



1ST QUARTER

**BIBLE CHARACTERS**

**WHO PUT**

**#GODFIRST**



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**Our heavenly Father, help us to seek You and Your kingdom first. Please accept our worship this morning. In the name of Jesus, amen.**

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**JANUARY 2, 2021**

## **When Jesus put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Jesus that will help us put God first in our lives today?

At the start of every new year, there is an expectation that it will be better than the previous year. The thought of something new is exciting. When Jesus was 30 years old, He started a new phase of His life. After being baptised in the Jordan River, His ministry had officially begun. But what happened next was very strange—and it will help us in this new year of 2021.

Matthew 4:1 says: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.” Isn’t that strange? Since the garden of Eden, Satan had been waiting for the moment he would try to deceive Jesus, as he had done with Adam and Eve. If Satan could have led Jesus to put Himself first, the whole war would have been lost. So Satan started with food. Yes, food.

For thousands of years, the enemy had observed how humans would do anything to meet their physical needs. Matthew writes: “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” Isn’t that obvious? Well, Matthew writes the obvious because he wants us to know that Jesus is fully human and, therefore, totally af-

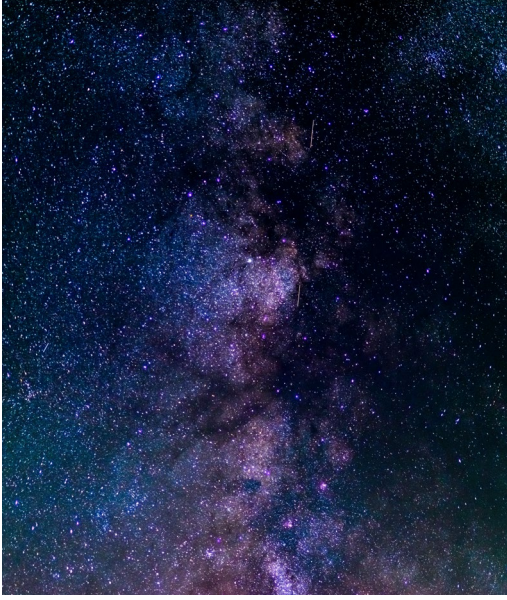
fectured by physical needs.

So the first temptation is for Jesus to doubt His identity and to put His physical needs first. You will be tempted throughout this year to put your own physical needs first. God has called you His child, but at every moment you can choose who should come first—God or your own physical needs. Jesus put God first.

Then the devil took Him to the temple. Jesus was now tempted, through a passage of scripture, to test God’s faithfulness. The second temptation was about putting His senses first. In other words, are you going to take God at His word? Or do you constantly need physical evidence of God’s love for you? Jesus decided to put God first.

Finally, the devil presented the very mission Jesus came to fulfill—and offered a shortcut. This third temptation is to take shortcuts instead of putting God first.

This is the first time in 2021 when tithes and offerings will be collected. Jesus put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**JANUARY 9, 2021**

## **When Abraham put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Abraham that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Abram was 80 years old when he left his rich and prosperous home to travel into the desert. God had called him, and Abram put God first. But, a few years later, Abram began to lie to save his own life.

Why did Abram become so fearful that he stopped putting God first? Time happened.

Did you have a time in your life when you would have dropped everything to follow Jesus? Many of us have done exactly that on multiple occasions. But then time passes, and our faithfulness turns into routine. Life happens and we start leaving God in second place or worse.

Some of us become disappointed with God because our lives didn't turn out as we expected. Did you achieve everything you aimed for last year? Probably not. It is easy to fall back into our own desires and fears.

Abram had the courage to challenge God and demand His promises be fulfilled. After all, Abram was promised a land and descendants. However, in Genesis 15, Abram challenges God directly:

"Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Sometimes we need to have some serious conversations with God. Do not continue in silence if you have a few things to say to your heavenly Father. Are you disappointed? Tell Him. Do you feel alone when He promised to be with you? Challenge Him like Abram did.

