

WHEN GOD IS FIRST

Transferring Ownership into His Hands

THE
MOODY
CHURCH

*Father, I love You and praise You.
I want You to be first in my life.
I will spend time with You
in prayer and in Your Word.
Fill me with the Holy Spirit
so that I might love others
in the same way that You do.
I will serve You in every way.
With passion, let me tell of Jesus.
I will be His witness in Chicago,
and to the ends of the earth.
Father, show me what it means to
make You first in my life.*

*In Christ's name I pray,
Amen.*

WHEN GOD IS FIRST

Transferring Ownership into His Hands

What would happen if God really were first in our individual lives and in the life of Moody Church? How would we affect our culture, our neighborhood and the world? How would we view our time, our finances and talents?

The early church put God first, and it was a transforming church; it affected Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the most distant parts of the earth. It was a church of "Irresistible Influence."

God is calling us to be like the early church—a transforming church of "Irresistible Influence"—a church that can impact our neighborhood, our city, our country and the most distant parts of the world.

In Acts 2:42-47 five important characteristics of a fruitful church are described. The first Christians fellowshiped, edified each other, worshiped, ministered and evangelized. And because they put God first, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

When God is first, there is a transfer of ownership from our hands to His. When He is first, we focus on what is essential and we are transformed. And one thing is sure —amazing things happen when God is first.

For eight weeks this fall we are going to consider and pray about how we can refresh and revitalize our love for Jesus and His church. By God's grace we want to put Him first, even at great personal cost.

What follows in this booklet is a vision of what we faithfully and prayerfully believe will happen in the life of The Moody Church if we put God first. Included is a description of the messages Pastor Lutzer will share with us throughout the next two months, plus Action Steps that will help us put what we have learned into practice.

Prayerfully study the book of Acts and memorize the selected verses given. When we've completed this study each of us will have a much better sense of what God wants from us and what we must do to make Him first in our lives. Then together we will celebrate and renew our commitment to Him and to His church.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST AT MOODY CHURCH...

WHEN GOD IS FIRST in our lives, The Moody Church will be a trusted place where anyone can connect with God and others.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will be a church where anyone who is lonely, discouraged, hurting and confused can find love, acceptance, help, hope, forgiveness, guidance and encouragement.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will affirm that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation; the Bible is the unfailing rule of life and faith; and that God's people are called to holiness through faith, worship and service.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we as a congregation will encourage and guide people to spiritual discovery.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will help believers discover their God given gifts and talents, empowering and equipping them for service and ministry.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will be a transforming church of "Irresistible Influence" — a church that changes our neighborhood, our city and our country.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will equip and send missionaries and workers all around the world for permanent and short-term mission assignments.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will be mindful that we have been richly blessed and that "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded..."
- Luke 12:48

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will each joyfully commit ourselves to consistent prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, ministry service and evangelism.

WHEN GOD IS FIRST we will give sacrificially to meet all of our church and ministry financial needs.

He Owns Our Hearts

September 21, 2003

ACTS 1:1-14

The disciples were to go to the upper room to wait for the promise of the Father. Whatever their schedules, they had to forgo them because of the command of Christ. They had to be absorbed in God; they could not do otherwise.

We do not have to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, but like them, when God is first: We do His will and not our own...we wait in submission; we wait for instructions; we wait for strength and power. Our schedule is no longer our own, but it belongs to God.

MEMORY VERSE

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- Acts 1:8

ACTION STEP

- Set aside one hour this week and wait in quietness, listing all of the things in your life that need to be transferred into God's hands. This should include people, finances, schedules, desires, goals and struggles. Invite God into every room and closet of your life, asking Him to take charge.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: What does it mean to belong to God? How can we know if God is first in our lives? How would you describe your relationship with God?
- Write out a prayer, sharing with God what is on your heart and then read it to other members of your family.
- Prayer: "We put our lives and all that we own into Your hands; may nothing be more important to us than You. Amen."

He Owns Our Tongues

September 28, 2003

ACTS 2:1-13

The Holy Spirit took charge of the tongues of the apostles and they spoke in other languages the wonderful works of God. They were willing to use their tongues for Jesus, even at great personal cost. We too have our tongues loosed, when God is first. Since the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart, we must be filled with the "wonderful works of God."

MEMORY VERSE

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."
- Acts 2:4

ACTION STEPS

- Write out your testimony, reviewing what you would say if you were to tell others about your personal conversion and relationship with God.
- Confess any sins that make you speak negative words, rather than words that give life to those around you.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: Have you ever told a friend about Jesus? Was it hard to do, if so, why? What are the important things we should say to others about Jesus?
- Think of one person whom you would like to tell about Jesus. Pray that God would give you an opportunity to share Jesus with him or her.
- Find someone who has gone to another country to tell others about Jesus; find exactly where they are on a map, and then pray for them too.
- Prayer time: "Dear Lord, sometimes I find it hard to tell my friends about Jesus. Please give me the courage to speak and the words to say. Amen."

He Owns Our Allegiances

October 5, 2003

ACTS 4:1-20

In Acts 4, Peter and John were willing to go to prison and to suffer for Christ and His cause. They gave eloquent testimony that "we must obey God rather than men." Here we challenge everyone that we must stand up for Christ, no matter what. We need to develop Christians who obey God at any cost, including personal hardship.

