



## **Give God First Place**

Giving God first place in our lives is not a one-time event . . . it's a life-long process for every Christian. Whether you're new to the faith or a "veteran" follower of Christ, you'll find this plan to be easy to understand and apply, and a highly effective strategy for victorious Christian living. Taken from the book, "Out of This World: A Christian's Guide to Growth and Purpose" by David J. Swandt

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# “God’s Place, My Prize!”

First place - it is the focused ambition of all who compete. Whether an individual or team competition, the best score or time wins, and first place always brings the top prize to the one who achieves that privileged distinction. Always, that is, with one important exception.

Before our salvation, we usually hold first place in our own lives – living for ourselves, fulfilling our own selfish ambitions, promoting our own agenda. But when we become a Christian, first place is no longer our position to hold; it belongs to God.

Giving God first place in our lives began on the day of our salvation, but allowing God to remain first in all areas of our life is an ongoing process. When we do so, we live a fulfilled and blessed life in Christ here on earth and inherit an eternal life of unspeakable blessings with God in Heaven forever.

*“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”* **I Corinthians 9:2**

# “God has Given You First Place in His Heart”

What would you think if someone told you that God sees you as if you have never sinned? The fact is, because of the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, that is exactly how God sees you. As Christians, we are forgiven, cleansed and free!

That means you are a saint: one who has attained a special standing of righteousness in Christ. You are perfect, holy and blameless in God's eyes. He calls you His child, an heir to His abundance, and His friend.

*"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." I Peter 2:9*

Truly understanding how God sees us begins with how we see Him. God is not watching from a distance just waiting for us to make a mistake in order to punish us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Consider what this verse says:

*"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." **John 1:12-13***

God sees each of us as His own precious child. He is a loving Father showering favor and care to us out of His endless compassion. Some scriptures in the Song of Solomon illustrate the incredible intensity of God's love for us by comparing it to the intimate love of a husband and wife. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that God is a rewarder of those who seek him.

God sees each of His children in a profoundly different way than most of us see ourselves. Understanding how God sees each one of us is founded upon the work that Christ began in our lives the moment we received salvation.

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." **II Corinthians 5:17***

*"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." **II Corinthians 5:21***

This new creation is God's divine work; a complete transformation of our spiritual condition and inner person. He has completely forgiven and cleansed us from our sin - past, present and future. We are in right relationship with Him.

*"...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions (sins) from us."* **Psalm 103:12**

We are God's people presented to Him without any blemish of sin; truly as His righteousness through the work that Jesus did on the cross. God has indeed given us first place in His heart!

# “God Wants First Place in Your Heart”

In today's society, many base their worth upon wealth, how high they are on the “corporate ladder,” how successful their business is, or even simply who they know.

But if our view of significance is established upon these things, we will only feel good about ourselves when we are flourishing in these areas. When our wealth and success diminish, our self-worth will also because our foundation is not solid. Jesus describes it this way:

*“But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”* **Luke 6:49**

Our identity is only as solid as the foundation we place it upon. By establishing our identity on the rock-solid

foundation of Jesus Christ, our sense of fulfillment in life will not depend upon the changing condition of temporal things.

When Christ is our foundation, our stability is like this:

*“He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”* **Luke 6:48**

Think for a moment of the many choices in life you may have to build your foundation of significance upon. These may include wealth, career, looks, family, fame, power or who you know. Are there others you can think of? Of all the things to establish our identity upon, only Jesus assures us of victorious Christian living.

But if you examine the other choices, none are bad or inherently evil. In fact, in many respects, they are very important areas of responsibility God has given us in our lives. But in the book of Matthew, Jesus helps us find balance.

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”* **Matthew 6:25-26**

When we resolve this truth in our own lives, we find peace and fulfillment, free from worry and anxiety. This balance is achieved when we put Jesus first in all areas of our lives.

*“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* **Matthew 6:33**

We all have dreams, goals and aspirations because God designed us to. But putting Jesus first should lead you to examine your priorities and motives as to why you aspire to do or attain the things you desire. When He is first in your dreams and aspirations, your future will be filled with greatness and joy!



When God does bring a questionable motive to your attention, your most important response should be a willingness to make changes. Change can be difficult at times, but God always has our best in mind, and wants you to grow spiritually.

# “Winning Life’s Battles with God’s Help”

There is a life-long battle that is being waged over our lives. On one side is the influence of that old sinful nature - those old lingering tendencies, temptations and sins that have been difficult for us to overcome. Over time as we mature in our walk with God, the influence of the sinful nature weakens. On the other side is the growing influence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives. These are two opposing forces as described in Galatians:

*“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”* **Galatians 5:16-17**

God’s word encourages us to “live by the Spirit.” In other words, we must allow the influence of the Holy Spirit to win over the influence of the sinful nature in our lives.

Many times, this is easier said than done. Our sinful nature prods us to make decisions to satisfy self-centered ambitions and passions. This is called temptation, and James describes it like this:

*“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”* **James 1:13-14**

Not until a decision on our part is made to give in to a temptation does it become sin.

“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.” **James 1:15**

Amazingly however, as a part of God’s profound love and grace extended to all Christians, God forgives us and cleanses us from all of our sins. We are absolutely 100% forgiven.

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* **1 John 1:9**

But there is still a danger in allowing sin to go unchecked. While God forgives us and cleanses us, He does not necessarily eliminate the destructive path of consequences and circumstances sin leaves behind. While God will always help us through difficult times, even when brought on by our own decisions, our best course of action is to do all we can to avoid making those decisions in the first place.

1 Corinthians describes two important aspects in effectively dealing with temptation and sin:

*“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* **1 Corinthians 10:13**

First is that we're not alone in our struggle. You can know that there are other

Christians, whether 30 days or 30 years into their walk with God, who still struggle with sin and temptation common to yours.

Second, is that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond a point where we're unable to make a decision to avoid sin. He will always provide a way of escape. Our job, as challenging as it may be, is to find that way out in the midst of our temptation.

The following section provides a Bible-based strategy for effectively dealing with sin and temptation. Putting this plan into action is one more way of giving God first place in your life!

# “Five Point Strategy for Living in Victory”

This section provides a 5 point Bible-based strategy for effectively dealing with sin and temptation. Putting this plan into action is one more way of giving God first place in your life!

1. UNDERSTAND THAT GOD SEES YOU AS PERFECT, HOLY AND BLAMELESS, through the work of Jesus Christ. (Read II Corinthians 5:21.) Many times guilt and shame are the most destructive of sin’s consequences. Understanding that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, regardless of the sin, is fundamental to victory (Romans 8:1).

2. CONFESS YOUR SINS. (Read I John 1:9.) Confessing our sin means acknowledging those sins first in our own hearts and minds, and then confessing them to God. Confessing our sin does not necessarily mean making them public to

others. Confession is between you and God.

3. **BE ACCOUNTABLE.** (Read James 5:16.) Finding a close trusted Christian friend, pastor or family member in whom you can confide is an effective way to introduce accountability and prayer support into the battle.

4. **AVOID THE SOURCES OF TEMPTATION.** (Read James 1:13-15.) This is the most challenging point to implement and requires some creative thought and planning. The truth is if you can avoid the temptation, you'll avoid the sin.

5. **READ GOD'S WORD.** (Read Psalm 119:11.) God's word tells us plainly that as we "hide it in our heart," it gives a special strength to say no to temptation and sin.