

# First Things First

by Steve Mays

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*Pastor Steve Mays emphasizes the necessity of putting God first in our lives through worship, sacrifice, and gratitude, using Noah as a key example.*

**Duration:** 30:08

**Scripture:** Genesis 8:1, Genesis 8:20, Job 19:25, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses various biblical stories where individuals faced challenging situations but experienced God's intervention. He mentions the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were unharmed in the fiery furnace because the fourth person with them was the Son of God. Another example is Paul and Silas, who were imprisoned but were freed when they praised God and an earthquake occurred. The preacher also mentions Noah, who was instructed by God to build an ark and preach righteousness for 120 years before the flood came. The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembering God and putting Him first in our lives, as He is the source of blessings and victory.

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## Transcript

It's the 2011 Summer of Sermons with Steve Mays. Often times, we don't remember God. And that's what we really need to do in our life.

Pastor Steve Mays shares good reasons to put God first in our lives. When all of a sudden your marriage is blessed, and your single life is blessed, and your business is blessed, and God is blessing your life, that's a good reason to give God thanks. Light of the world, light of the world.

Hope that shines in darkness, a voice that will be heard. Light of the world, light of the world. Hope that shines in darkness, so we'll follow the light of the world.

One of the great benefits of having a relationship with God is knowing we can always go to Him in times of need. But we also should know that we can go to God when life is going pretty well. In fact, Pastor Steve says that praising the Lord should always be our first response when we've been blessed.

For Noah, worshiping God was number one on his to-do list when the ark landed safely on dry ground. Now today, Steve takes us back to the book of Genesis where he shows us that we can find reasons every day to praise God. Here's Pastor Steve with a lesson called First Things First.

Would you turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 8 and want to draw your attention to two verses, verse 1 and verse 20. Chapter 8, verses 1 and then in verse 20. And we're going to look at a topic, very simply, First Things First.

A very unique man and one who was able to build for God but he also was able to bow before God. And so join me in just a moment of prayer. Father, we pray that God as we come to an end of Noah and God we see that out of all the people on the face of the earth he was the one that God you chose to show favor and he was willing to build for 120 years and now he's willing to bow before the God of all creation.

So Lord, would you teach us the importance of not only building but bowing before you. To show our kids how to build but then to teach our children how to bow before the throne of God. In Jesus' name.

Amen. When I begin to study some of these Bible characters I begin to really look into their lives and there's a common denominator in every one of their lives as you look at it. It doesn't make a difference if it's a man or a woman.

The common denominator is always the same. They are absolutely filled with inspiration. They are filled to the brim.

It's like God just opens their eyes and God has shown them an insight. And then they are always filled with passion. A tremendous passion to do what God put before them.

It doesn't make a difference if it's Esther and she goes on to say, you know, if I perish, I perish. But how do I know that I wasn't born for such a time as this? Or if it was Job even during the difficult times. He says, my Redeemer liveth and I know it.

And I will see him one day. Or if it's Isaiah, not only is he able to pronounce the woes but he's also able to weep for the people. And so they were motivated and they were thrilled.

And when you find a Bible character, they are always motivated because of the commission of God and the call of God upon their life. And then we look at our lives and we think, okay, what is motivating us and what is thrilling our life and what is the inspiration that we are really making in the world in which we live? And personally, I'd like to leave in such a way that I leave an impact. That we leave a mark on society.

That when people said that we couldn't do it, we did it. When people thought we would give up, we don't. And when all of a sudden people thought you couldn't make it through the marriage, you did it.

But not only did you do it, you got it with an A. In other words, the possibility of really understanding the passion and the heart and the glory of God. And the reason why Daniel did it, he stood in the lion's den. He purposed in his heart when he was about 15.

He now stands in the lion's den when he's now 90 years old. And he says, you know, King Darius live forever. The God whom I serve continually, he has sent his angels to watch over me.

And Job, setting in the dust, once again, naked I came in, naked I go out. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And then he got up, you remember, and he prayed for the very three friends that caused him most pain in his life.