So God invited Abram to leave his tent and come outside. It is almost as if God is taking Abram from his limited reality and bringing him to God's reality. God says to Abram, "Your tent ceiling isn't large enough to accommodate what I can do." God reminds Abram that God is God, and Abram is not.

It is precisely because Abram put God first that his name was changed to Abraham. And his desire to be faithful led to the first biblical reference to tithing.

Abraham put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.





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**JANUARY 16, 2021**

## **When Moses put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Moses that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Moses tried to save the people through his own power. It didn't work. In fact, he was banished from Egypt and his dreams were dead. After decades working as a shepherd in the desert, something strange happened to Moses. God called him to revive the dreams of his youth—to see the people of Israel freed from slavery.

Moses wasn't ready. He could no longer speak properly and believed he was too old to challenge Pharaoh. He was right about that. For Moses, putting God first meant refusing to believe in his own ability and strength. It meant putting his whole life in God's hand and accepting the call based on God's power, not his own inadequacies. Here is Exodus 4:10–12:

“Then Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

So the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

Because Moses put God first, his entire nation was rescued from slavery. Moses wasn't perfect and neither are we. Like God called Moses, He is still calling us to put Him first in our lives. Each of us has a special mission that can only be achieved by putting God first. Even though this can be difficult, the Holy Spirit helps us with the courage to do it.

Moses put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**JANUARY 23, 2021**

## **When Joshua put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Joshua that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Joshua had been a slave in Egypt. He was familiar with the slave master's whip tearing at his skin. Then, one day, an old man walks into Pharaoh's palace and tells him to free the Israelites. Joshua saw every Egyptian god being humiliated by Jehovah, the only true God. Soon after, he was walking across the sea on dry ground on his way to freedom.

Joshua became Moses' disciple soon after, even following him to the base of Mount Sinai when God delivered the commandments. Sometime later, Joshua was chosen by his tribe to represent them as a spy going into the land God had promised. He must have been both scared and thrilled.

Along with the other 11 spies, Joshua saw for himself the wonderful land they would inhabit. However, he would soon discover that his moment of courage was not visiting the land but arguing with his fellow spies.

Ten of the spies saw the same thing Joshua did, but disagreed with the conclusion. They were sure the Canaanites were going to destroy them. Joshua had to put God's promises first and stand up against them.

Eventually Joshua was chosen to lead the people of Israel into that same promised land, some 40 years later. It wasn't easy for him, but Joshua was certain of one thing—he would put God first, no matter what happened. Here is what Joshua said to the people of Israel, as recorded in Joshua 24:15:

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua put God first and God always came through. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**JANUARY 30, 2021**

## **When Ruth put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Ruth that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Ruth was not an Israelite when she was born. She grew up as a Moabite and probably worshipped Chemosh, the fish God of the Moabites. Chemosh was also known as “the destroyer”. In 2 Kings 3:27, we see the king of Moab offering his own son and heir as a blood sacrifice to Chemosh.

In sharp contrast to this, Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi, spoke of Jehovah, the loving God of the Israelites, who rescued His people from slavery and calls them to love and respect each other. Ruth must have started to worship Jehovah a long time before the tragedies happened.

In a sad and dark turn of events, Naomi lost her husband and two sons within a decade. Her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were devastated. Life was already difficult when their husbands were alive, but now the situation was desperate. Naomi decided to return to Israel and sent both of them home. Orpah eventually agreed to go home. On the other hand, Ruth simply refused.

Even at this darkest hour in her life, she didn’t blame God for her circumstances. Instead, she put God first in her life and insisted in travelling with Naomi to continue worshipping Jehovah. Here are Ruth’s words, as recorded in Ruth 1:16:

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Life may be difficult for you right now. Putting God first doesn’t guarantee that our lives will be easy, but it does mean we will find peace and salvation. Ruth found a loving husband and joined the people of God. In fact, Ruth had the honour of becoming a direct ancestor of Jesus Himself, the saviour of the world.

