



2021

OFFERING CALENDAR

Victoria

GOD FIRST

ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES



Dear Church Leaders,

Thank you for your faithfulness in leading, empowering and caring for your local congregations. This resource jointly developed between your local conference and the Australia Union Conference provides information and inspirational readings on stewardship, tithes and offerings for each Sabbath of 2021.

Thank you again for your ministry and may God multiply the fruit of your labour.

*Director for Stewardship
Victorian Conference*



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Local Church



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 affected 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 fulfil—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.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

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.

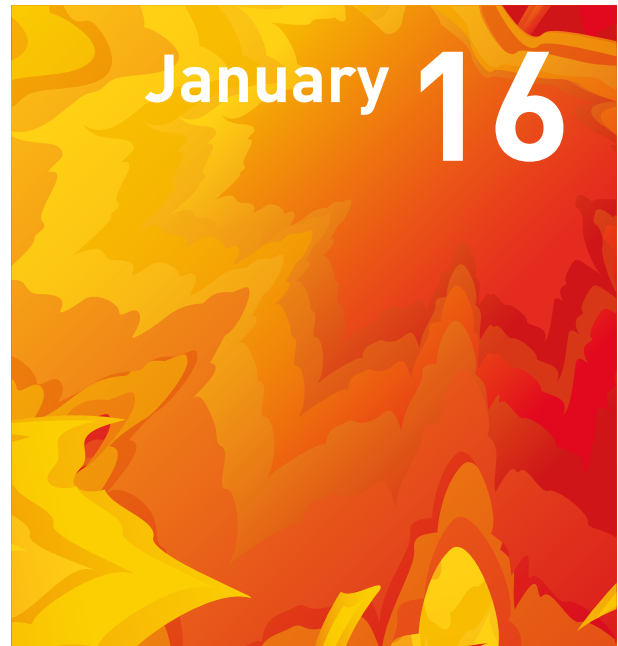
So God invited Abram to leave his tent and come outside. It is almost as if God is taking Abram from his limited reality and bringing him to God's reality. God says to Abram, "Your tent ceiling isn't large enough to accommodate what I can do." God reminds Abram that God is God, and Abram is not.

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.

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

Local Church



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.

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



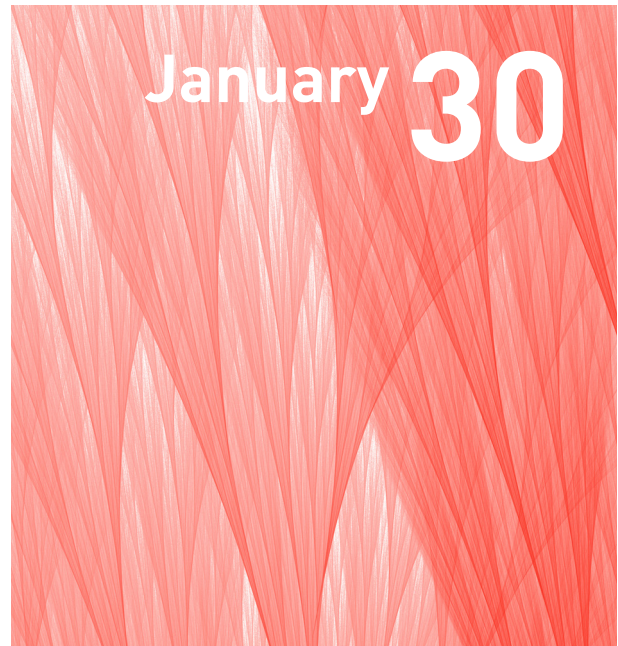
SPD Strategy: DISCIPLESHIP OF ADVENTIST YOUTH

The youth and young adults across the South Pacific wish to thank the corporate church for the amazing support that has been offered in providing funding for the World Changer Bibles and reading guides that have had an incredible positive impact in the churches. To date we have distributed more than 505,000 World Changer Bible kits and provided training to pastors and lay people across the 35 territories of our South Pacific Division. 70,000 of these WC Bible kits were dedicated to every student in every Adventist school across the Pacific including Australia and New Zealand. We have seen unprecedented growth in many of our Island territories and this is partially due to the valuable ministry tools. The Pacific Nations are Christian, and as the younger population are growing with higher birth rates than Australia and NZ, there is a continual need for Bibles and other resources to keep up with the next wave of students and young people joining the church. Due to the lack of finances and high unemployment, many of our members cannot afford to buy a Bible. Most people are part of the informal economy selling produce from their land only – living at subsistence level. There is an HUGE ongoing need for more Bibles to be given into the hands of new believers and our young people as they enter our Adventist schools. The Youth offering is a dedicated offering that will help to resource the needs of our youth and young adults across the South Pacific. There is a crucial need for more Bibles and other resources for young Adventists. Your donation will provide much needed support and will enable our young boys and girls to share their faith with their friends. Please give generously as the needs are urgent.



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

Education



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.

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



Local Church

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.

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

Disaster & Famine Relief: ADMINISTERED BY UNION



“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”
Isaiah 1:17 (NIV)

In an average year more than 300 disasters affect more than 200 million people – most of which are already in poverty and disadvantage. Disasters like bushfires, flooding and cyclones destroy homes and livelihoods, leaving thousands of children, women and men without their basic needs. They often need shelter, enough food to eat, clean water, physical safety and the ability to rebuild their lives. And they can’t do this without our help.

Appeal: By supporting the Disaster and Famine Relief Offering today, you will enable ADRA to be ready to respond immediately to disasters both at home and overseas. Your offering will help deliver emergency shelter, food, water and medical supplies to those affected.



Thank you Lord for being a God of grace and mercy. Please open our hearts today to those who need hope in times of distress. Bless and multiply our offerings so that others can feel the comfort of your love when facing uncertain times. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.





Local Church

When Daniel and his friends 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 became the chief interpreter and was appointed over all the pagan magicians of Babylon. Daniel was also a government official under 4 kings. Some commentaries say he was made 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.

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

Education



February 27

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.



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





Local Church

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.

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

Adventist World Radio



Radio has a special place in my heart. It was the radio ministry that brought my own family a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus and an introduction to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Shortly after the close of World War II, my family lived in a small logging town in northern California. There were no Adventists and, of course, no Adventist church. My brothers and I were preschoolers at that time. Mom and Dad found the radio program on our kitchen radio, and we would all listen on Sunday mornings during breakfast.

After listening to the program for a period of time, my parents took the Bible correspondence course and upon completion requested a visit from an Adventist pastor. The pastor gave them some additional studies, and they were baptized in the Klamath River. That is one of my earliest memories.

Over the years, I have thanked God that someone sponsored that radio program on a station that reached our little wooden mill-town home. Our family's life-focus changed dramatically after my parents' baptism. There was church school, academy, and college, and service for God's church.

With my background, it is easy for me to imagine other families in isolated places in the world - places where there are no Adventists members or churches - responding to the broadcast ministry of Adventist World Radio. The thousands of letters and e-mails received by AWR each year are a positive testimony that families are being reached by radio.



Local Church

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 lifelong 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.

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

Education



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.

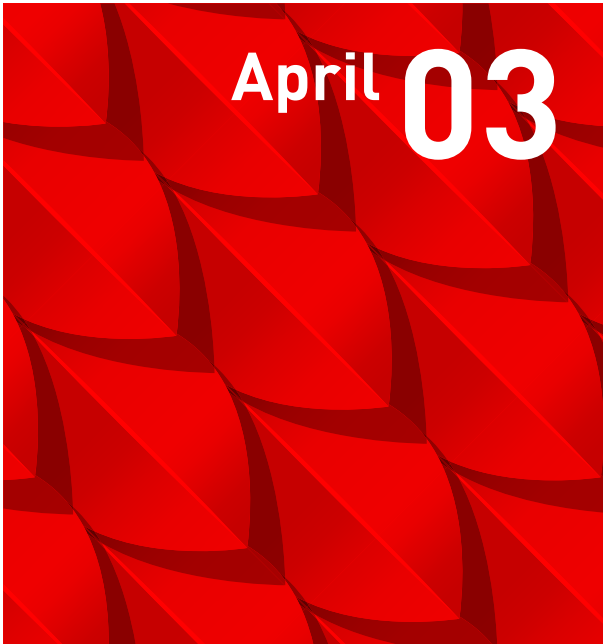
The flood came and the ark saved Noah and his family from total destruction. Humanity had been saved.

