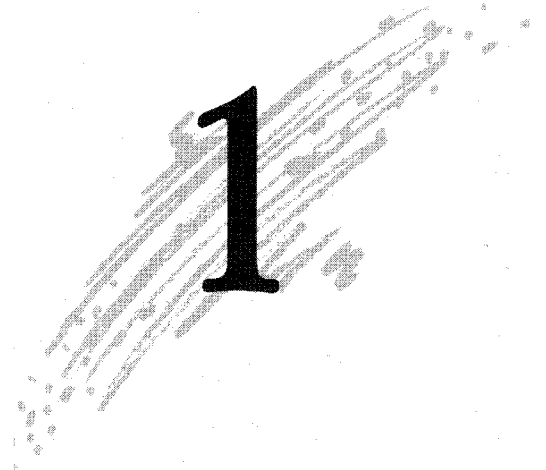


God in First Place



LESSON AIM

To help kids understand that ★ God deserves first place in our lives.

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- examine how they set priorities,
- learn why a rich young man chose not to follow Jesus,
- identify interests that may compete for first place in their lives, and
- make a commitment to put God first.

BIBLE BASIS

Mark 10:17-27

Many of Jesus' teachings challenge our minds and our sense of fairness as we attempt to understand them. The story of the rich young man is certainly one of those.

A sincere, respected young man comes to Jesus full of admiration and enthusiasm. He addresses Jesus as "good teacher," then goes straight to the heart of the matter: "What must I do to have life forever?"

Good start! Jesus' response is almost a retort: "Why do you call me good? Only God is good." Jesus isn't going to make this easy. Perhaps Jesus is warning the young man that flattery and emotion won't get what he's after. Jesus proceeds to name five of the commandments—those that deal with peo-

YOU'LL NEED

- five plates of treats
- five paper grocery bags
- a "treasure box"
- slips of paper
- a pencil
- Bibles
- photocopies of the "God Is First" handout (p. 17)
- scissors
- crayons or markers
- tape

ple-to-people relationships. You can almost see the light in the young man's eyes as he says, "I have obeyed all these things since I was a boy." Then Jesus lovingly issues the challenge: "Sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor. Then come and follow me."

The young man responds with stunned silence. Then he turns and sadly walks away, unable to part with his wealth and put God first in his life.

Matthew 6:33

Jesus challenges his followers to want God's will more than anything. Those who succeed in putting God first can trust God to take care of all the other things that so easily command their energy and attention.

Putting God first is a choice. It's never easy, but it's always the right choice—and the benefits are eternal.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

Many things compete for first place in the lives of your kids. And those things may not be all bad! Older kids may be concerned about having top grades, being the best in sports or music, and identifying with the "in" group at school.

Younger kids may still be in the "me first" stage—what they want at the moment is most important; all other considerations are secondary.

Kids of all ages may be consumed with the desire to accumulate the most awesome collection of whatever toys or gizmos are the latest, greatest things to have.

Our challenge as Christian teachers is to show kids that God and God alone is worthy of our first loyalty. Good grades, medals, championships, and possessions may bring pleasure for a time. But in the eternal perspective, those things may become dangerous roadblocks preventing us from giving our very best to God.

This lesson will help kids evaluate their priorities and understand that ★ God deserves first place in our lives.

ATTENTION GRABBER

The Lesson



What's First?

Before anyone arrives, set out five plates of special things such as quarters, strawberries, chocolate kisses, gummy worms, and sticks of gum. Cover the plates with heavy paper grocery bags and don't let anyone peek! Plan to have at least two treats for each person in the class.

As kids arrive, tell them they'll get to choose from the items on the plates, but they'll have to wait their turn. Line kids up from the youngest to the oldest. When everyone is in line, remove the bags and let everyone see what's on the plates.

Say to the first child in line: **Go the table and take one thing. Then go to the back of the line.**

Explain that kids can choose one thing from the table each time they come to the front of the line. Encourage children to go ahead and eat their treat if they've chosen something edible. Keep going until everyone has chosen two treats.

Then gather kids in a circle and ask:

● **How did you decide what to take first?** (I took what I like best; I took a quarter because I can buy something with it later; I took gummy worms because they're gross.)

● **Was it easy or hard to decide what to take?**

Explain. (It was easy because I really love strawberries; it was hard because I like everything.)

● **Would you agree that all these treats are good things? Then why are there still things left on some of the plates?** (Because you said we could only take two things; because the things that are all gone were better than the things that are left.)

Say: **Sometimes it's hard to decide between what's good and what's best. Even though most of you like all the things I put up here, you had only two choices, so you had to decide what to take first, what to take second, and what not to get at all. In real life we have to make choices about what comes first, too. Today we're going to learn that ★ God deserves first place in our lives.**

BIBLE STUDY

A Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-27)

Say: **Our Bible story today is about a young man who was rich. Let's explore what it would be like to be rich.**

Bring out your "treasure box"—it can be a jewelry box, a decorated tin cannister, or a wooden box of any kind. Choose an older child who's a quick writer to be your scribe. Give your scribe a pencil and several slips of paper. Choose a younger child to hold the treasure box and put the slips of paper in it.

Say: **Let's name all the things we can think of that a rich person today would have. Our scribe will write down everything we say, then we'll put those things in our treasure box.**

Children may name things such as millions of dollars, a big house, lots of cars, a swimming pool, and designer clothes. When children have contributed several ideas, pick up the treasure box and hug it. Ask:

- **How would you feel if you had all these things?** (Great; happy.)
- **What would you do if someone told you to give all these things away?** (I'd laugh; I'd say no; I'd ask why.)