Ruth put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**FEBRUARY 6, 2021**

## **When Hannah put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Hannah that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Hannah experienced a wonderful miracle in her life. God answered her prayer and gave her a son. She must have been so happy to discover she was pregnant. A few months earlier, she had entered the temple in Jerusalem and opened her heart to God, even promising that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to God's service.

Now that she was a mother, her life was so different. She named her son Samuel, which means "heard by God". We can imagine Hannah sitting with little Samuel and teaching him about God through the telling and retelling of the old stories. Samuel was a miracle and she loved him with all her heart.

But the time soon came when she had to take Samuel to the temple to serve the Lord, as she had promised. Although God had given her many other children, Samuel was her first. Giving him up to the Lord still as a child must have been very difficult. Putting God first is often difficult. But here are Hannah's own words, as recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1, 2:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord;  
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.  
There is no-one holy like the Lord;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God."

Samuel would become one of the greatest prophets in the history of the people of Israel. He was a man of God who anointed king Saul and even king David himself. None of this would have happened if his mother had refused to put God first.

If you are a parent, have you ever wondered what impact putting God first will have on your children? It is impossible to predict the kind of impact children will have on the world when they grow up witnessing their parents putting God first.

Hannah put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**FEBRUARY 13, 2021**

## **When David put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from David that will help us put God first in our lives today?

King David is remembered as a hero in the history of the Israelites. His greatest moments were those when he accepted the call to put God first. When his fellow Israelites were shaking in fear from the giant and his insults, David put God before his own protection. Picking up a few stones and facing Goliath in the name of Jehovah seemed foolish to others. But David put God first and God delivered him in that battle.

Later in the story, David had been anointed king, had defeated the giant, had worked in the palace and had even married the king's daughter. You would be excused for thinking his life went from glory to glory after all this. It did not. King Saul persecuted him as the greatest terrorist in the kingdom and every Israelite soldier who saw Goliath fall to the ground were now trying to capture David, dead or alive.

Nevertheless, even in these frustrating and confusing circumstances when all seems lost and God seems to have disappeared, David put God first. When he entered the camp where king Saul was sleeping, he could have killed the tyrant and taken over the throne. He did not. God would not have approved revenge in this way, so David put God first and went back into hiding.

David didn't always put God first. The adultery with Bathsheba and her husband's killing were clear examples of sins David committed when he put himself first. But eventually David takes responsibility for his sins, repents and puts God first again. By the end of his life, he cannot accept that his house looks better than the house of God. He vows to do everything he can so God's house is better than his palace.

David put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect our tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.





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**FEBRUARY 20, 2021**

## **When Daniel put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Daniel that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Daniel was a young man when he was taken to Babylon, the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. King Nebuchadnezzar would take the best and brightest young men as captives from the many nations he conquered. He would then indoctrinate them into Babylonian science and religion, knowing they would greatly contribute to the expansion of his kingdom. Ten thousand other young people were taken alongside Daniel and, from them, the best of the best were taken to the palace. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were some of these.

Their first test was a biblical diet. Putting God first could have cost them all the privileges afforded them—or worse, they could lose their lives. However, these young men made a commitment in their hearts to put God first, no matter what happened. They couldn't be forced or bribed to do otherwise. They were faithful with their diets and God gave them wisdom, helping them become the top students in the Babylonian "university".

Later, Daniel would be put in charge of all other scientists, while his three friends would eventually become the top leaders of the capital city, Babylon itself. This only happened because they put God first, no matter the consequences. In fact, they were willing to be burnt alive rather than compromise. Daniel 3:17 records their words:

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Even as an old man, Daniel would rather be thrown into a den of lions than stop praying first thing in the morning. But God came through again and Daniel lived to praise him and become the prime minister of Babylon.

Daniel put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**FEBRUARY 27, 2021**

## **When Esther put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Esther that will help us put God first in our lives today?