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.

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



Evangelism

When Judas refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Judas, who refused to put God first?

The other disciples believed Judas was the perfect disciple. He was intelligent and very competent. He also believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, Judas wanted to follow Jesus closely so he would obtain a high position in the kingdom of God.

Ellen White reminds us that “the Saviour read the heart of Judas; He knew the depths of iniquity to which, unless delivered by the grace of God, Judas would sink. In connecting this man with Himself, He placed him where he might, day by day, be brought in contact with the outflowing of His own unselfish love. If he would open his heart to Christ, divine grace would banish the demon of selfishness, and even Judas might become a subject of the kingdom of God” (The Desire of Ages, page 294).

Many of us have talents and abilities that help us achieve so much in our careers and local church leadership. Like Judas, it is possible for us to believe in Jesus while we are slaves to our own selfishness. Judas was in charge of the money so he could experience the joy of giving in a transformative way. Putting God first in our tithe and promise is a tangible way Jesus is also transforming our hearts.

Like Judas, we are also tempted to follow Jesus so we can get our mansion in heaven. However, the Bible doesn't encourage anyone to desire heaven because

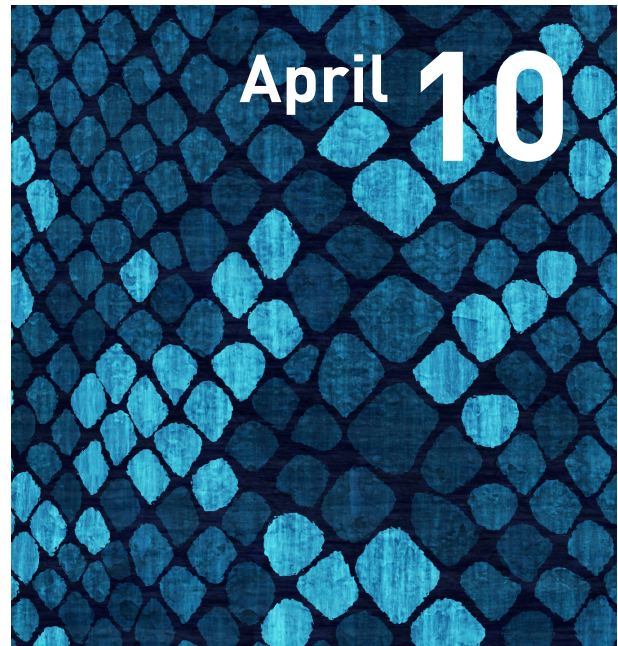
of the wealth. When Judas asks to become a disciple, Jesus simply responds: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:19, 20).

When Judas denied Jesus and eventually committed suicide, his selfishness finally won the war for his heart. Money had no value any longer, so the 30 coins became a curse and a reminder of his failures. God is inviting you and me to put His kingdom first in everything we do. Money is a blessing from God only when we allow Jesus to defeat selfishness in our hearts.

Judas refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His kingdom first, while Judas' example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Hope Channel



Sarah grew up believing in Jesus and loved Him from a very young age. Yet, like many of us, she never felt good enough for Him and this cast a dark shadow over her childhood. Sarah thought, “Well if I can’t ever be good enough, then I’ll just not try. I’ll just make the best life I can on this earth.” This way of thinking did not bring her the peace and hope she was searching for.

This led to unhealthy habits, she’d look for worth in relationships and substances, but this only brought further pain. She fell into depression for several years. This was only heightened when she needed surgery on her hands. As she recovered from these surgeries she was unable to do regular everyday tasks. Her days were spent in bed, watching television and her self-worth continued to plummet. Sarah fell into a dark place, further away from God, to the point where she considered ending her life.

It was at this point she reached out to a friend who suggested downloading some inspirational content onto her phone. That’s when Sarah found Hope Channel – right in the app store in her phone! “I liked the name,” Sarah said. “I thought okay, ‘Hope Channel’ – I am really looking for hope right now!” The first program she came across was Table Talk, and she started watching right away. Through this program she began to understand God’s grace and her life started to change.

This led to Let’s Pray LIVE and she began to reach out to their online community. Now, she feels she is part of a family. She has peace knowing others are praying for her. Sarah says, “I’m just so grateful that I found [Hope Channel] and in the months since I found it, I have never once thought about throwing away this precious life that I’ve been given. I am joyful.””

Appeal: Thousands around the world like Sarah are searching for hope. They are looking for a community to connect with and for people who will pray with them. With 59 Hope Channels around the world and programming that broadcasts in over 70 languages, Hope Channel is working every day to share hope and peace. Today, the offering will further the ministry of Hope Channel. Your faithful support of Hope Channel makes this possible and allows for continued growth and reach to new places. Let us join together to share hope around the world!

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

When Cain refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Cain, who refused to put God first?

Adam and Eve had been cast out of the Garden of Eden when Cain was born. They experienced hardship together. Adam worked hard to grow sustenance from the earth and his children certainly helped when they were old enough to start working.

Cain focused on agriculture. Abel kept flocks. Both observed carefully how their parents talked about God and told stories of the garden. Both heard how God sacrificed the first animal for the forgiveness of their sins and to cover their shame. Both Cain and Abel wanted to worship God.

When they came of age, the Bible says they both brought an offering from the best of what they had. Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock, while Cain brought some of the first fruits from the soil. God looked with favour on the offering Abel brought, but rejected Cain's offering. Cain became furious. Not at God and not even at himself. He was furious with Abel, his brother.

Rejection isn't something human beings know how to deal with well. We hate being rejected and much of our lives is spent doing everything we can to avoid rejection. We sacrifice many years studying, so we are not rejected when applying for a job. We sacrifice time and money dressing up and taking care of ourselves, so we are not rejected romantically. We sacrifice our talents raising resources, so our credit card isn't rejected at the store.

Despite our best efforts, however, rejection still comes. In this case, Cain clearly rejected God's example of what an acceptable offering should have been. In humility, Cain should have arranged with his brother to have an animal sacrifice. He didn't. Perhaps he thought he would do his best and that should have been enough.

Sometimes we decide to make our own rules when it comes to our offering. This is a mistake. God is God and we are not. The instructions on what we should do with our tithes and offerings are clear and we must follow them.

Once rejected, Cain could not bring himself to be vulnerable and talk to God, his parents or even his brother. Without any resistance, resentment took over Cain. God tried to help but Cain rejected God too. Sin took over his heart and he surrendered all control to his anger and violence. Cain would go down in history as the first murderer.

Cain refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Cain's example is a warning for us today. But we don't have to be like Cain. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, let's put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When Samson refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Samson, who refused to put God first?

Samson was born as a Nazarene. This meant he had to live a certain way. First of all, he should not drink wine, grape juice or anything that came from the vine. He should not touch dead bodies and—most famously—Nazarenes should not cut their hair.

Since his younger years, Samson was a strong and disagreeable boy. When he came of age, the Lord led him to a young Philistine woman. Meeting her is described in this way:

“Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. . . .

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along” (Judges 14:5–9).

Did you notice it? Samson liked to live on the edge between right and wrong. God’s instructions were clear: stay away from grapes and dead bodies. In this one short passage, he disobeyed both instructions. Later it would be easier for him to allow his hair to be cut as he already chosen the rebellious route.

No-one wakes up on day and decides to reject God. There is always a series of small decisions when we fail to put God first. When we notice our strength hasn’t left us, we convince ourselves we are still on the right track. God invites us to put Him first today, so we are not victims of our enemy like Samson was.

When Samson woke up to the spiritual corruption of his heart, he immediately called out to God and God answered. In fact, the Bible tells the story that every prayer Samson prayed was answered. God was merciful with Samson and He will be merciful with us. Even if you were not faithful with your tithe and offerings in the past, you can always start today.

Samson refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Samson’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

When Eli's sons refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Eli, who refused to put God first?

