

# 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.

The 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?**

**Key Text:** *Luke 1:38*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To show that we should put God first in our lives because He is our Creator.
2. To show that we should put God first in our lives because He is our Redeemer.
3. To show how Christ our Example gave the Father control of His priorities.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. The Lord Our Creator (*Col. 1:16*).

- A. Why does the Lord have the right to have priority in our lives?
- B. Why are we responsible for using what God has given us for His glory?

#### II. The Lord Our Redeemer (*Isa. 44:22*).

- A. Why else should we submit our priorities?
- B. Why should this motivate us to let God control our priorities?

#### III. Following the Example of Christ (*John 6:38*).

- A. Describe Christ's purpose in life.
- B. How can we follow His example in this area?
- C. How did Jesus demonstrate the importance of putting God first? (*Mark 1:35*).

**Summary:** As our Creator and Redeemer, the Lord has the authority to claim our priorities. We should put Him first in our lives by seeking Him at the beginning of each day and by using all He has given us for His glory and to fulfill His purpose for our lives.

## COMMENTARY

### Lord of Our Priorities.

Our relationship to the authority figures in our life can color how comfortable we are in accepting Jesus as President of our priorities. In our fallen world, many have had unpleasant experiences with clueless authority figures exercising their power simply for the sake of doing so. In such situations, the impulse to rebel can reach epic proportions and come to fruition with devastating results. When we project our traumatic experiences with such authorities onto Jesus, we are disturbed by the thought of His being our Lord, Employer, Owner, President, and Judge. Rather than feeling comforted and contained, we feel exiled to some sort of emotional prison. We are not comforted, and we do not view His words as conveying good news.

Yet, good news is exactly what God intended Jesus to be. Thus, we need to reframe our picture of authority; we need to understand that Jesus' authority is *for* us, not *against* us. We need to see Jesus as Someone who is emotionally and spiritually on our side and who

## 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.

has the power to help us succeed. Our fear must change to faith before we can access the gift of Jesus as Lord of our priorities.

Changing fear to faith requires that we contrast Jesus' use of authority with how many humans misuse their authority. Jesus has authority over us, because He created us and knows us. He created us free, which means we have the capacity to make choices. From the beginning of Creation, God gave humanity the freedom to choose its own destiny. Our first parents made an unwise choice, so now, as fallen creatures, we are no longer totally free. Envy and greed have become a large part of our motivational system. Our human nature is bent to sin. If these things were not so, we could redeem ourselves by making a new choice; but as fallen beings, we have a propensity to make choices that lead to destruction and death.

As Christians, however, we are enabled to live a life motivated by faith in the salvation Jesus achieved for us. In living such a life, we become new and truly free creatures. We receive a positive identity to embrace and grow into. The Spirit of God dwells within us and, thereby, re-creates us into the image of God and fully restores our freedom. Only those who, by faith, accept this new identity have the real capacity to make truly free choices for good and for life. In Christ, however, wrong choices do not condemn us. Rather, they provide opportunities for us to learn how to do better. If we stumble in our Christian walk, we have an Advocate we can trust to pick us up, brush us off, and help us get back on track. In this way, we can perceive Christ using His authority, not to criticize or condemn us but to encourage us and to coach us. We will believe He wants to help us do that which will enable us to reach the goal we have mutually set. Jesus created us with certain impulses and drives. We mature as Christians when we learn to nurture our God-ordained impulses for life into full bloom.

There is a paradox in this type of freedom. The paradox is that we achieve this freedom only through obedient surrender. This is not the type of surrender that makes a person a doormat. Rather, it is the type of surrender that requires relinquishing our own power to receive the power of Another. In the Christian life, we give up what power we have to benefit ourselves. As long as we deny the lordship of Christ, we will not be free, because we remain a divided entity. When we surrender from the fight to be our own god, we will find the freedom to be what God originally made us to be.

When we set aside our power to live as autonomous, self-driven individuals, we will be able to serve the needs of the community of which we are a part. In this, Jesus is our Example. Jesus loved not His life to death. He freely chose to fulfill His mission of redemption. He did not fight back against the enemies who falsely accused Him, but He loved them even though He knew they would kill Him. Because He trusted God to the point of self-sacrifice, He achieved His calling as our Lord and Savior. His life and death are truly gifts to humanity.