And God turned his captivity. Or what about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? There in the midst of the fire, walking around, unbound, enjoying that moment because the fourth was the son of God. And

Paul, there in the middle of prison, in the middle of the night, him and Silas are singing praises to God.

And the jail begins to rock and all of a sudden the doors begin to open. So no matter where you look, where you go, you begin to realize there is a very common denominator. These men and women always put God first.

And when God sees that, then God does some extraordinary things through them. And I believe he'll do the very same thing in your heart and in my heart. If I really choose to put God first, if I'm really going to be sincere about being a Christian, not just a kind of a Christian, I mean slam-dunking this Christianity, that I'm going to walk and I'm going to live it, I'm going to talk it, I'm going to rejoice, and I'm going to sing and I'm going to learn what it means to die to myself and be a blessing to other people, I believe that you will experience the joy and the peace and the anointing and the super-blessing of God upon your life.

And God will strengthen your walk. And we see that in Matthew 6, verse 33, a great verse you ought to remember, that if you will seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness, everything else is going to be added. And these men and these women did seek God.

So here you have a man, Noah, now seeking God. And God opens his heart and says, You have found favor with me. You are upright, just, and you have integrity.

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to build me a boat 450 feet long and 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. And I want you to hop in this boat and take your family.

But I want you to preach. And so for 120 years, he now begins to preach righteousness. The day comes, he now has to come inside the ark, and God shuts the door.

And all of a sudden, it begins to rain for 40 days. And then he's in the ark for another 50 days. Then he finally lands on the earth, and you know the story.

He sends the raven out, it comes back. He sends the dove out, it comes back. He does it for another week, another week, another 57 days.

And finally the door opens, and I'll tell you what. If it was me, I'd be out smelling some roses or something. I'd be out from all the smell of the animals and all the cooking, and I would be looking for something new in my life.

But not Noah. He walks down the ramp. The boys, no doubt, are all over the place.

But he, Noah, begins to pick up rocks. And no one knows what he's doing. But he's now beginning to build an altar.

Now no one told him to. He just knew what he had to do. And he had a lot of time to think about it.

He had been through the judgment of God. They had been tossed back and forth. And before he starts down this road on this new adventure in his life, he understood, he went into this boat with a corrupt nature, and he's coming out of this boat with a corrupt nature.

And it needs God in his life. And so he starts off, and he says, I'm going to sacrifice. And before we do one thing, we're going to give thanks to God.

We're going to worship God, and we're going to honor God with our life. We're going to do first things first. And I believe if we could do that in our marriage, if we could do that in our work, if we could do that in the city, I believe God would turn this country and this city around if we would put God first once again in our life.

Now notice two verses in chapter 8, verse 1 and verse 20. He says in Genesis 8, verse 1, In other words, God remembered. It's not that God forgot.

But in the Hebrew, it means that basically God had shown him kindness, or God basically had protected his family. God had secured his future because he was a man that was looking to God. And when the time came, it was now time to let him out of the ark, and he was going to start another generation.

And God willing, that generation would begin to serve and seek God. And we know it didn't happen. But his heart was right, and God remembered him.

But notice in verse 20, a very unique phrase. It says, In other words, God remembered Noah. God has always remembered you.

He's always showed you kindness and tenderness. He's always been with you during the difficult times and the good times. But the second thing we realize is oftentimes we don't remember God.

And that's what we really need to do and start doing in our life. It's not that I remember to call on God in the bad times, or when the marriage is going through it, or the kids are driving me crazy, or things aren't going well financially. No.

It's pretty easy to call and ask God for help. But where I find it difficult is when things are really going your way. When all of a sudden your marriage is blessed, and your single life is blessed, and your business is blessed, and God is blessing your life, or for me, coming out of the hospital, or not being in the hospital on my birthday.

That's a good reason to give God thanks. And so, when do we give God thanks? In other words, when do we stop and say, God, I remember you. And it takes an effort.

It takes something in my own heart to realize what God has done, and I'll never forget the great sacrifice God has made for me. Therefore, I'm going to put God first. And Joshua did it.

He said, as for me and my family, we are going to serve God. And Caleb did it. He had that excellent spirit.