Eli was a great man. He took his duties as a high priest seriously. During the time of the judges, people came to worship God from everywhere. Eli was always ready to protect the tabernacle and lead people in worship.

Thousands came to the tabernacle every year and Eli was ready to help them. One day he prayed with a woman who was asking for a child and God answered their prayers. Once that child was born, his mother Hannah decided to put God first and bring the boy to serve in the tabernacle .

Eli taught Samuel everything he knew about God and the priestly service. Then one day, God spoke to Eli through the boy. You might remember the story of God calling Samuel three times in the middle of the night. What we often forget is the content of the message that God wanted to deliver.

Eli had been so focused on the people of Israel that he had not paid enough attention to his own sons. God had previously impressed on Eli the importance of educating his sons to put God first. Instead, Eli refused to discipline and educate them. The results were terrible.

Eli's sons became priests who refused to put God first. They had no respect for the offerings brought to the tabernacle by faithful Israelites. In fact, the Bible says:

"This sin of the young men was very great in the

Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt" (1 Samuel 2:17).

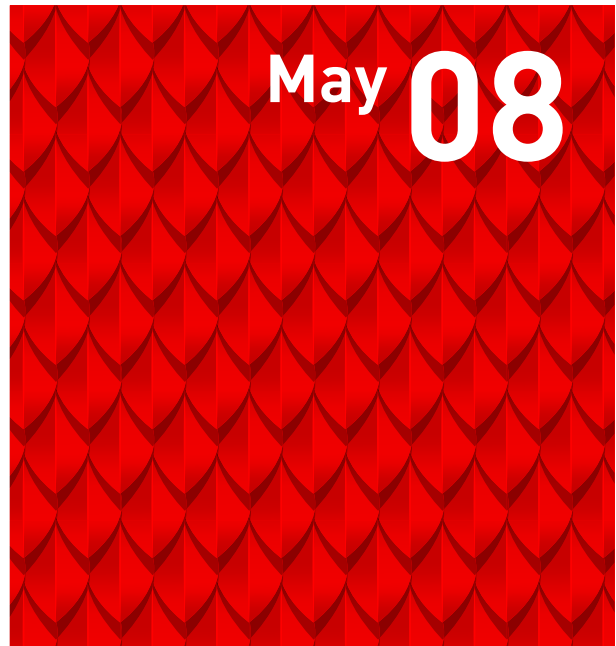
This is a devastating expression. Treating the Lord's offerings with contempt meant they despised the offerings and had no respect or reverence for them. God didn't take that lightly and eventually both of Eli's sons were killed by the Philistines. Eli died on the same day when he collapsed after hearing the news about the capture of the Ark of the Covenant.

Sometimes we don't give our tithe and offerings the respect and reverence they deserve. They are a reflection of our connection and respect for our Creator.

Eli's sons refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Eli's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

South Pacific Record



Did you know? Adventist Record is more than a magazine that informs, inspires and nurtures church members across the South Pacific. As well as the print magazine you've always known and loved, Adventist Record is now a website that's updated daily, a dynamic Facebook, Instagram and Twitter page, inspirational videos . . . all to serve you in more ways and more places.

Adventist Record has been spotted in some diverse settings, from prisons in PNG, to marketplaces in Solomon Islands, to fruit stalls in Cook Islands and of course the magazines find their way into churches all throughout our Pacific region.

But all of this is only possible through your continued support. By giving to the Adventist Record offering you ensure that we can continue to tell our stories, connect our family and share our hope.



Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.





Local Church

When Solomon refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Solomon, who refused to put God first?

Everything started well for Solomon. The weight of the crown led him to ask for wisdom—the one thing he needed most. His request was fulfilled. And God also blessed Solomon’s reign with wealth, health and prosperity.

In time, however, Solomon’s wisdom turned into rationalisation. He used his intelligence and intellect to provide rational excuses as to why he broke many of God’s established laws.

- Solomon used forced labour to build the house of the Lord as that must have seemed more efficient.
- Solomon married princesses from many other nations, so he could forge peace treaties with his enemies.
- Solomon built altars to his wives’ gods as a way of welcoming them into his kingdom.
- Solomon built his palace to be three times larger than the temple so he could accommodate his large household.

All of these rationalisations seemed to make sense and, at first, brought much wealth to the kingdom. However, they led to high taxes and injustices that were not sustainable. God has given the laws that lead to long-term prosperity and peace, but Solomon used his intellect to bend them according to his pleasure. Solomon did not put God first and Israel was divided into two kingdoms within months of his death.

Today it is still common to find highly intelligent

and knowledgeable people rationalising the breaking of God’s law. Putting God first means taking His word seriously and following it. The simplicity of a child following the instructions of a loving parent is perhaps the best antidote to our own demise.

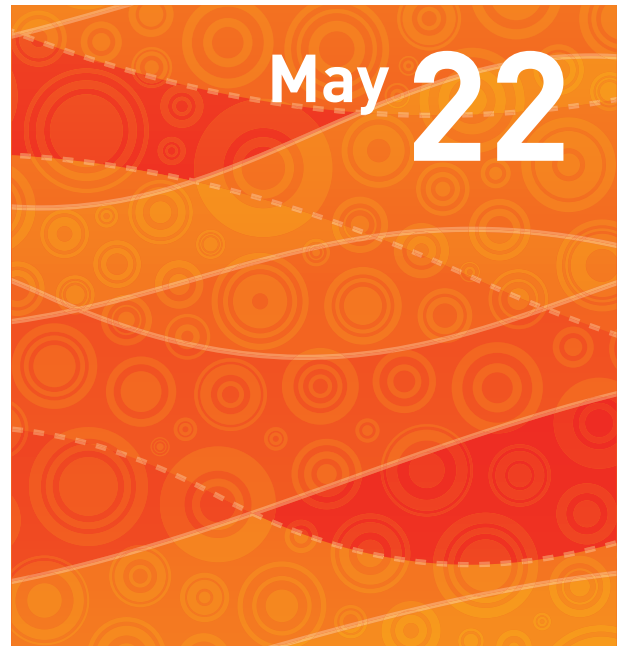
God stands ready to open the doors to health, wealth and prosperity to many of us, according to His plans for our lives. Sometimes God keeps a door shut because our faith and future would be compromised if we were to walk through it.

God’s faithfulness evokes our own response. If we are faithful with the small things, God will put us in charge of greater things. We are stewards, glad to serve the Master in taking care of His resources.

Solomon refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Solomon’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When Israel refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Israel, who refused to put God first?

When Moses returned to Egypt to free the people of Israel, it was clear that they weren't ready. Centuries of slavery had corroded their vision of God and themselves. Nonetheless, God delivered on His promise to Abraham.

Once in the desert, they were technically free. Except they had no idea how free people lived. They would sooner return to bondage than rely on a God they could not see. But God was patient with them, demonstrating His love daily through the cloud, the fire and manna.

God's law was the set of instructions they needed to learn how to be free. This was especially true of the Sabbath, which clearly outlines how to worship God and how to respect human beings and creation alike.

But their most decisive moment as a people wasn't related to the Sabbath or the law. They were to be tested on their reason and their faith. When the 12 spies were sent as representative of the tribes to survey the land, they did not return with conflicting reports. All spies agreed about the quality of the land. It was exactly as it has been described.

But they diverged in their interpretation of the facts. Joshua and Caleb were rational. They built their case on the fact God had freed them already from the most powerful nation on earth at the time. This mighty salvation was clear evidence that God would continue to fulfil His promises. They were willing to put God first

because of the evidence they had seen.

Along with the rest of the people of Israel, the other 10 spies were overtaken with irrational fear. They refused to put God first because they chose to ignore the evidence of how God had led them in the past. The consequences were devastating. God decided to keep that entire generation wandering in the desert until their death. Only their children would inherit Canaan.

Sometimes we are like those 10 spies. We have already seen first-hand how God is faithful when we take our tithe and offerings seriously. Sometimes, however, we are still tempted to ignore the facts and give in to fear. Putting God first in our tithe and offerings means trusting the evidence of what we have already seen.


Israel refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the world around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Israel's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.




