

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

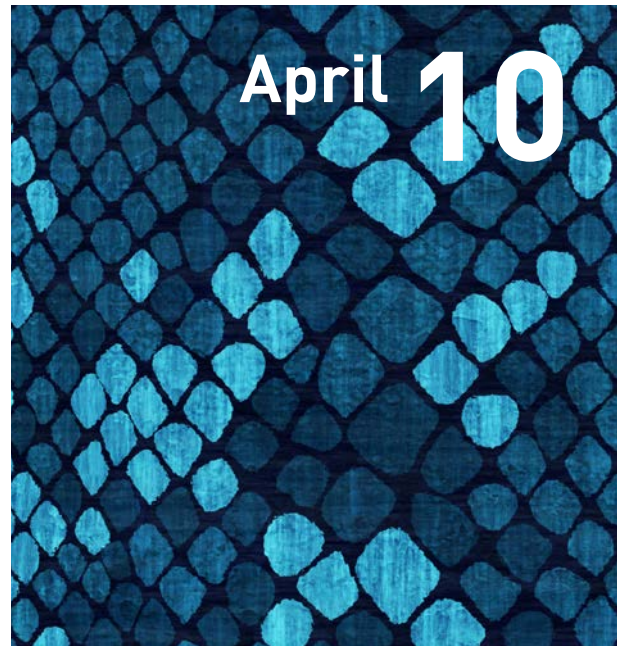
of the wealth. When Judas asks to become a disciple, Jesus simply responds: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:19, 20).

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 found. 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).

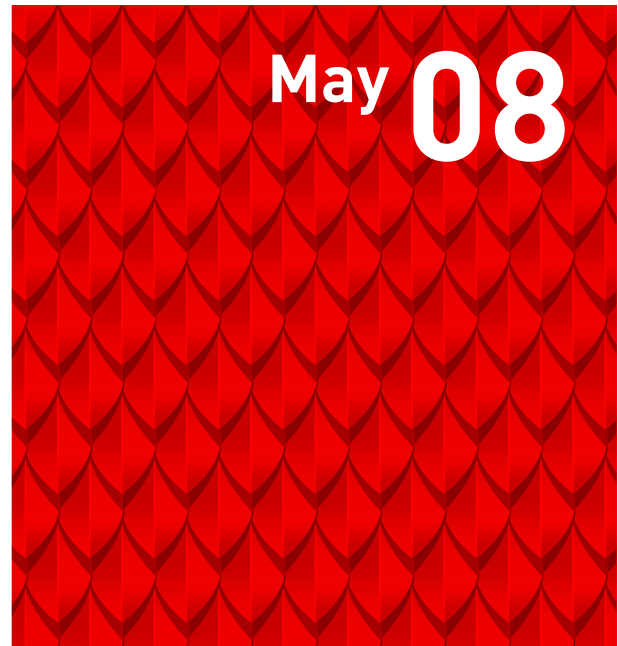
This is a devastating expression. Treating the Lord's offerings with contempt meant they despised the offerings and had no respect or reverence for them. God didn't take that lightly and eventually both of Eli's sons were killed by the Philistines. Eli died on the same day when he collapsed after hearing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

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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.

May 15

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

May 22

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

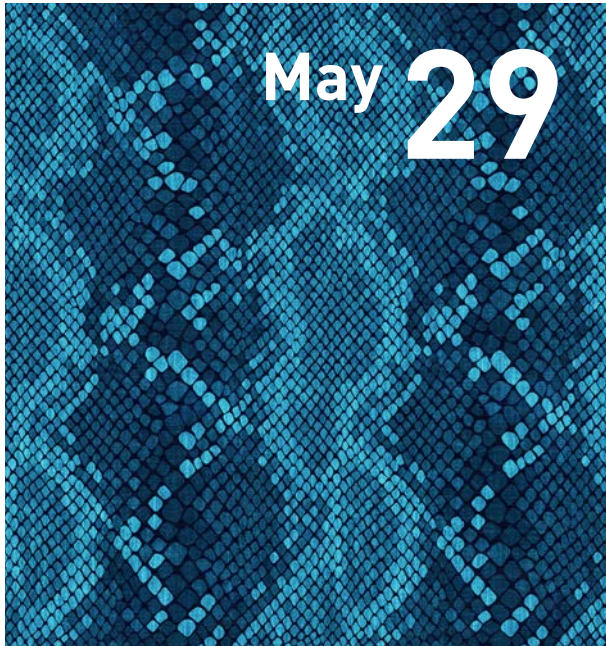
because of the evidence they had seen.

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

June 05

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.

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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 tithe 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.