And we see it all the way through the Bible. Men and women who put God first. God blesses their life.

And so maybe God is speaking to you right now. Maybe this is the time that you need not only to give thanks in the difficult times, but need to learn to give thanks in the great moments of your heart. And I believe if you're doing that, God's going to bless you in an abundant way.

And so we see that He doesn't look around, and He doesn't look and see what's going on around Him. He doesn't really care. He just wants to get to His knees.

And when that happens in a man and a woman's life, when all of a sudden they want to bow because of the goodness of God, because of the grace of God, because of all that God has done in and through their life, things begin to happen big time in their heart. Three things I want to share with you, absolutely

important in your heart and my heart today. Number one, Noah builds.

Noah builds an ark. Number two, Noah brings a sacrifice. Noah brings a sacrifice.

And number three, Noah blesses God. And we pick it up in chapter 8, verse 20. And Noah built an altar unto the Lord.

In other words, he walks out, he sees this new world, he walks down that ramp, and his eyes are focused on rocks. And his kids are saying, what are you doing? He says, I'm going to build God an altar, and we are going to give thanks as a family. And the kids don't really understand that.

I imagine, think about it, when they were building this ark, it had to be a massive project. That the kids came with little limbs and stems and everything else, and Noah would say, son, that is not going to hold up in this incredible storm. We need beams, and we need strong things to hold us together.

So we need to get the biggest tree, and the longest tree, and the heaviest tree, and that's what we need to do. And no doubt, he taught his children how to build this ark. How to bring it to the saving of their own soul.

But it's one thing to build for 120 years, and every day his children saw, and every day they enjoyed seeing dad work. And at the very end of the 120 years, they could step back, and they could see this incredible boat, 450 feet long, and 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high, and all of a sudden, 7,000 some animals going inside, and over 100,000 square foot per deck. There were three decks.

And the kids just stood there and looked, and they built this thing with their dad. But it wasn't really important to Noah. What was more important, is could my kids bow their knee before God.

And so now, he's going to teach the children how to bow a knee before this invisible God. And it's one thing to build a church. It's another thing to bow a knee before the throne of God.

It's one thing to work on your house, and build a marriage, and build things. It's another thing to bow, and bring your spouse, or bring your family before God, and ask God to touch. And I believe both are important.

I believe we need a Mary, and I believe we need a Martha. We need to work, and we need to set before God. And many of us can build, and few of us have the ability to bow a knee.

And so he now begins to build this incredible altar. Abraham tells us a great story. When all of a sudden, he finally had Isaac, the joy of his heart, he waited all his life for this one boy.

God one day came to him and said, Come here, Abraham. I want to talk to you. What do you want, God? I want you to take that boy, and I want you to take him to the mountain, and I want you to take his life.

And Abraham, no doubt, looked into the eyes and heart of God saying, Well, this is the promise. How can you take him? And God said, This is what I desire. I want you to offer Isaac to me.

And the Bible tells us, from that moment to where he got to the mountain, it was a three-day ride. And Abraham did not speak. No one spoke.

Because it was just heartbreaking to this man. And then as Isaac and Abraham begin to walk up this mountain, the Bible tells us that Abraham put the wood on the back of Isaac. Kind of interesting.

Because God placed the wooden cross on the back of Christ. And Isaac becomes like Christ, the type. And as they're walking up this mountain, all of a sudden Isaac said, Dad, we have the wood, and we have the fire.

Where is the sacrifice? And Abraham said, God will provide himself a sacrifice. They got to the top, and we believe that Isaac was about 30-some years old. And he now becomes a willing sacrifice.

And as his dad had the knife, nothing happened. But when his dad brought it down, the angel stopped him. And this is what it says, And I now know that you are a friend of mine.

I believe that when you begin to build altars, you actually become a great friend of God. Because you're worshipping, and you're surrendering, and you're putting first things first in your life. And you're giving the very best that you have.

No doubt, we don't want to sacrifice our Isaac, but we have to. If you're dating a non-believer, you need to pray this prayer, God, if she's not the one, take her out of my life. You're going to say, Pastor Steve, you're crazy.