Say: **Let's see what happened to the rich young man in today's story.**

Choose two good readers, one to read the words of the rich young man, and one to read the words of Jesus. Open your Bible to Mark 10:17 and have your readers do the same. Explain that you'll take the role of the narrator. Be prepared to cue your readers with a nod of your head when it's time for them to read their parts.

Begin the reading. Stop the person who's reading the words of Jesus in the middle of verse 19, after "You know the commands." Ask the class:

● **How many of the Ten Commandments can you name?** Although Jesus does not list all Ten Commandments in this passage, it will be a good review for your class. After the kids have named all the commandments they can think of, signal the readers to continue. Close the reading at the end of verse 27. Then ask:

- **What did Jesus ask the young man to do?** (Sell everything; give money to the poor and follow him.)
- **Why did the young man go away sad?** (Because he was rich and didn't want to sell everything.)
- **What was most important to the young man?** (Keeping his riches.)

TEACHER TIP

You may want to choose readers as kids arrive and allow them to look over their parts in Mark 10:17-27 before class.

- **Do you think the young man cared about Jesus?**

Explain. (Yes, because he came to Jesus and asked what to do; no, because he wouldn't do what Jesus asked.)

- **How do you think Jesus felt when the young man walked away?** (Sad; disappointed.)

Say: **The Bible tells us that ★ God deserves first place in our lives. Jesus must have been sad when the young man decided that his riches were more important than obeying and following Jesus. It's not always easy for us to put God first in our lives, either.**

LIFE APPLICATION

God Is First

Say: **Let's have some fun thinking about things we enjoy—things that are important to us.**

Distribute photocopies of the "God Is First" handout (p. 17), scissors, and markers or crayons. Form groups of four. Make sure there's at least one reader in each group who can help nonreaders understand how to complete the handout.

Circulate among the groups and offer help to any who need it.

Have kids cut out the completed quilt squares and share what they wrote or drew with the other members of their groups. Then gather everyone together and ask:

- **What new things did you learn about the people in your group?** (Stacey does gymnastics; Jon likes to read.)

Say: **It looks like we have some really interesting people in this class! I'm glad to see that you're involved in so many wonderful things.**

TEACHER TIP

If your students enjoy art, encourage them to color in the small triangles. Consider preparing a colored sample before class to help kids visualize how the finished square might look. When the colored squares are assembled on the wall during the closing activity, they'll make a beautiful display.

COMMITMENT

Hidden Cross

Say: **Let's take a moment to read the Bible verse that's printed in the center diamond of your handout.**

Have a volunteer read Matthew 6:33 aloud. Then ask:

- **What does this verse tell you about the things you wrote or drew?** (That they're not as important as God; that those things are good, but God should be #1 in our lives.)

- **What happens when one interest or hobby or person becomes more important than loving and obeying God?** (We get in trouble; it makes God sad.)

- **What do you see in this design besides triangles**

and squares? Encourage kids to study the handout until someone realizes that the design makes a cross.

Say: **★ God deserves first place in our lives. When we make loving and obeying God the most important thing we do, our lives become like a beautiful pattern, with God right in the center.**

Have kids re-form their groups of four and discuss this question:

● **What does putting God first mean to you?** (Taking time to learn about God; praying every day; obeying what the Bible says.)

Challenge kids to sign their names in the center diamond of their handouts to show their commitment to give God first place in their lives.

Say: **Now tell the members of your group one thing you'll do to give God first place in your life this week.**

After groups have shared, call kids together and encourage them to share what they learned in their group discussions.

CLOSING

Off the Wall

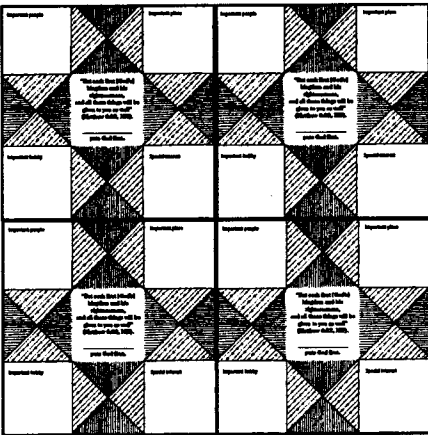
Invite one group of four to tape its squares together on a wall, as shown in the illustration in the margin. Then invite the other groups one by one to add their squares. Help kids arrange their squares so the completed display forms a connected design. Ask:

● **What does our completed display make you think of?** (A pretty quilt; that God puts us all together like this in our church; that we make a beautiful pattern together.)

Hold up the treasure box.

Say: **The rich young man had many beautiful things in his life. But because those things were more important to him than God, he went away sad. Gesture toward the wall display. We have wonderful things in our lives, too. But ★ God deserves first place in our lives. Jesus said that when we give God first place, God will take care of everything else. And that's a promise!**

Close class with a prayer similar to this one: **Lord, thank you for loving us and filling our lives with so many wonderful things. Please help us give you first place in our lives, and we'll trust you to take care of everything else. In Jesus' name, amen.**



GOD IS FIRST

What things are important to you? Write or draw the people, place, hobby, and interest that are most important to you in the four corners of the square below. You may want to color in all the small triangles. Then cut out the completed square.

<p>Important people</p>		<p>Important place</p>
	<p>“But seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33, NIV).</p> <hr/> <p>puts God first.</p>	
<p>Important hobby</p>		<p>Special interest</p>

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