



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.

Australian Union Conference



Seventh-day Adventist Church™

Australia

Victorian Conference

141 Central Road
Nunawading VIC 3131 Australia
Telephone: +61 3 9264 7777
www.vic.adventist.org.au