I've waited 10 years for her. Well, let me tell you, if she's not the one, you're going to wish to God that she was out of your life. You need to listen to God, and let God do what he wants to do.

When we dedicate these children, what we're really saying is that, God, if you want to take these kids, you can take them. We don't want you to, and we're afraid you're going to. But we want to say right off the very beginning of our life and our marriage, they are your children.

You gave them to us. You have a right to them. We hope you don't, but if you do, help us to be willing to sacrifice our Isaac now.

And where people get messed up is they will not sacrifice their Isaac. They will not give God the very thing he wants. And when we come to realize that nothing can stand between you and God, he's a jealous God, and he wants the thing you're hanging on to.

And then we read later on about Elijah. Kind of interesting. He didn't build an altar.

He repaired an altar, which is kind of unique. Sometimes we fall away from the Lord, and we need to rebuild it once again. So he went up on the hill, you remember, with 450 prophets of Bel.

And he begins to repair the altar. And one of the things he does is he puts the wood in order. And in the Hebrew, it means methodical, and it means analytical.

That's where we get the word methodical and analytical. You put the wood in order. In other words, you put the wood in such a way the sacrifice is not going to fall through.

And this is what speaks to my heart. If I'm going to give God something, I'm not going to throw it in front of God and say, fine, take it. I'm not going to cop an attitude with God because he doesn't want that.

He wants me to be willing, and he wants me to give the very best. And he wants me to lay it before him, and he wants me to worship him when I'm doing it. So Isaac had to get up there, and Abraham had to be willing to give God his very best.

Elijah had to repair the offering. And when it was together, you remember what happened? The fire came down, and the stones were completely dissolved. Which tells me that when you build an altar in your home, and you begin to worship God, God can do the supernatural.

He can take the hard hearts, and he can melt them. And he can take these things that are so weird and false, and he can speak the truth. The false prophets were all killed.

And when I begin to have an altar in my heart, and I begin to worship God, there cannot be any false things going on in my life. So this altar was a real commitment. It means that I'm going to alter my life.

So Noah comes out of this boat, and he says, I'm going to build something that my children can see, and it expresses my heart. And God, I want to give you thanks. I want to give you honor.

I want to bow my knee, because you are the king of kings, and we're going to start off with you first. If we could do that in this church, if we could start the day with God, if we could go through the day thinking about God, and if we could come home and meet each other and see God, it would be so powerful. But not only did he build a boat, secondly, he brings a sacrifice to that incredible altar.

Notice he says in chapter 8, verse 20, again. He says, And every clean bird and every clean beast offering a burnt offering on the altar. Now, this is not a sin offering.

This is that consecration offering. This is that offering that you would lay on top of the altar, and you would step back, and the whole thing would be consumed by fire. In other words, no one would get anything from it.

And some of the other offerings, the priest would get like the chateaubriand, and you would get like the ribeye, and God gets the grease and the fat. He likes that. He wants the grease and the fat.

Why? Because when you burn grease and you burn fat, that's what you smell at the barbecue next door. But God doesn't want you to eat the fat and all that. He'll take that.

He wants the sweet smelling. And he would provide for the priest through the offering. He would provide for you.

But the burnt offering was a total consecration. No one was able to have a steak sandwich afterwards. Everyone received it.

And what's interesting is when all of a sudden we have these animals that are now going to start this new population, Noah is going to start killing them. He doesn't really worry about the animals. He's more worried about his commitment to God and starting off right with God.

And a sin offering, a consecration offering, he begins to take all the clean animals, and he kills them. And I imagine the kids were saying, Dad, we brought these things for a year with us. What in the world are you doing? Well, no doubt they had names.

No doubt the kids began to name them. They got close to the kids, and now they were going to kill the family pets. It says exactly what the Bible tells us.

Christ was crucified. You know, God is asking me and you to do one simple thing. What's in your hand? You remember when God spoke to Moses? He said, What's in your hand? And Moses said, A staff.

He said, Give me that staff. Very important point. God does not want what you do not have.

