

# Lord of Our Priorities



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:24, Exod. 19:5, Job 1:1-5, Rom. 3:24, Eph. 1:7.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*Matthew 6:33, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** The Lord Jesus Christ does not ask to be first among equals in our lives. He asks to be first without equal.

**T**he radical claim of Jesus. Jesus asks us to give Him unrivaled first place in our lives. To all who would be His disciples, He says “ ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple’ ” (*Luke 14:26, NKJV*).

Obviously, this statement of Jesus cannot be taken literally. If we are called as followers of Jesus to love our enemies (*Matt. 5:44*), we should certainly love those closest to us, such as our immediate family. Jesus is not asking us to hate our family members; instead, using powerful and exaggerated imagery, He's saying that we must give Him first place in our lives. He wants to be our top priority, the recipient of our highest devotion. After all, considering who He is—not only our Creator but the One who redeemed us with His own blood (*see 1 Pet. 1:18, 19*)—we owe Him everything, and He's asking us to acknowledge that debt by making Him first in our lives. How could we do any less?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.*

## The Earth Is the Lord's

**Read** the following texts. How do they help us understand the claims Jesus has over our lives?

*Gen. 1:1*

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*Exod. 19:5*

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*Ps. 24:1*

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*Ps. 50:10, 11*

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*Isa. 45:18*

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*Col. 1:16*

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The whole idea of the Lord having priority in our lives is dependent upon who He is in contrast to who we are. It's in the context of this relationship that we can understand why the Lord should be given complete priority over our priorities. The leader of one nation doesn't have the moral or legal right to make rules for the citizens of another country, does he? The president of France, for instance, doesn't have the authority to tell people living in Paraguay how they must live.

The Lord, as our Creator, is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. Whether we acknowledge it or not, He has authority over us, in much the same way a ruler in a particular land has authority over the citizens of that country. Though the Lord has given us stewardship and responsibility over the things on the earth, whatever we possess, whatever gifts we have, we have only because God first created these things and then gave them to us.

It's crucial to keep this realization before us because God does not force us to use, for His glory, the gifts He's given us. He's made us free, free to prioritize as we wish. We can acknowledge His claims over us, not just in words but in how we live and how we prioritize, or we can go our own way, doing what we want and, of course, reaping the sad results of our wrong choices.

**Whatever you have, whatever you are, dwell upon how everything comes from God. How should this realization help you understand how you should set your priorities?**

## Redeemer God

**“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa. 44:22).**

Yesterday’s lesson looked at the claims God has over us by virtue of the fact He is our Creator. In that sense, He is our Owner. And yet, in and of itself, in a fallen world, that might not be enough to get us to want to serve Him, to want to surrender our lives and priorities to Him. It might oblige us to, in the sense that someone working for his or her employer is obliged to work for that person. But God wants us to serve Him, not out of some cold, hard obligation but because we love Him for what He’s done for us, not just as our Creator but also as our Redeemer.

**In your own mind, recall the situations where you did something for someone because you felt obliged to, as opposed to when you did something for someone because you really loved and appreciated this person. How does this contrast help you better understand the way the Lord wants us to relate to Him?**

The Bible makes it clear the Lord is not only our Creator but our Redeemer. Numerous verses talk about Jesus in the role of our Redeemer, of having done the work of redemption in our behalf. Indeed, it’s impossible to understand His death on the cross apart from the notion of redemption.

**Read Romans 3:24; Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19. How do these verses about Christ’s work of redemption in our behalf help you want to serve the Lord and surrender your God-given gifts to Him?**

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The word for “redeem,” or “redemption,” both in the Old and New Testament, comes from various words that mean things like “to buy back,” “to ransom,” “to deliver.” These ideas convey the truths of what Jesus did for us. Thus, not only is He our Creator; He is our Redeemer. He ransomed us from the power and, ultimately, the final legal consequences of sin (*see Rom. 6:23*). When we begin to grasp what this redemption means for us personally, when we experience for ourselves the joy of freedom of this redemption, then it becomes so much easier to make Him the Lord of our priorities.

## The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ

Doing His Father's will was the number one priority of Jesus. His plan for life was simply this: To discover the Father's will and do it.

**LOOK** up the following texts. What is being said in each case? What's the common theme found in them all? What do they tell us about Jesus and the example of obedience He presents for us?

*Luke 22:42*

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*John 4:34*

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*John 6:38*

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*John 17:8*

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*Phil. 2:8*

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*Heb. 10:9*

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“So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 208.

What a powerful example is Christ's life of complete surrender that not only His deeds but His words were from the Father.

**Go back over the texts for today. Put the basic thoughts together and ask, What's the message they have for me? What do I need to change in order to move better toward this ideal as personified in Jesus?**

## First on Your Agenda *(Luke 6:46).*

**What** question does Jesus ask His hearers at the end of His Sermon on the Mount? *Luke 6:46.* **How different would your life be if you did everything Jesus told you to do?**

Obedience is the ultimate evidence that we have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. His will becomes our will. His plans become our plans. As a loving response to His saving grace, we yield ourselves completely to Him as Lord of every aspect of our lives.