SPD Strategy: COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH MINISTRY

Our focus for health week in May 2021 is to champion whole-person health with the goal of helping people to live abundantly. The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognises that positive lifestyle choices act as preventative medicine and that evidence-based lifestyle medicine, integrated with conventional medicine, may assist to prevent, arrest and in some instances, reverse chronic disease. The Health offering will be 50% for the local conference health department. The remaining 50% will be used for the South Pacific Division Comprehensive Health Strategy to empower and grow our network of locations, health professionals and advocates to champion whole-person health so we can become a leader in lifestyle medicine. God wants us to live our best life so we can serve and share the message of health, healing and hope to all!



Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church



When the Rich Young Ruler refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from the rich young ruler, who refused to put God first?

When Jesus met the rich young ruler, the disciples might have been excited to have someone with financial wealth join the group. That didn't last long as Jesus asked the man to sell everything he had and give to the poor. Here is the story of what happened:

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (Matthew 19:21–26).

What the rich young ruler did not realise was simple: the experience of salvation and full connection with God and humanity required the giving away of his possessions. The Bible would refer to this experience as Shalom, a total harmony and peace with God, humankind, oneself and nature.

To those of us who have accumulated wealth, regardless of how small that wealth might be, we are also tempted to keep it safe. Wealth can give us a feeling of security and power. In itself, wealth is a blessing from the Lord. As soon as we begin to believe it is the result of our work and should not be shared with anyone, it can turn into a curse.

The rich young ruler put his wealth first. Jesus wept when that happened because it was a tragedy for the sincere and greedy young rich ruler to miss out on salvation because of his wealth. Putting God first means putting our wealth in second place. Generosity is a non-negotiable characteristic of the Kingdom of God.

The young rich ruler refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him and the people around him. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the young rich ruler's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Pacific Adventist University

Perhaps one of the most intriguing verses in the Bible is Ecclesiastes 11:1, where we read, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” For a society that depended on the land and good weather to survive, effective farming was crucial. Although some versions use the word “grain,” which is what you sow in the soil, the NKJV uses “bread,” which is the product of grain. That means you would not sow bread as such but grain with the expectation to obtain bread from the harvest. This seems to be confirmed by the expression, “you will find it [bread] after many days.” This is particularly true concerning Christian education. You can cast your grain with the expectation of reaping later an abundant harvest of the formed product: a new and faithful generation that will keep aflame the faith of their fathers. Please, give generously this June 12! With your special offering, you are making possible that loyal young people, like freshly baked bread, can be at the table of the Lord’s service forever.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When the Laodicean church refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from the Laodicean church, who struggled to put God first?

We are told that the church in Laodicean really struggled to put God first. They never rejected God, but God certainly wasn't first in their lives. Jesus called their state lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. Here is the full biblical passage:

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:14–22).

God is fully aware of our actions and our motives. He knows our failures and our successes. Jesus knows when we pretend to be faithful. He can see through our masks. He knows.

That is why God doesn't reject us. Jesus continues knocking at the door of your heart day after day, week after week, year after year. Once we allow Jesus to come in, putting God first will be easy.

The Laodicean church refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the Laodicean church's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Conference: ADRA SUPPORT OFFERING

When Lucifer refused to put God First

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Lucifer, who refused to put God first?

Sometimes we wait until everything is perfect with our finances and our lives before we are faithful in our tithes and offerings. We tell ourselves: “If only the environment was right, I wouldn’t struggle to put God first. If I were promoted, if interest rates lower, if I felt closer to God, if, if . . .”

One of the most beautiful and powerful angels lived in the most perfect environment and saw God every day. This perfect setting didn’t help him remain faithful, because this is a decision each one of us must make in whatever circumstances we are living through at each moment.

Lucifer became too proud to put God first. His ego was too important for that. Lucifer’s needs were more important. He wanted to become his own god. To make his own rules. To get the most out of life, without God interfering with his freedom. Why should God get the best of his worship and his service?

These motives are still at the root of our own difficulty in putting God first in our tithes and offerings. Our ego and our needs always try to get in the way. We think of ourselves and how much more we may need the money compared to the church. We argue: “God doesn’t need this money. The church has enough. I had better use it myself.”

On one dimension, this is correct. God and the church

aren’t desperate for your money. Our giving has less to do with need, much more to do with faithfulness and humility. God is God and we are not. In part, God asks for the tithe for our benefit. Our tithe and offerings are a great antidote to greed and selfishness.

Waiting for the perfect set of circumstances is a sure way to avoid putting God first in our lives. God is calling us to surrender our ego today and allow Him to open the floodgates of heaven in blessings.

Lucifer refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for him, as well as angels and humans alike. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Lucifer’s example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When the Waldenses put God First

The Waldenses lost everything when they put God first. Even then, they didn't give up. What can we learn from the Waldenses today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Church had prohibited the Bible from being read and understood by regular people. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, Peter Waldo renounced his wealth and dedicated himself to helping others. A movement started in France as lay preachers voluntarily renounced earthly wealth and lived in strict adherence to the Bible. A key emphasis of the Waldenses was to make the Bible accessible in the common language.

In 1179, Waldo and one of his friends went to Rome, where Pope Alexander the Third and the Roman Curia welcomed them. They had to explain their faith before a panel of three clergymen. The results of the meeting were inconclusive, but the Third Lateran Council in the same year condemned Waldo's ideas.

Waldo and his followers developed a system whereby they would go from town to town and meet secretly with small groups of Waldensians. There they would confess sins and hold worship services. A travelling Waldensian preacher was known as a barba. The group would

shelter the barba and help make arrangements for him to move on to the next town in secret.

They lost their positions in society and eventually had to flee to the hills and caves. They continued to put God first by explaining scripture to anyone they could find. Eventually they understood their movement to be a light in darkness. They were precursors to the Protestant Reformation and represented a remnant of people who absolutely refused to put their own comfort above the Kingdom of God.

We are called to be the remnant today—men, women and children who continue to be faithful to the Word of God by always putting the Kingdom of God first.

The Waldensians put God first, even when it cost them everything. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.




World Mission Budget

There are 7 billion people living on this planet today. Did you know that more than 42 percent of them live without any Christian presence or influence in their lives? That's approximately 3.1 billion people! Our Gospel commission is clear: "Go ye into all the world and teach all nation, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19)


Four times a year the offering taken during our church service supports the work of Adventist mission work around the world. Today is one of those days when we have a special opportunity to help share God's words of hope and love with our fellow humans.

Appeal: Please give generously to help missionaries work in hospitals, clinics, schools and churches. Dig deep to fund the printing of literature and the preparation of broadcasts so that people who never knew about Jesus can hear His words or read about Him in their own language.

Thanks you for supporting the World Mission Offerings in order to reach a world in need. Your help is appreciated.



Dear Lord, thank you for the privilege of knowing You. Accept our offerings of gratitude today, and may their effect be multiplied in Your mission field. Amen.



Local Church



When Martin Luther put God First

Martin Luther lost everything when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from Martin Luther today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church led people to believe that they needed the church to reach Christ and receive salvation. Persecution was certain for anyone who challenged the authority of the church and especially the Pope. The Papacy had become the apocalyptic beast depicted in the Bible.

During this dark period of human history, Martin Luther was a devout Roman Catholic priest. While reading scripture, he realised that each person could connect with God directly, without a human mediator. Under the authority of the Bible, Luther challenged the authority of the most powerful person on the planet at the time, Pope Leo the Tenth.

Luther taught that salvation and, consequently, eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin. His theology challenged the authority and office of the Pope by teaching that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge, and he opposed the exclusive concept of priesthood by considering all baptised Christians to be a holy priesthood.

He was excommunicated and persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Emperor. This

did not stop him from putting God first and standing firm to his convictions. In his own words, Martin Luther wrote how he felt about this struggle in the famous hymn: "A Mighty Fortress"

That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;

The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther put God first, even when it cost him everything. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Union Global Partnership Project:

TIMOR – LESTE

Publish his glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.” 1 Chronicles 16:24 (NLT)

The Australian Union Conference has been partnering and supporting Timor Leste in mission for over 3 years. Previous offerings have contributed to the building of classrooms for students who were having their lessons in tents and supporting the installation of 5 centres of influence providing services in health, mission and all types of ministry work. In the past this offering has supported the training of local ministers by sponsoring students to get their teaching, pastoral and nursing qualifications. Your ongoing support means that there are currently a team of local ministry people on the ground in Timor Leste that are moving Gods mission forward in that region.

