to God for wisdom in his



DIGGING DEEPER THE DECALOGUE

Apart from Moses' citation of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) in Deuteronomy 5, the Old Testament gives little if any evidence of giving the Decalogue greater authority than any of the other Sinai laws. This does not mean these tablets were not treated as special. On the contrary, Moses notes the Decalogue contained the only revelation that was communicated by God directly to the people (Deut. 4:12-13; 5:22) and committed to writing on tablets of stone by God's own hand (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:1-4). All subsequent revelation at Sinai was communicated indirectly through Moses, the covenant mediator.¹

Why do you believe there was and is such a strong emphasis on teaching and learning the Ten Commandments?



suffering. Paul received the good that God intended: the perfecting of his strength in weakness (2 Cor. 12:6-10).

2. Satan causes doubts about the goodness of God by tempting us to develop a “victim mentality.” Satan attempted this with Job by striking down and destroying all the people and things Job loved and cherished, and then wreaking havoc on his health. Yet Job remained firm, trusting in the goodness of God (42:1-6).

Like Paul and Job, our experiences may not always feel or seem good. But we’re assured all things will be used for good when we love God and put Him first (Rom. 8:28-29). This promise in Romans 8:28-29 is for those “who love God” and live “according to

His purpose.” Translation: It’s for those who put God first.

WHAT EXPERIENCES IN YOUR LIFE REFLECT THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS GOOD?

God Alone Is the Way to Eternal Life

// Psalm 16:9-11

Most of us go through life feeling little need to know how to get where we’re going. Instead, we spend money on fancy apps to help us navigate through life like pros. Have you ever tried using your GPS in a area where road construction is taking place? You’ll quickly discover how important it truly is to know the way to where you are going. This also applies to where we’re going in our lives and for eternity. It’s important to know the way.

David knew “the path of life” was God Himself. God

showed him (and still shows us) the path of life on earth through His guidance, teachings, and directions.

God’s way is the only way which leads to both “abundant joy” in the present and “eternal pleasures” beyond time. Jesus described the importance of knowing the way and choosing God’s way when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is our GPS.

When we remain in Jesus and align ourselves under Him (John 15:1-8), He takes us where we need to go. He calms the difficult seas in our lives. Eternal life is a gift we receive by placing faith alone in Christ alone for the payment of our sins. The good news of the gospel is that we don’t have to pay for any of it. Jesus is the way. He is the gift.

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Too many people think God should let them in heaven because they've kept the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were never given as an entry point for eternity. While it's true God expects us to obey His commands, the ultimate purpose of the law is to show us our inability to keep those laws. In other words, it reveals our need for a Savior (Rom. 7:7).

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THIS CLASS HAS HELPED YOU DISCOVER GOD'S PATH FOR YOUR LIFE?

God has allowed a permanent sacrifice—Jesus Christ—to substitute for the punishment each of us deserves. “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Does this mean we ignore and shun righteous living, as well as the commands of God? “Absolutely not!” (Romans 6:2). But it does mean we have been set free from legalism and condemnation through the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. This allows us to willingly and gratefully pursue a life pleasing to God by placing Him first over everything else.

DID YOU KNOW?

The idea of God was at one time problematic in the African-American experience. The God who is Jesus was the God white Westerners introduced to the Gikuyu, Masai, and Wakamba people of East Africa. The problem? This God was believed to be responsible for the suffering of slavery. Also, He was not Ngai, who was the god of the African. They believed Ngai was god alone. When Ngai was stripped from the African culture, it left a terrifying darkness and void. But that was a long time ago. African-Americans have overcome this troubling experience, because many accepted the presentation of Christ and believe the one true God has delivered them from much suffering. According to Pew Research, today 83% of African-Americans are more likely to say they believe in God than other cultures.²

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE HURTS OF OUR PAST HAVE ON OUR ABILITY TO PUT GOD FIRST?

LIVE IT

How will you actively seek to put God first in your life?

The starting point for any personal change begins with honestly acknowledging what needs to change. If there is any area in your life where you do not put God first, confess that to God. Then make a commitment to begin each day by putting God first. This will look different for each person, but it could mean simply saying a prayer or reading your Bible when you first wake up.

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- Make a new habit by listing one action you will replace to demonstrate your recommitment to put God first in your life.
- Identify three personal characteristics or habits which could lead someone observing your lifestyle to conclude that you place God first.
- Consider keeping a notepad or journal this week where you write down every time you sought to put God's perspective and His guidance first in your life.

DAILY READINGS

1. DEVOTED TO YOU // EXODUS 20:1-2

What's your response to someone who displays devotion to you? Gratitude and appreciation are common responses. God displays His devotion to His people when He identifies Himself as belonging to them. Our acceptance of His devotion becomes apparent through our expressions of appreciation and obedience to Him. He deserves it. In many instances throughout Scripture, God displays faithfulness as our Protector, Provider, Healer, and so much more. We can trust a God who is devoted to us like that.

Let us commit our hearts in sincere obedience to the ways of the one God who is devoted to us.

2. NOTHING BUT GOODNESS // PSALM 16:2

It's challenging to find goodness with so much evil in the world. Daily news is filled with crime, death, terror, and hatred. So, where can we find goodness among so much distress? The answer is clearly God. There is no one good but God (Luke 18:19). The goodness of God is one of His attributes. This means God will always do what is true and what is right. Therefore, we can have confidence that none of the evils of the world is caused by Him. He will uphold us when those distresses encroach upon our lives.

As you walk with God, look for His goodness to show up in your life every single minute of the day.

3. FULL-NESS OF JOY // PSALM 16:11

Got Joy? It's easy to confuse joy with feeling happy because joy is often defined as happiness. The suffix "-ness" means a state of being. While it's OK to be in a state of happiness, it can be fleeting

because being happy is based entirely on circumstances. This verse provides another option. It reminds us that the abundance or full-NESS of joy is lasting and found only in the Lord.

Therefore, focus on getting your joy from the One who provides it completely. God's joy is eternal.

4. LAW AND ORDER // ROMANS 7:7

Have you ever been pulled over for a traffic stop? When we run a stop sign, the traffic laws convey we have disobeyed the local authorities. God's law acts the same way. Paul said, "I would not have known sin if it were not for the law." Without God's instructions, we would wander aimlessly through life, living as we please, with no regard for sin, for God, and His laws. Just as we avoid traffic infractions, even more so, we must avoid breaking God's law because He is the highest and greatest authority.

Need help? Store God's laws in your heart so you can follow them and avoid sin (Ps. 119:11).

5. FIRST THINGS FIRST // DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

God made His desire for His people clear. He commanded that He be first in our lives. Jesus repeated this truth with more details in Mark 12:30. We are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Loving God is exemplified when we make His kingdom more important than anything else in our lives. This kind of love does not happen all at once. It's a day-to-day learning process.

We must seek it, think about it, and learn about it on a daily basis. Soon His love will encompass everything we say and do.