We must avoid at all costs the fatal delusion of calling Jesus “Lord” but failing to recognize His lordship over our lives as we plan our daily schedules. We can easily become preoccupied with working out our own agendas. Instead of asking the Lord to rule and overrule in every activity of our day, we ask God to bless the plans we have already made. Ellen White suggests a different strategy for those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord: “Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

**Consider** the stories of the following Bible characters. **Where did God’s plans for them conflict with their own personal plans?**

*Exod. 2:11-15*

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*Jer. 1:4-10*

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*Matt. 19:16-22*

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*2 Tim. 4:10*

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**Who can’t see himself or herself, to some degree, reflected in these stories? Some of the stories (as far as we can tell) had a good ending, some bad. What made the crucial difference?**

## First in Your Day (Ps. 5:1-3, Mark 1:35).

Our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated the importance of seeking God first in the day. Mark records that “in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He [Jesus] went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (*Mark 1:35, NKJV*). “The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 90.

We would do well to follow the example of our Lord. While it is important to set the Lord always before us (*see Ps. 16:8*), it also is appropriate to set aside special times of prayer. David prayed in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (*see Ps. 55:17*). Daniel followed a similar practice (*see Dan. 6:10*).

**Read** the psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 5:1-3. Why do you think the morning is such an important time to especially focus our attention on the Lord? What is it about the morning (or whenever you first wake up) that makes it such an important time to commune with God?

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Most Christians agree in principle that it is important to make communion with the Lord the first priority of the day. However, many have difficulty putting this conviction into practice. Late-night activities or early morning responsibilities seem to crowd out easily that special time of fellowship with the Lord. As a result, our time with God often becomes reactive, crying out to Him when things go wrong, rather than proactive, seeking Him first before we face any of the challenges of the day. Many seriously cripple their spiritual life because they don’t take that crucial time to pray, read the Bible, or meditate on the Word. In the same way that if you skip breakfast you can soon run out of physical fuel, by skipping morning devotion you can find the spiritual “fuel” lacking to meet the temptations the enemy is always trying to throw in your path (*see 1 Pet. 5:8*).

**What things are you letting interfere with a consistent morning devotional life? Why not, right now, prayerfully resolve in your heart to use this precious time when you begin your day to keep in communion with the Lord?**

**Further Study:** Think of individuals mentioned in Scripture who put God first in their lives and allowed Him to be the Lord of their priorities. For example, consider the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. *Read Luke 1:26-38.* Notice her response to the claim of God.

**Note:** The idea of yielding our lives under the authority of another is not a popular concept in the twenty-first century. People want to be the masters of their own destinies. They want to be in control. Christians have a different perspective. The One who calls us to live under His lordship is our loving Savior, who gave His life to redeem us. Under His lordship we find freedom, not bondage. We are sons and daughters, not slaves.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** How is it possible to follow the example of Jesus who “made no plans for Himself” but simply allowed the Father to direct His steps? Give some practical suggestions as to how that approach to life might be implemented. Share your ideas with the class.
- 2** Look at two other important areas of your life, family, and finances. What are some practical ways we can acknowledge the lordship of Jesus in these two crucial areas?
- 3** Look up as many texts as you can find that talk about Christ as the Sacrifice for our sins and then write down a paragraph summarizing what they are saying. As a class, have people read aloud what they wrote. How does this great news help motivate you to want to serve the Lord and surrender to Him all He’s given you? What greater motivation could we possibly have to do this?

# God Is Faithful, part 1

Maria Tzenova

My dreams were coming true; I was studying at the University of Bulgaria. I was not yet a member of the church, but I understood the Bible principles, and I believed. My parents were not believers, but I had shared what I believe with them. My mother had visited the church, but my father was not interested in this strange new religion.

Then I learned that the required labs for my Latin class fell on Saturday. I was determined to keep the Sabbath, so I decided to talk to the professor, a severe woman who seldom smiled. After the first class I approached her and made my request to miss the labs.

“No!” she shouted loudly. “If you do not attend the labs, you will fail the class. And without this class you cannot major in English. So you might as well leave the university now!” She turned and walked away, leaving me standing alone.

That afternoon I went to the train station to go home for the weekend. I sat wrapped in my winter jacket, not so much from the cold as from fear for my future, which looked as bleak as the sky outside. Fail the course? Leave the university? Lose my dream? Never! I had worked too hard to get this far.

What would my parents say? They had been so proud of me. How would I tell them that my faith in God, my religious convictions, would prevent me from fulfilling my dream? My mother had just begun to accept my new faith. If I left the university because of the Sabbath, what would she think of my faith? Would her fragile faith crumble? Would mine?

I decided not to tell my parents. Not yet. Then I had an idea. I would not have classes on Sabbath forever. I could postpone my baptism until the class ended. This seemed like a reasonable solution. But it did not bring the comfort I had hoped.

I knew the fourth commandment, but I wanted to understand what God had in mind for me in this situation. I took out my New Testament and prayed for guidance. Then I opened it to Galatians 4:9. “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them . . . again?” (NIV). I closed the New Testament, knowing what I had to do. It made no difference that I was not baptized; I would be faithful to God, no matter what.

The future looked bleak, but I had peace.

*(continued next week)*

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