Appeal: As you give generously this team will continue to grow with further sponsorship, resourcing and practical assistance. What you give makes a difference in how we are Gods hands and

feet with our neighbours in Timor Leste, Please continue to pray for our partners and the challenges they face and know that your offering is making a huge difference.

Dear God, bless and multiply what is given this morning for your glory in Timor Leste. We pray for our partnership country, may the Church in Timor Leste be filled with your Spirit and be a powerful force for the Gospel in that region. Amen.

Education



When William Miller put God First

William Miller was considered a mad man when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from William Miller today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

He was a man of integrity who could not bring himself to believe the Bible to be true. But, after an unexplainable event during his time at war, Williams Miller's worldview was shattered. He asked himself, "If the laws of nature are the only possible forces acting in the universe, how did I not die when the bomb exploded so close to me?"

He decided to start a deep study of scripture. Back at his farm in Whitehall, New York, Miller committed to reading and understanding the Bible, one verse at a time. This endeavour took him two years—1816 to 1818—during which time he absolutely fell in love with his saviour, Jesus Christ.

One of the most significant discoveries Williams Miller made during this time was the prophecy of the 2300 "evenings and mornings" found in Daniel 8:14. The prophecy foretold a significant event to take place about 1843 or 1844 and he was compelled to share this knowledge with as many people as he could. However, he was not a preacher and refused to do it.

As the Holy Spirit kept impressing him to tell others what he had discovered, he asked God to be abundantly clear in this calling. If someone would ask him to share these findings, it would be a sign between him and God that he should do it. Less than an hour later, a family member arrived at the farm to ask him to share his findings.

At first, Miller was upset because God had sent this invitation immediately. But he was the kind of man who kept his word. That day Williams Miller put God first and started preaching this beautiful message that God had not abandoned the world and would soon do something great.

His preaching led to a great disappointment on October 22, 1844. Hundreds of thousands of people expected Jesus to return that day—but Jesus didn't. Instead, He started His ministry in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. It was from this disappointment that God called the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Today Seventh-day Adventists are preaching the good news of the soon coming of Jesus in more than 200 countries. Millions of people are now hopeful because of Miller's determination to put God first.

William Miller put God first, even when he was laughed at. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

When Joseph Bates put God First

Joseph Bates was considered a mad man when he put God first. Even then, he didn't give up. What can we learn from Joseph Bates today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

He was a retired sea captain when he first heard William Miller's message of Christ's soon second coming. He was convinced it was true. Bates was the kind of man who put God first in everything, so he gave his energy, his money and even sold his house to help spread the news of the Second Coming.

However, great personal sacrifice followed as Bates's son rejected the message and left home angrily to start a career on the high seas. Bates doesn't give up even when everything he hoped for didn't happen. The year 1843 came and went—and Christ did not return. Then the Great Disappointment of 1844 shook the faith of Bates and the other Millerites. They were a laughingstock for those around them and were forced to rebuild their lives in utter poverty, having sacrificed everything for the cause.

Bates and others returned to their study of the scriptures to find that instead of signalling Christ's return, October 22, 1844 was the date Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to intercede before the Father on behalf of believers.

But hardships were constant. One day Bates didn't have anything to eat at home. He pled with God and promised to remain faithful no matter what happened.

That day an envelope arrived with enough money to sustain him. God had inspired someone to send this money in preparation for the day Bates needed it most.

As he continued to study with friends, Bates discovered the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath and shared this with his fellow believers, James and Ellen White. This small group of leaders soon established the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has grown into a worldwide movement today.

Joseph Bates put God first, even when he was laughed at. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

SPD Strategy:

COMPREHENSIVE MEDIA EVANGELISM



Now more than ever people are looking for encouragement and hope as they face the challenges of living in this complex world. In times like these everyone deserves to hear about God’s love. However, as a Christian it can be tough to share your faith as it seems that people don’t want to listen. The task is huge, and the times are uncertain, and we understand you can feel overwhelmed.

At Adventist Media we believe that together we can share the gospel with every nation, tribe, people and language. That’s why we are producing high quality Christian resources—from books and magazines to podcasts and video clips—that are designed to help you connect with people. And we want to continue providing you with inspiring content so that you can share the gospel in relevant and effective ways anytime, from anywhere, to anyone. Your offering today will really make a difference in helping people across the South Pacific to learn more about Jesus and His love for them.



Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.





Local Church

When John Andrews put God First

John Andrews was so competent he could have become wealthy and powerful. Instead, he put God first and sacrificed everything to take Present Truth to the world. What can we learn from John Andrews today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

John Andrews was a very capable man. When he was 13 years old, he was converted and accepted Jesus as his Saviour. He cultivated a love for the Bible early in life and he taught himself to read the Bible in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

When he studied the Sabbath message, he became convicted of its truth and decided to dedicate his life to understanding and preaching it. He helped to formulate many of the doctrines and structural documentation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. By putting God first, John Andrews dedicated his intellect and energy to serve the remnant church of Bible prophecy.

When the church decided to sponsor a missionary to Europe, John Andrews was the most capable man to do it. Despite mourning the death of his wife, Andrews gave up everything he had built and answered the call to take his family overseas. He understood the risk of poverty and disease. He was aware of the hardship to be faced. But John Andrews persevered.

In 1874, he sailed to Europe with his two children, Charles and Mary. Even though they were only teenagers, the children proved to be extraordinary young pioneers in Switzerland, editing, translating, setting type, helping tirelessly to establish the international missionary journal, *Les Signes des Temps*—The Signs of the Times.

In 1878, John Andrews attended the General Conference session and took Mary with him because he was certain that she had contracted tuberculosis. As soon as he arrived at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, his fear was confirmed. Alone in Europe, Charles wrote to his father “Our separation will be but short and then if faithful we shall meet our loved ones. So Pa, don’t feel discouraged. We pray much for you.”

John Andrews kept a vigil by her bedside during Mary’s last days. Mary Andrews passed to her rest at only 17 years of age. He returned to Europe but also died of tuberculosis a few years later.

John Andrews was the foremost intellectual in the early Adventist movement and his contributions were largely responsible for the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today there are more than 162,000 Adventist congregations in 207 countries and territories. Our hearts are grateful to this man who always put God first.

John Andrews put God first, even when it cost him. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Education



When Abram La Rue put God First

Abram La Rue put God first, even when others thought he was too old to be a missionary. What can we learn from Abram La Rue today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

In 1883, Abram La Rue was a 65-year-old shepherd and woodcutter from California. He had an ambition to take the gospel to China. When he wrote to the General Conference, they said he was too old. They also said that they didn't have the money to send him. Still determined to go, La Rue negotiated his way onto a ship where he could work his way to Hong Kong. He arrived there in 1888 and began working as a colporteur for the next 14 years.

From 1888 to 1902, Father LaRue, as he was now generally called, stood alone. On February 2, 1902, Brother and Sister J. N. Anderson and Miss Ida Thompson arrived to help him. Soon after, nine people who had been led into the truth largely through Brother LaRue's efforts, were baptised. It was time to take Present Truth to China's mainland.

LaRue was a true follower of Christ, dedicated to prayer and devotion. He was patient, sympathetic and constant. His standing for 14 years alone in a distant land, carrying on a self-supporting work, shows that he had the stamina needed in pioneering work. Despite the difficulties, LaRue put God first. A few days before his death, he willed most of the little money he had to the mission in China. He gave his all to the cause he loved.

Abram La Rue was buried in Hong Kong where he had worked for 15 years. Although he did not actually set foot in China as a missionary, his pioneering work played an important role in laying the foundation for the entry of Adventism into this great land of the Orient.