## 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?**

We are not called to be the Messiah, and few are called to be martyrs. However, we are called to love others with the love of Jesus. We are to live this side of the Resurrection proclaiming the good news we have experienced. Because Jesus died for us and was resurrected, we can fully live without the fear that someone can steal life from us. Because we know there will be a resurrected life, we know we can live now with unconquerable hope. We have a God who redeems us.

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 2:24, Exodus 19:5, Job 1:1-5, Romans 3:24, Ephesians 1:7*

- 1 Jesus is Lord of our lives because He created us and redeemed us. These two things awaken in us a profound sense of gratitude and inspire us to make serving Christ our highest priority. Yet, putting Christ first every day in all things is often a struggle. What, for you, are the greatest obstacles to committing yourself totally to Christ? What is useful in overcoming these obstacles?
- 2 Luke 17:11-19 relates the story of ten lepers who came to Jesus for cleansing. All of them were healed, but only one returned to thank Jesus—and he was a Samaritan. Why would religious people—be they Jews or Seventh-day Adventists—feel they are somehow entitled to God’s blessings without thanking Him?
- 3 Ellen White wrote: “We [should] depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 208. What does that mean in practical terms? Should we stay in bed until He tells us to get up? Not eat until He tells us what to fix for breakfast? Or should we look for opportunities to honor Him as we go through the activities of our daily lives? What kind of opportunities should we be on the lookout for?
- 4 Jesus prayed before dawn in a solitary place (*Mark 1:35*). David prayed morning, noon, and night (*Ps. 55:17*); and Daniel prayed three times a day (*Dan. 6:10*). The Bible does not say we have to pray as they did; we all have different schedules and temperaments. When and how do you cultivate a prayer experience that works for you?

## 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?



## Witnessing

As humans, we often see things as black and white, good or bad. It is “obvious” that those who drop out of school or use their money to buy alcohol rather than food don’t have their priorities in order.

As Christians, however, we must operate not on a good/bad model but on one of good, better, and best. Too often it is not the “bad” priority that comes between us and God but the “good” one that keeps us from choosing the best.

Perhaps this is why it is said the road to hell is paved with good intentions; we must never let our own idea of what is good in a particular situation interfere with what God demands.

Our witness, then, must neither demand nor exhibit anything less than full allegiance to God. Jesus never tolerated anything that stood between a person and his or her God. His call was simple: “ ‘Follow me.’ ” Those who heeded the call were greatly blessed, but there were many who missed their blessing because they put the good, such as burying their father, ahead of the best (*Luke 9:59*).

Are we experiencing the promise of this week’s memory text, or are we still wondering whether or not God answers prayer? “ ‘Seek first,’ ” not as an afterthought, not as a justification, not as a bargaining chip, “ ‘his kingdom and his righteousness’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NIV*).

Let us humble ourselves, realize our wretchedness (especially if we appear “good” in the world’s eyes), and put God first so we might see how He orders everything else in our lives. What greater witness is there than a life completely surrendered to God?

## 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?**

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Take a few moments to look back at your appointment book from last week. What occupied the major part of your time? What unexpected things, both good and bad, did you have to manage? What one event was the highlight of your week? How does this review reveal the priorities in your life?

### Thought Questions:

❶ The issue of origins is much debated in our world. The Bible proclaims Jesus to be the Author of our existence. “ ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other’ ” (*Isa. 45:18, NIV*). This gives Him the title and right to be the sovereign Ruler of the universe and of our personal lives. How does this world view impact the way we live our lives, as well as the way we relate to others? What impact does it make on your response to God to know that He allows you to choose whether or not you offer Him your allegiance?

❷ Parents often indulge their children with the best of what they can offer. Paul tells us that “the riches of God’s grace” are “lavished” (*Eph. 1:7, 8, NIV*) or “made to abound toward us” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). The Lord has the right to demand our obedience; instead, He compels us through love, demonstrated by His death on the cross. What practical implications does this knowledge have for how you develop your daily agenda? What impact will it have when your story is written at the end of your life?

### Application Question:

We live lives driven by what has been called the tyranny of the urgent. As a consequence, we come to the end of each day feeling robbed and discouraged by failure and guilt. The psalmist declares, “in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation” (*Ps. 5:3, NIV*). How can we learn from Jesus the way to be proactive with our lives? With His help and mentoring, we can make radical changes in our priorities that will help us live in hope. Covenant with God to set aside time to allow Him to reorganize your life.

**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?