

The Power of Seeking God First

Within five minutes of meeting Harold and Marti, we heard about their grandson Eric. And no wonder. His accomplishments are inspiring. At 19, he was the youngest in his class to graduate from a prestigious Connecticut university, and his grade-point average earned him the honor of summa cum laude. He earned his master's degree in Scotland, his doctorate from Switzerland. He spent two years helping engineer and construct sanitary water systems in the jungles north of Puerto Bahia Negra, Paraguay.

That's where he met Nicole. Her family lives in Chartres, France. They own a perfume company, among other holdings. Eric and Nicole have two-year-old twin daughters, Elita and Ninete. He is now a full professor in the same university from which he graduated. They spend their summers in Paris. Harold and Marti just got back from a delightful trip there. They even had slides to show us of their family and the trip.

We've known Curt and LaVonne for more than 20 years. They have been long-distance friends for most of that time, the type you get four-page letters from twice a year to catch up on all the family news.

Well, not quite all.

Three years ago we first heard about their grandson Patrick. One of Curt and LaVonne's daughters, Patrick's mother, had been married and divorced before we met them. We had never known for sure about that previous family. It turns out that Patrick was the only child from that marriage. He had gone to live with his father at age seven. Curt and

LaVonne tried to maintain contact Patrick over the years, even though their former son-in-law was antagonistic and sometimes hostile to them. They sent Patrick cards, presents, letters, and put him at the top of their prayer list.

Influenced by his father and his environment, Patrick developed a very expensive drug addiction. While high on drugs, he robbed a mini-mart and shot and crippled the clerk. He is serving 25 years at a prison near Corcoran, California. His is not the type of story that grandparents share slides about.

The good news for both sets of grandparents is that neither story is over yet. Eric still needs Harold and Marti, and Patrick still needs Curt and LaVonne.

Yet this is not the most important thing.

As much as we love our grandchildren, as much as they still need us, there is something more important for every grandparent.

Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33, KJV).

Grandchildren are added things—not the first thing.

When we were new parents, it dawned on us that we had no idea how to be good parents. In our early 20s with two children, we were anxious about how we could succeed with a family in this turbulent world. So we tried something we had never done before: we read the Bible together.

Neither of us had much spiritual knowledge nor had we attended church with any regularity. We had no Christian friends.

We dug through a box of our old high school annuals stored in the garage and found a promotion Bible that had been given to Janet at a Nazarene Sunday School she visited as a child. We started in and read every night all summer long. By the end of summer, we knew we needed more instruction. That led us to attend a church and sign up for a Bible study. It was a Navigators-based study called "Introduction to Christ."

Within weeks, we individually accepted the truth about Jesus and invited Him into our lives. That was more than 35 years ago. Matt. 6:33 was one of the first verses we memorized as new believers and one of the guiding principles of our new-found spiritual life.

It still is.

There is *one* first thing.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in the lives and hearts of believers right now. There can never be anything else first in our lives—ever.

And all these things will be added unto you. All else are added things.

And God has added wonderful things to our lives. He's added material things we never expected to have. We live at 4,000-foot elevation in the ponderosa pine trees of north central Idaho next to a lake in the middle of the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. We're an hour from the nearest McDonald's and two-and-a-half hours from the nearest interstate highway. We have a trilevel house, a garage, a shop, and a bunkhouse.

Next to the house is a false-front western town (like a movie set) that Steve built. It's a fun place for picnics, cook-outs, campfires, and concerts. North of that homemade town is our barn, corrals, and horses.

But these are all added things—not the “first thing.” They aren't even close.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Lord has also added vocations to our lives. It is our privilege to both be full-time writers. Between us, we have written approximately 100 books and hundreds of articles, stories, and scripts. In addition, Janet is a music director, choir leader, and a professional writing instructor. Stephen has the added responsibilities of pastoring the only church in our little town of 300, and after years on the city council, he now serves as mayor.

But all these are added things.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

We have received thousands of letters and E-mails from wonderful people who have enjoyed our writing. We've been featured on radio interviews and television shows.

But all those are added things.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

In the Lord's grace He has added wonderful friends. In 30 years of pastoral ministry, we've had the privilege of pastoring three churches peopled by sincere, loving, faithful men and women of God. They've worked alongside us, nurtured us, loved us, and looked after our family.

We have dear Christian friends in almost every state, the kind of people you can call in the middle of the night with heartbreaking concerns and know they will physically and spiritually stand with you. It's difficult to imagine our lives without friends like these.

Yet they're all added things.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

One of the delights of our Christian walk is to see how the Lord has added spiritual ministry and blessings to our lives.

Janet travels around the country speaking at women's retreats. Steve speaks at conferences, camps, colleges, and churches. In every location, the Lord is at work and graciously allows us to be a part of what He is doing.

But ministry, as important as it is, is not the first thing.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Lord has been especially gracious in adding to us a wonderful family. Ours is a story of high school sweethearts who never stopped "going steady." We have three handsome, smart, witty, loving sons—Russ, Mike, and Aaron—each committed to the Lord. Our youngest son just graduated with honors in political science from Northwest Nazarene University. We have two beautiful, loving, talented, Christ-centered

daughters-in-law—Lois and Michelle. We have two sets of in-laws who love the Lord and are delightful to be around (the Crouses and the Thomases). And we have two awesome grandchildren—Zachary and Miranda—who keep our refrigerator covered with photographs and artwork.

And yet with all the overwhelming love these family members bring, with all the many delights they provide, they're not the first thing.

Family is an added thing.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Lord is in the process of adding things to our lives. That's what He promised to do.

What He has added to your life might be different than what He has added to ours, but no follower is given an empty barrel. He fills each of our lives with the things that bring meaning and purpose.

That's what He means when He says, "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, KJV).

But they're all added things.

Grandchildren are added things. Good grandparenting requires that we keep first things first.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Remember Eric the college prof? And Patrick, serving time in prison? There's a little more to their stories that you should know.

Harold and Marti pray for Eric, Nicole, and the twins every day. There are several things that trouble them. One thing is that their grandson and Nicole have never married. Marti and Harold worry about what that means for their great-grandchildren.

An even greater worry is Eric's total rejection of God and his antagonism to the Christian faith in which he was raised. Harold's blood pressure goes up every time he ponders some of the things that Eric has said. And Marti's heart breaks

when she hears of her darling little twins being instructed in a New Age pantheism.

On the other hand, Curt and LaVonne have been praising the Lord. Last September their Patrick discovered a western novel on his bunk when he came back from the exercise yard at prison. It was written by a Christian and was a story about a man just out of jail in the Old West who was trying to find meaning and purpose to his life. He found that meaning and purpose in a relationship with Christ.

Patrick decided he needed to do the same thing. He has been in triweekly Bible studies ever since he committed his life to Christ, and the prison chaplain recently asked him to teach a Bible study. Curt and LaVonne have visited him many times and describe the tears that flowed down his cheeks when he said “Grandma and Grandpa, forgive me for messing up my life and bringing you so much grief. I’m serious about Jesus. This isn’t a jailhouse game.”

OK—which sets of folks are the good grandparents? The answer: both of them.

They have both worked hard all their lives to show love, concern, and support to their children and grandchildren. They have demonstrated their faith and have been open with their prayers. They have sought the rule and reign of Jesus in their lives and in their family.

They have sought first the kingdom of God.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of the Bible, and the grace of the Lord Jesus, they have provided a legacy, a spiritual heritage, for their grandchildren. Their grandchildren need only accept it.

None of us grandparents can do anything more. And none of us should do anything less.