When Esther agreed to join the selection process that would eventually make her queen of the Persian empire, many doubts must have rushed through her mind. Her people were exiles and their prospects were dim. It looked like God had abandoned them to the Persian rule, while still demanding obedience. But Esther was beautiful and this was an opportunity to rise above every woman in the empire.

Esther was beautiful, both inside and out. Even a ruthless king could see that. Xerxes chose her, above all others, to become his queen. Esther enjoyed her own palace and privileges she could have only imagined in previous years.

It is difficult to put God first when we struggle with poverty and the lack of resources. Yet, wealth and power often also lead people away from Him. How do you put God first when you have more wealth and influence than those around you? You follow the example of Esther and remember those who need protection.

King Xerxes was deceived by an advisor when he issued a death decree against all Hebrews. When challenged to beg the king for mercy, Esther was afraid. In her own words, Esther 4:11 reads:

“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

Esther was not immune to fear. But she was as courageous as she was beautiful. After asking all the Hebrews to fast and pray, she risked her life by entering the king’s presence uninvited. At that moment of great risk, she puts God first and proclaims some of the most unforgettable words in all history: “If I perish, I perish.”

Esther put God first. Her example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**MARCH 6, 2021**

## **When Peter put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Peter that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Peter was one of the oldest disciples Jesus called. He was determined and trustworthy. On a stormy night, Jesus appeared to the group as a ghost walking on water. Peter was the first to speak out in his desire to be with Jesus, even if it meant jumping out of the boat and walking on water. Putting God first seemed to come easy for Peter. Until he almost drowned.

Soon after walking on water, Peter doubted. As Peter began to be engulfed by the tempestuous water, he must have felt the shame of public failure. He had asked to come to Jesus and all the disciples could now see that he had failed. Putting God first in our failures isn't easy. But Peter did it. He shouted for help and Jesus saved him.

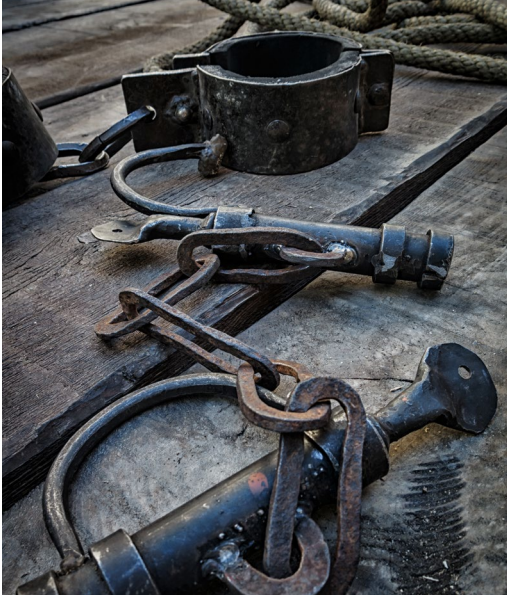
This story repeats itself when Jesus is arrested and crucified. Peter had promised to be next to Jesus, no matter what, but Jesus warned him of his betrayal that very night. Peter wasn't scared. He was ready to die for Jesus. This is clear from Peter's attack in Gethsemane. Despite the soldiers surrounding them, Peter tries to kill someone.

Thankfully, he was a fisherman, not a soldier. He missed and cut the man's ear instead.

What Jesus did next confused him. Jesus healed the man and said He didn't need protection. What could that mean? Peter was ready for conflict and Jesus rebuked him for it. He followed Jesus from a distance and denied knowing him three times that night, as Jesus predicted. Meanwhile, John stayed right next to Jesus throughout the horror of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Peter had failed again. How could he possibly lead anything after that?

Putting God first in the midst of our failure, confusion and shame is impossible. It is only through God's power that we can accept God's forgiveness and start again. Later, Peter would become an excellent leader as Jesus trusted him again and again. Perhaps you've been unfaithful with your tithe and offerings in the past. Perhaps you've failed. Putting God first means asking for and accepting God's forgiveness today. It means starting again to trust in God with your finances.

