



## A God-first Life

**M**y dad turned ninety last month. He is in remarkable health, a picture of fitness, playing tennis every day. Indeed, in 2014 there is a strong likelihood he will be ranked as a top five singles players nationally for his age group. Granted, there are only ten.

I, on the other hand, live this annual rhythm: six months getting in shape, three months getting out of shape, three months self-loathing, repeat. My wife, Nancy, just told me no more brownies. I guess the six months are officially underway.

Our spiritual life can feel as erratic, can't it? Seasons of progress, times of regression, moments of intimacy, points of rebellion.

Our Covenant forebears had a saying when they would check in with each other about their spiritual lives. They would ask, "How goes your walk with the Lord?"

The value of the question was not in thinking the answer would always be positive and growing, but actually just the opposite: the question presupposes that our relationship with God needs tending to in the way all relationships do.

There are two words that help center me in my meandering—God first. Those two words are also my new year's challenge to you. Make 2014 a conscious year of "God-first" living.

One conviction I hold is that the commands of God direct us to greater measures of meaning in life. They are spoken from God's loving heart for our best interest. As we align our lives with the commands of God, we walk toward values and behaviors that lead to the nourishing and flourishing of our soul; when we ignore or violate them we walk toward things that are corrosive. God's commands are designed to be life-giving, not life-stifling.

Jesus gives two "first" commands that combine to paint the picture of God-first living. In taking these to heart, we nurture deeper purpose in our lives in turn.

The first "first" is found in Matthew 22:37-38, where Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment."

This is to say, there is nothing more impor-

tant than loving God with everything we've got—nothing held back, a fully consuming devotion that touches every area of will, emotion, and intellect. It is an interior directive toward greater attentiveness, intimacy, tenderness, familiarity, yieldedness, and fidelity.

The second "first" given in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

In the context of the passage, Jesus is contrasting the investment of our energies. Material pursuits have limited value. Pursuits centered in eternal values have enduring value.

By being directed to seek first the kingdom of God, we are called out of a privatized faith. It is an external directive to live out in this world the values and priorities of God.

So, which first is really first? They both are. When taken together they point to the rhythm essential to a God-first life. As we like to say in the Covenant, we pursue Christ *and* Christ's priorities; we live with God *and* for God; we go deeper in Christ *and* further in mission. Think of an airplane propeller; as its two ends spin and circle together, there is propulsion.

But here is the challenge. It's hard to live a God-first life in an increasingly me-first world. Indeed, our culture is accelerating in conferring us with our own god-like attributes. We can create our private virtual worlds to our own specifications. We can be quasi-omniscient through Google, and quasi-omnipresent through Facebook and other social media. We can seemingly be anywhere, connect with anybody, and know anything that is known. It is hard to live a God-first life when we can be god-like ourselves.

And so join me in these two antidotal daily prayers of surrender. Place them where you will see them every day.

Lord, what more of me is there for you?

Lord, what more for me is there to do?

The first helps us to love God first; the second to seek first God's kingdom. But foremost, may we be committed to making 2014 a God-first year. ■

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