Abram La Rue put God first, even when other didn't believe in him. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Union Offering: MAMARAPHA COLLEGE

“And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.” Mark 16:15 (NLT)

Mamarapha College is a tertiary education institute owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a RTO (Registered Training Organisation) we offer nationally credited qualifications ranging from Certificate II to Advanced Diploma for courses in Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Pastoral Ministry and Lifestyle Health Promotion.

Set in the beautiful bush surrounds of Perth’s orchard region, Mamarapha is a quiet, peaceful place where each year dozens of Indigenous students connect with God and discover how to share Him with their family and communities in a culturally sensitive way.

Mamarapha College graduates have impacted the lives of thousands of indigenous Australians through lifestyle programs, community service, public evangelism and personal faith sharing initiatives.

Appeal: Your offerings today will support Mamarapha’s core focus of training disciples to spread the Gospel of Jesus into Indigenous communities throughout Australia.



Dear God, thank you for the work and ministry of our Mamarapha College, bless the staff, students and community that are impacted by the programs and initiatives that are run. Take what we give this morning and multiply it’s impact so that many more can be blessed by the ministry of Mamarapha. Amen.

Annual Sacrifice



Prem chose to live on a small stipend in a remote town in India as a Global Mission pioneer. Before Prem arrived, there were no Adventists in the region. The nearest hospital is several hours away so pioneer Prem uses the talents God has given him to serve the town's sick. He has transformed his living room into a clinic where he lovingly teaches the locals how to adopt a wholistic lifestyle and treats their illnesses. Then he prays for the Heavenly Physician to heal and bless them.

Through Prem's compassionate words and actions, many of his former patients now come each Sabbath to the local church building. There they eagerly wait for Prem to finish treating patients in his clinic so he can teach them more about Jesus.

APPEAL: The Annual Sacrifice Offering comes at the end of Week of Prayer and is an opportunity for us to sacrifice for mission to help fund the work of Global Mission pioneers. The question is: what are you willing to give up for mission?



Father, our Global Mission pioneers continue to make great sacrifices to be laborers in Your field. Their needs are great. Please bless our sacrificial offerings to help equip these bold pioneers to reach even more people with Your love.





Local Church

When Albert Stauffer put God First

Albert Stauffer put God first when he left his own country to become a missionary. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Albert could have continued to enjoy the safety and comfort of his home. But Albert was the kind of person who put God first, so he accepted the call from the General Conference to travel to Brazil to sell Present Truth literature.

This was 1894 and success was uncertain as he had to survive from the sale of the books and tracts he had with him. However, his task was even more difficult because they were not printed in the native Portuguese language. Thankfully, other missionaries establish a printing press and created a system to write, translate and print new materials.

Two years later, Albert and a fellow colporteur went to an evangelical church service in Curitiba, the capital of the State of Parana, in the south of Brazil. Mrs Ana Diedrich Otto was a much sought-after midwife in the city and was present at the worship service. She was disturbed when she saw two young people attending the service whom no-one knew. Clearly they were not from the city.

The following weekend, Mrs Otto noticed that the two young men were present at the church again. She then listened to them and decided to buy the book they were presenting—"Life of Jesus" in German.

The following Sunday they met again and spent the whole morning studying the Bible. As a result, Mrs Ana and her husband Oscar Emilio Otto accepted the Adventist faith.

Colporteurs have dedicated their lives to distributing life-saving literature throughout Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and many other countries in South American and the world. Every morning, from house to house they put God first with their lives. Without them, the Three Angels Messages would not be present in more than 200 countries and territories as it is today.

Albert Stauffer put God first everyday as a colporteur. His courage inspires us. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When William A. Spicer put God First

William A. Spicer put God first as he travelled the world and set the DNA of Adventist mission. What can we learn from him today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Spicer was only 22 years old when he sailed to England to establish the work of the church there. He then returned to the United States to serve the General Conference as the foreign mission secretary where he actively pursued various expansions like securing the land in Zimbabwe where Solusi University operates today.

Pastor Spicer then went to India in 1898, where he was one of three ordained Adventist ministers in the whole of Southern Asia. He founded the Adventist periodical there and established a good foundation for church growth.

Returning to the United States in 1902, Spicer became the secretary of the General Conference. One of the key responsibilities of the Secretariate is sending missionaries abroad, which Spicer did for 20 years. This is a difficult task because of the logistics of sending and returning families to and from every continent. Spicer created the infrastructure that allowed the Seventh-day Adventist Church to expand.

God then called Elder Spicer to become the president of the General Conference for another eight years. Spicer always put God first. Despite the difficulty and discomfort associated with global travel in the early 20th

century, he travelled internationally in almost every year of his ministry.

Sometimes putting God first involves large sacrifices we make in a single moment. William A. Spicer showed through his ministry how a life dedicated to putting God first in everything has a tremendous impact in the world.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church still sends and supports hundreds of missionary families who are taking the Adventist message to every tribe, language and people group. Spicer created this infrastructure for mission, but you and I can maintain it through our tithe and offerings. What a privilege to put God first in everything we do.

William A. Spicer put God first year after year throughout his life. His resilience inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

*Ace & Roenna Sintos
put God First*

Ace and Roenna Sintos decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. That's when their transformation began. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Ace and Roenna are from the Philippines. They built careers as government employees, holding high positions for many years. When Roenna suffered an ectopic pregnancy, their world of security and comfort came crashing down. Ace had no other alternative but to resign and take care of her.

When Roenna was well enough to return to work, she resumed her career in education. But Ace had another plan. He felt called by God to dedicate himself full time to media ministries. Unfortunately, this new calling didn't pay as well as his previous position. Nowhere close.

Ace and Roenna studied the possibilities and the math didn't seem to add up. If Ace dedicated himself to media ministry, they would have to sacrifice their quality of life. Even then, nothing seemed certain. Would they have the courage to put God first?

At first everything was as difficult as they expected. To make matters worst, they had to invest in technology to be able to serve better. They were living a simple life in the full assurance that they were at the centre of God's will. This moved them to dedicate all their gifts to God.

Many years have now passed and the transformation is unbelievable. Both Ace and Roenna now serve full

time as key leaders of the Digital Evangelism Initiative, a global project of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They still lead a simple life and are now in a much better financial situation than they were when working for the government. They even have all the technology necessary to work for Jesus.

Ace and Roenna put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When Pavel & Valentina Dmitrienko put God First

Pastor Pavel and Valentina decided to put God first even through their struggles. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Pastor Pavel and Valentina had a 9-mile (14.5-kilometre) trek to serve the people in a house church. That risky trip made them tired and hungry. But it was impossible to find bread on store shelves in Sukhumi, capital of Georgia’s breakaway region of Abkhazia.

It was 1993 and a months-long armed conflict between Georgian and Abkhaz forces had resulted in a major food shortage. Some bakeries sold bread at night, but they were sold out every time Valentina dared to make the risky trip.

One day after the worship service, Maya—a church member—gave Valentina bread, but she refused to accept it. Maya insisted and cried. So Valentina divided the loaf into two, half for her and half for Maya.

Valentina and her husband were happy since they had not eaten bread for six months. She was thinking of eating it with barley soup.

While walking home, they met an old, thin, and filthy woman begging for food, saying she was starving to death. Valentina remembered the joy Maya had experienced when she had shared the bread with her. Would they have the courage to share even in such a difficult situation?

Valentina gave the half loaf she had in her bag, and the older woman accepted it with tears of joy.

Valentina and Pavel continued on their way home, joyful smiles lighting their faces. They were happy they had been able to give their precious bread to the elderly woman. Sometimes, putting God first involves sharing what you have with others, even when resources are hard to come by.

Pastor Pavel and Valentina put God first despite the sacrifice. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



ADRA Project within Australia

“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it’s in your power to help them. If you can help your neighbour now, don’t say, “Come back tomorrow, and then I’ll help you.”” Proverbs 3:27-28 (NLT)

In every community, there are people struggling to get by and falling through the cracks. ADRA, in connection with Adventist Churches, has volunteer-run projects in Australia and New Zealand that feed, clothe, house, connect and empower people to overcome hardships and crisis and get back on their feet.