Peter put God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.



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**MARCH 13, 2021**

## **When Paul put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Paul that will help us put God first in our lives today?

Paul had always put God first but, as he persecuted the followers of Jesus, Paul could not see what was right in front of him. It was only when Paul fell to the ground, blinded by the light of Jesus, that he began to truly see. For Paul, putting God first meant humbly questioning his assumptions and going back to scripture.

After three years in Arabia, Paul returns with a renewed conviction that God had not given up on the world. Jesus was the saviour who wanted to reach every human being. Paul continued putting God first as he travelled from city to city and village to village to announce Jesus. Nothing would deter Paul from putting God first, including the many times people tried to kill him.

On one occasion, Paul and his companion Silas had their clothes ripped off in the middle of the city square. They were beaten and put in the inner cell, with their feet clamped in the stocks. Still bleeding and bruised, Paul and Silas did the unthinkable:

instead of complaining, they worshipped Jesus. If you are at your lowest moment right now and everything seems to have gone wrong, there is no better time to worship than today.

Then God sent an earthquake. Assuming the prisoners had escaped, the officer in charge picked up a sword to kill himself. Paul and Silas remembered the beatings, torture and humiliation that officer put them through. For Paul and Silas to have revenge, all they needed to do was wait for the officer's body to hit the ground.

But Paul and Silas were the kind of men who put God first. In that split second, they decided to forgive the officer and shouted for him to stop. That officer and his family met Jesus and, by the end of that night, they were also worshipping the King of Kings.

Paul and Silas put God first. Their example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.





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**MARCH 20, 2021**

## **When John put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from John that will help us put God first in our lives today?

John was the youngest of all the disciples. He loved Jesus with all his heart. When all other disciples scattered following Jesus' arrest, John stayed close to Jesus through the entire ordeal. Jesus honoured his faithfulness by giving him the mission of taking care of the woman who cared for Jesus the most: Mary, His mother.

But when he was young, John was vengeful and angry. It was hard for him to feel compassion for those who rejected Jesus. Once he suggested to Jesus that fire should come from heaven and completely destroy the Samaritans who rejected Jesus. Putting God first in John's life wasn't a single moment of courage. Instead, it was a life-long commitment to love as Jesus loved.

After Jesus returned to heaven, John remained faithful until his death, some 70 years later. He eventually became the pastor of the church in Ephesus and wrote many books of the New Testament—the gospel of John and the book of Revelation among them. However, his letters to the churches provide the greatest insight into his conversion. Here are his own words, recorded in 1 John 4:7:

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is from God.”

Sometimes we are disappointed that we still can't control our temper and our desires. But John went through a profound transformation over a lifetime by putting God first every day of his life. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to also put God first today.



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**MARCH 27, 2021**

## **When Noah put God First**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Noah that will help us put God first in our lives today?

If you have ever felt that people in your city don't care about God, you know how Noah felt. In fact, it wasn't only God they didn't care about. They didn't care about each other either. The situation became so evil that if they were allowed to continue acting that way, every human being would have been destroyed.

It was at that moment that God stepped in to save the world the first time around.

Noah was told to put God first and dedicate the next century of his life to building an ark, and call everyone to repent and change their ways. He was mocked and ridiculed by the very people he was instructed to warn, but he didn't give up. Every day Noah put God first and followed the instructions he was given.

All of us are tempted to put our own projects and priorities first. Perhaps you are an administrator of many resources. Or perhaps you are constantly struggling to make ends meet. Like Noah, all of us are challenged every day, every week, every month, to put God's kingdom first. God has promised that all other things will be added. And God keeps His promises.

The flood came and the ark saved Noah and his family from total destruction. Humanity had been saved.

Like in the days of Noah, the people God has asked you to warn might mock and ridicule you. But one day soon, God will come back to save us. Those who put God first will see the results of their efforts with every person who will be saved.

With every plank and nail, Noah was putting God first. His example compels us to do the same. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first today.