He wants what you have. If you will give him that staff, he will bury the Egyptian army, and he will destroy Egypt, and he will open the Red Sea, and God will turn the world upside down for you if you give him what you're hanging on to. And what did the boy have in his hand? A sack lunch.

And when the boy gave that sack lunch to Jesus, what did Jesus do? He blessed it, and he multiplied it, and he fed the whole multitude, over 5,000 men, and there were 12 baskets taken up. In other words, he was able to feed everyone on just a boy's sack lunch. Or what about the woman with the two mites? That's nothing.

Two mites, one eighth of a cent. In other words, one quarter of a cent. And Jesus said, Come here.

I want to show you, disciples, something. She has given everything she has. Now, why am I saying this? Because what dawned on me last night is I hear people say, Well, I don't have anything to give.

You don't need anything to give. You can start giving yourself. God would far rather have you than your money.

And when all of a sudden I begin to realize that all he had was a few animals, but he was going to sacrifice them. Nothing was going to stop him. He was not going to say, Well, you know, I've got to really be careful.

He is saying, I'm going to please God. I'm going to sacrifice. God will take care of the mating situation.

I'm not going to worry about it. And sometimes we say, No, I've got to be real careful not to give to God. My wife is really bugging me.

My kids are bugging me. I'm like, You give, period. You learn to be transparent.

You learn to do what God wants you to do. You bring the offering. And you build that incredible altar.

And let God alter your behavior. And let God give the very best in your life. Because if you're a friend of God, you're going to make it through any difficult time.

And lastly, he says here, in a very profound way, Noah blesses God. Notice it says in verse 21, And the Lord smelled a sweet Savior. In other words, God said, I smell something.

What's going on down there? It smells good up here. Someone's cooking something. Nice grease.

It smells great. Now let me ask the question. What do you smell like today? Well, I don't know.

I didn't use deodorant. No, no, no. If you've been hanging out in the world, you're going to smell like a cesspool.

And that's what God's going to smell. If you've been hanging out with the Lord Jesus Christ, you're going to be smelling like Christ. And that's what God's going to smell.

And I think the smell is simply obedience. I can build an altar. And I can sacrifice that altar.

But it's through that life of obedience that God begins to bring a sweetness in my life. And now that sweetness goes up to all around. When the woman with that one box broke it, it fragrance filled the whole house.

And so it's in the breaking of that box. All she had was that box. She gave it.

But in the breaking of that, there was a fragrance. And God looks at this man and he says, This is my man. Yes, he built.

And before he built, he was righteous. He was the only one, Stephen, I could talk to. He had a heart for me.

And I gave him the biggest job I've ever given someone to do. And he was obedient. And for 120 years, no one came to Christ.

But he built this boat. And now he walks out. And I see him walking out.

And he could go look at every place else. But he bows his knee and says, Thanks for getting me through this tough time in my life. And thanks for saving my family.

And thanks for what you're doing in my heart. And then he, on his own, out of his own heart, he offers a burnt sacrifice. And it just fills heaven with obedience.

This is a sweet man. You know, it says in a great scripture in Ephesians 5-2, And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, has given himself for us and offering a sacrifice to God, a sweet-smelling Savior. Let me put it a different way.

Noah now becomes a type of Christ. Noah is obedient. And it brings a sweetness before God.

Jesus Christ, 2,000 years ago, went to the cross. And on that cross, he died. And it became a sweetness to God.

You say, well, I don't understand. Because of his death, I'm here. Because of his death, I live.

And it pleased God to crucify Christ. And through the death of Christ, it was pleasing in the life of obedience. And so, I think for me, I just want to put God first.

How am I going to do it? I don't know. One day at a time. Are you always going to do it? I don't think so.

But my passion is to do it. And my heart is to do it. And I want to build.

And I want to bow. But I want to bless God. Pastor Steve Mays, sharing good reason to put God first in our lives.

Good encouragement from Steve's lesson called First Things First. You know, it's been said that the beginning is an important part of any work. And when it comes to understanding God's work in our lives,

it's imperative that we start at the beginning.

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