Appeal: Today’s offerings will support ADRA Community Projects in Australia and New Zealand such as community meals, free counselling services, crisis support, and disaster response. Each project is run in partnership with a local Adventist Church and is a tangible way for us, as Adventists, to connect with our local communities and be the hands and feet of Jesus. Give generously today to help others live as God intended.

Dear God, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the needs that arise in our own context. We pray for the ministry of ADRA in Australia and New Zealand, lead and guide the leadership, staff and all those that come in contact with the support that ADRA provides. Bless our giving this morning and multiply it for your glory. Amen.

Local Church



When Brenton Jackson put God First

Brenton Jackson decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Brenton was born in New Zealand to a loving Adventist family. He loved Jesus and understood how much God loved him. However, when he was 13 years old, his world started to collapse. His parents divorced.

This affected his life so profoundly that he left the church and lived for many years without any connection with Christianity. But his life took another turn when he found himself jobless, on the brink of homelessness, and with nothing left but \$200 to his name. “How did this happen?” he asked himself repeatedly.

But, at his lowest moment, he remembered the love of God he experienced as a child. He remembered the sacrifice his parents made in putting God first with everything they earned. Brenton realised they never lacked anything at home, so he made a decision that would transform his life.

Entrusting his future to God, Brenton donated his \$200 to a local Adventist Church. Like the widow in biblical times, Jesus watched as Brenton gave Him everything he had. What happened next was nothing short of a miracle.

Everything Brenton needed was provided . . . and it is still provided today. Brenton is a fully devoted disciple, always putting God first in his life. He is thankful that everything he has comes from God.

Ellen White reminded us: “The Lord does not need our offerings. We cannot enrich Him by our gifts. Says the psalmist: ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.’ Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of His mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no other” (Counsels on Stewardship, page 18).

Brenton put God first throughout his adult life. His determination inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Education

When Sarah put God First

Sarah decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from her story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

When her husband left her, Sarah knew she had to find a way to support herself. But she didn't know where to look for a job. She prayed for direction, and God impressed her to share His Word with the people living around her. India is not a Christian country, so this task was difficult.

Sarah began visiting her neighbours in their homes. "I prayed for the sick, and they got well," she said. "I prayed for those who had evil spirits, and the spirits went away. I prayed for those who couldn't have children, and they were able to start a family."

Not having a source of income was a tremendous sacrifice. But how could she abandon people who needed God so much? She put God first and hoped God would provide what she needed, even if it took a while.

Some people were happy for Sarah to visit them, but others didn't like someone coming to their home. One day, Sarah visited a family who was worshipping their god. They demanded that she join their worship, but she refused. Angry, a young woman plunged Sarah's hand into a pot of boiling oil.

"I prayed," says Sarah, "and when I removed my hand from the oil, it wasn't burned at all."

The next day, the father of the young woman called Sarah to apologise. He told her that he had punished his

daughter and asked Sarah to pray for his family. Sarah was happy to uplift this family in prayer.

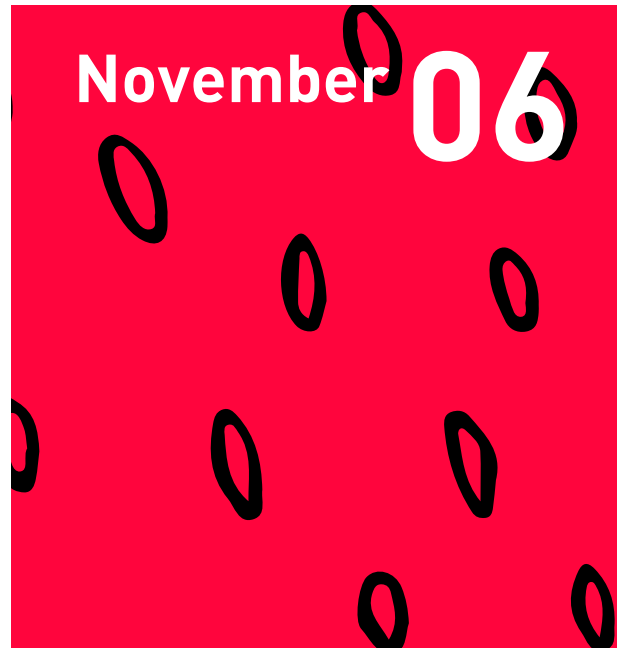
"Now they are changed," Sarah says. "They have accepted God, and they worship with us in our church." There were five families who witnessed Sarah escape serious injury that day. They were amazed, and they too have requested her prayers.

Today Sarah works as a mission pioneer supported by the offerings given by Seventh-day Adventists from all around the world. Her ministry is introducing many people to Jesus and His saving grace.

Sarah put God first in her most difficult moments. Her courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When Abraham put God First

Abraham decided to put God first in his life. What can we learn from his story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Abraham is a wealthy Maasai in Tanzania. This African tribe is well known for their cattle. There is nothing more precious to the Maasai than their cattle. It is common for a Maasai to mourn the death of a bull louder and longer than the loss of a family member. After all, the value of a bull is more than US\$1000.

When Abraham learned of the love of Jesus through Adventist World Radio, he decided to put God first in his life, despite the consequences. That's when he gave 100 cows as tithe to the Lord.

His neighbours and friends could not understand it. They were certain he had gone mad.

Immediately after Abraham returned the tithe of 100 cows, something unusual happened to his cattle. His cows started giving birth to twins. Cows usually give birth to only one calf at a time, but all of Abraham's cows began to give birth to twins. Abraham had given away 100 cows, and now he had more cows than before.

His neighbours were shocked. "Call your pastor, I also want to give a tithe," one neighbour said. "We want our cows to have twins, too," said another.

Abraham marvelled over the way God was blessing him and decided he didn't want to return just one tithe. He wanted to give two tithes. He called the Adventist pastor to come for a visit.

Abraham took the visitors to his field and began to count out two tithes.

"One, two, three, four, five," Abraham counted the cows in his herd. "Six, seven, eight, nine." When he reached the 10th cow, he instructed a helper to put a tag on its ear so that cow would be set aside for tithe.

"That one is for the Lord," he said. Then he counted an 11th cow and told his helper to tag its ear too. This would be his second tithe. Then he started counting from "one" again.

Abraham put God first despite the opinions of his friends and neighbours. His courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



World Mission Budget: UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITIES

APPEAL: If you had one shot to make a sudden, big difference in someone's life, would you take it . . . or let it slip away? Unusual opportunities don't happen every day but when they do, they require a rapid response from God's church. When you give your Unusual Opportunities Offering you are contributing to a special fund that enables the General Conference to respond rapidly to urgent projects as soon as they arise.

So let's seize the moment. Let's speed the work of the gospel by giving generously. Please mark your tithe envelopes "Unusual Opportunities Fund." With your support, the church will be able to respond to new opportunities that will increase the impact of God's mission throughout the world.



Dear Lord, we know you love a cheerful giver. Move us, we pray, to respond with speed to your call to give generously to further your work.



Local Church



When Advent Press puts God First

Advent Press decided to put God first. What can we learn from this story that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Advent Press is the Seventh-day Adventist publishing house in Ghana. The company was heavily in debt to the government of Ghana, suppliers and the West-central African Division to the tune of US\$2 million. The whole compound was muddy and the machines were obsolete. It was unable to pay the salaries of its workers. Few saw the potential and they were set to auction their assets.

But new management agreed with the staff a series of drastic changes that would put God first in their lives individually and as a company. They made arrangements to pay their debt in 10 years, knowing it would take a miracle to achieve this. Yet the debt was paid in seven years and today Advent Press is a shining example of efficiency in both business and faith.

The first step was a collective and individual commitment to return tithe, even if they couldn't afford it. The second step was set up prayer bands in different places. They believed and trusted that God would answer their prayers. Another action was to cut salaries by 50 per cent and maintain this for five years.

The miracle wouldn't have happened without the staff, including management, putting God first in everything. To their surprise, God started to answer their prayers. A volunteer offered to sponsor the printing of the Sabbath school quarterlies. This became the turning point for the press.

To the glory of God, the press, which was nearly

auctioned off, is now one of the best Adventist publishing houses in the Adventist world—first in Africa and 13th in the world. It has sponsored one pastor at Valley View University into the gospel ministry. Currently, it is sponsoring another student at Adventist University of Africa.

All the obsolete machines have been replaced at the cost of US\$2.5 million. The once muddy compound is now paved, the buildings have been renovated and a six units have been built for staff accommodation. Today, payment of salaries is no issue, even in the midst of COVID-19. The press has its own delivery vans and a standby generator.

Indeed, faithfulness in returning tithe, prayer, commitment and dedication has turned the fortunes of the press.

Advent Press put God first. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Education

When Joe & Susan put God First

Joe and Susan decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Joe is an IT manager in Silver Spring, Maryland. Parking at home after a weekend camping trip, Joe Marcellino saw a trail of oil going up the street from his Isuzu Trooper SUV. Joe called his friend Eric for help.

Eric found the oil had spewed from the oil filter's rubber gasket and warned that the engine had probably sustained significant damage. He estimated that repairs could cost more than US\$3000.

Recently married, Joe and Susan had about \$3000 in the bank. But Joe was reluctant to spend the money on the SUV because the couple had fallen behind in returning tithe and owed about \$1500 for the past three months.

Susan saw no room for discussion. "We need to give our first fruits," she said. Joe and Susan prayed and decided to return tithe rather than repair the SUV.

After this decision, Eric contacted Joe and advised him to contact the gas station that had changed his oil shortly before the camping trip. The gas station sent a mechanic to Joe's house and, after an inspection, took responsibility for the damaged engine. The gas station's insurance paid them \$3000.

When the repairs were finished, Joe received the bill from his mechanic for \$1500. To his surprise, the \$3000 from the gas station's insurance had been enough to cover the cost of the repairs and his tithe. Joe and Susan are certain that putting God first will lead to miraculous and unexpected results.

The next miracle was selling the same car. Within a week, Joe was approached by Wayne, the purchasing director at the Adventist Church headquarters. Wayne asked Joe whether he would be willing to sell the SUV.

"A missionary in Africa has asked specifically to buy an Isuzu Trooper," he said. "Are you willing to sell it?" He gave Joe a fair price and had the vehicle shipped to Africa. Seeing Joe's concerns, he promised to keep him posted on what happened to the SUV. The vehicle had 40,000 miles (about 64,000 kilometres) at the time of the sale. After about 18 months had gone by, Wayne shared with Joe the SUV had done more than 100,000 miles (about 160,000 kilometres). A few years later, Wayne said the SUV had passed 300,000 miles (about 480,000 kilometres).

"It is the Lord who kept it going for this missionary!" Joe said. Now 61, Joe said the experience taught him an important lesson about mission and the importance of returning tithe first.

Joe and Susan put God first. Their faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Local Church



When Junior & Stephanie put God First

Junior and Stephanie decided to put God first despite their fear and uncertainty about the future. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Junior and Stephanie Roberts are owners of catering services in Jamaica. They committed their lives to God and were baptised together a month after their wedding.

The couple made a tough decision to put God first in their business decisions. Shellfish and wine were favourites and deciding to stop serving sea food and alcohol could represent the end of their business. Beyond this, they would need to stop all business activities on Sabbath. What if clients complained and went to their competitors instead? Did they have the courage to put God first regardless of the consequences?

Despite their fear and uncertainty about the future, they put God first in their business. At first, their business struggled. It's almost impossible to survive because most clients wanted exquisite seafood and alcohol. And the events mostly fall on Friday evenings and Saturdays. That took a cut in their income.

With their faith tried several times, they felt the Lord's leading. Today both of them had never been happier and their company is flourishing. Their income became more stable and they know what kind of clientele to look for.

Ellen White wrote about this: "The world and the churches are breaking God's law, and the warning must be given, 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is

poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation.' With such a curse hanging over the transgressors of God's holy Sabbath, should we not show greater earnestness, greater zeal? Why are we so indifferent, so selfish, so engrossed in temporal interests? Is our interest separated from Jesus? Has the truth become too pointed, too close in its application to our souls; and like the disciples of Christ who were offended, have we turned away to the beggarly elements of the world? We spend money for selfish purposes, and gratify our own desires, while souls are dying without a knowledge of Jesus and the truth. How long shall this continue? All should have a living faith,—a faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. Men and women are ready to do anything to indulge self, but how little are they willing to do for Jesus, and for their fellow men who are perishing for the want of the truth!" (Counsels on Stewardship, page 51).

Junior and Stephanie were tempted to put themselves first but they were faithful in putting God first. Their faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



SPD Strategy:

MISSION TO THE CITIES

When Ellen White wrote in 1910 that “The work in our cities is the essential work for this time,” New York city was the largest city in the USA. Today, Sydney is larger than New York was then. Twice as many people move into our six cities of over 1 million every year then we have as total Adventist membership in the Australian Union Conference and the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference. Making disciples in our cities is even more important now than it was in Ellen White’s day. You’re offering today, will help in equipping, resourcing, and sending our church members, volunteers, students, professionals and families into the cities of our division as missionaries to make disciples in these last days of earth’s history.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

New Church Buildings



When you put God First

Do you remember when you put God first despite your fear and uncertainty about the future? What can we learn from your story that will help the rest of us put God first in our own lives today?

Do you remember when you fell in love with Jesus for the first time? For each of us, there was that first moment when we were overwhelmed by the love of Jesus. Nothing mattered more to you than following Jesus and acknowledging Him as king over your life.

You made every sacrifice to keep the Sabbath holy. You ate the right things and read the right books. You watched the right videos and resisted the wrong music. You avoided bad websites and longed to pray and talk to your God.

Unfortunately for you and your family, that didn't last long. Your first love faded and a war began between guilt and grace that would last until today. What would you give to get back to that first love you once had?

As it turns out, there are things you can give that will take you right back in 40 days or less. Namely, your time and your money. These are your most valued treasure and, unless you put them in the kingdom of God first, there is no other way of giving your heart fully to Jesus.

Here is how Jesus himself put it: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21).

Hollywood has convinced many of us that our heart comes first. This is why we always wait to feel like doing something before we do it. We will never feel like giving tithe and offering unless we do it consistently, because our hearts will only be in the kingdom of God if that is where we invest our time and money.

If you want to experience that first love again, start returning God's tithe faithfully today; set a promise (offering) and keep to it; spend time with God's word and prayer; and dedicate your time to helping fulfil the mission of the church and also to alleviate the suffering of others. Tithe, offering, worship, mission, compassion. Start doing this whether you feel like it or not. Then observe over the next few weeks how much your love for God will increase and how much easier it will be to follow Jesus.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

You have put God first. Your faith inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Local Church

When God put you First

Some 2000 years ago, God put you first and gave His only begotten Son so you could live forever. The birth of Jesus is a reminder that it was God who put you first, before you even knew He existed.

The gospel story is NOT the story of you loving God so that God can take you to a better place. It is no wonder many of us have struggled to believe God truly loves us.

The gospel story is the story of God loving you even before you were born. It's the story of God putting YOU first. It's the unbelievable story of the ruler of the universe giving up heaven to suffer on your behalf so you can have eternal life. The gospel story is a story of a Father: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus describes the church as His bride. For all of the failures of our church to fulfil the mission God has given us, the church is still Jesus' bride and we are called to love the church as Jesus does. We must be careful how we treat the church, always remembering how much love Jesus has for the church.

Jesus will always supply the resources needed by His bride to fulfil her mission. The interesting thing is how Jesus does this. He supplies the church by putting the resources into your bank account and invites you to put God first by passing on the resources to the church.

Two things are clear: 1) if the church doesn't have enough resources, it may be possible it is because some

of us are keeping her resources to ourselves; and 2) it explains why Jesus continues to send so many resources to those who are faithful in passing these resources to His bride.

You are also invited to realise that you are the church. Another analogy is that we are the body of Christ and therefore, when we use our best talents, we are building the body of Christ. This means Christ will interact with your community through you.

When Jesus was born some 2000 years ago, He declared to the universe that He was putting you first. Today God is pleading with you to put Him first. He cannot wait to bless you beyond your wildest dreams.

For this coming year, His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.

Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

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