MEMORY VERSE

"But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" - Acts 4:19-20

ACTION STEPS

- What is the one point in your life in which you are most tempted to compromise?
- Write out exactly what it would "cost" you if you were to "come clean" wholly given to God, come what may. Then after yielding that area of your life to the Lord, devise a strategy to overcome this challenge.
- This week make and keep this promise: I will read my Bible and pray for the same length of time that I watch television.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: Have you ever done something that you knew was right, but got hurt doing it? How did that make you feel?
- Draw a picture of yourself. Then ask: how can I use my eyes, ears, mouth, feet and hands, to be more like Jesus? Draw bubbles coming from each part of the body and think of how each part could be used by God.
- Prayer time, "Dear Father, thank You for the example of Peter and John that You have given us to follow. Please help us to be like them in obeying You. Amen."

He Owns Our Money

October 12, 2003

ACTS 4:32-37

The early believers were willing to sell everything and let the apostles take charge of distributing funds. Though this is descriptive and not prescriptive, we must show the same willingness when it comes to our finances. Yes, we must be willing to settle the issue of who owns our wealth.

Larry Burkett said that the average church member gives \$20 a year to foreign missions; but the average American gambles, \$1,174 per year. A pastor told me, "They just don't get it; they spend \$50,000 on a new SUV, but they don't tithe..."

We have simply not transferred our money to God.

MEMORY VERSE

"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all."
- Acts 4:33

ACTION STEPS

- Review the last six months of your check book to answer this question: where are your priorities? (Since your checkbook will be reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ, this is good practice).
- Then consciously give God all of your assets, investments, property, vehicles and the like. This transfer must be thorough, and total.
- Ask God to help you answer this question: what can you conscientiously give to the Lord's Work to help the needs of His kingdom? And where should you give?

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: What kinds of wealth do we have as a family? How are you using what God has given you to help the poor?
- Do you as a child receive an allowance or have some money saved? Think of someone you could bless with a small gift of money or maybe a book or special toy.
- Prayer: "Dear Father, help me to give cheerfully to others and to Your works. In Jesus name, Amen."

He Owns Our Reputations

October 19, 2003

ACTS 5:1-14

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are reminders that we must give our reputations to God; we cannot do things for outward show; we must be willing to be real and not impress others with our spirituality.

They did not trust God with their money or with their reputations. They sinned because they didn't trust; they did not believe in the faithfulness of God. And they were judged for it. The result was that great fear came upon the people, and many were saved.

MEMORY VERSE

"Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.... Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" - Acts 5:11, 14

ACTION STEPS

- Read Matthew 6:1-17, inserting your name in the text.
- Ask God to give you honesty in answering these questions:
 - What is the implication of this passage for our spiritual practices such as praying? For our giving? For our living?
 - What does this teach us about how God monitors our motives, thoughts and actions?
 - If people could see us as God sees us—with total transparency — what area of our lives would need radical changes before we would want to enter society?
- Choose to do a favor for someone while remaining totally anonymous.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: What do others think of you at school or work? Have you ever done something for outward show, like Ananias and Sapphira? Explain.
- Make a promise to help someone without expecting anything in return.
- Prayer: "Dear Father, thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit. Help us to trust Your faithfulness so that others might see our faith and come to know You personally. In Jesus name, Amen."

He Owns Our Status

November 2, 2003

ACTS 6:1-7

The deacons were asked to wait on tables, but it was necessary that they be "filled with the Holy Spirit." So-called menial tasks are important to God and require the Spirit's filling. When God is first, even the most basic things are highly important.

Interestingly, the first church conflict involved racial issues which were connected to status. We must be willing to fit where God places us.

MEMORY VERSE

"Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."
- Acts 6:3

ACTION STEPS

- Pray that God will send you someone to whom you can be a servant.
- Choose to cross a comfort zone by befriending someone who is different from you either (1) racially, (2) educationally or (3) socially.
Idea: have an international student to your home, possibly for Thanksgiving.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: What does it mean to be "full of the Spirit" and "wise"? (Acts 6:3). What kind of things do you do at home or at school that show that you can handle responsibility and be trusted?
- Have each family member think of one task or chore each could do to help the family. Then discuss how this could be a regular commitment.
- Prayer: "Dear Father, please guide us as we try to be faithful in carrying out our responsibilities. Let us do these things as if we were doing them for You. In Jesus Name, Amen."

He Owns Our Future

November 9, 2003

ACTS 7:51-60

In Acts 7, Stephen gives them his testimony and is stoned for it. What does it matter? Someone, for whom God is first, does those kinds of things! Are we willing to share with others, things that they do not want to hear?

Stephen does not care about being put to death; his life is in God's hands. Jesus actually stands in heaven waiting for him.

MEMORY VERSE

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

- Acts 7:59

ACTION STEPS

- Write your own epitaph, what you wish people would be able to say about you after you die (a paragraph will do). What isn't true of you just yet?
- Question: Twenty years from now what will you wish you had done today?
- In quiet prayer give God your future, your hopes dreams and fears.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: Why do people persecute Christians? Why were the people angry about Stephen's speech? Why did Stephen say, "Don't hold this against them"?
- What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Write down a list of the things that the Holy Spirit commands us to do in Ephesians 5:19-21.
- Prayer Time: "Dear God, thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit. Help us to listen and obey Him. We pray in Jesus name. Amen."

He Owns Our Appointments

November 16, 2003

ACTS 8:25-40

In Acts 8, the church is persecuted, and the believers are scattered throughout the area. Satan tried to “blow out” the spiritual fire begun in Jerusalem, but he unwittingly “blew it out” all over the landscape. They went everywhere “preaching the Word.”

Philip is having a revival in Samaria but is led into the desert and leads someone to Christ. God was preparing this man, just as He was preparing Philip. We must be witnesses, wherever God has planted us.

If God owns our schedules, we will be “God directed” in our witness. We will see His hand in our appointments.

MEMORY VERSE

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.” - Acts 8:4, 5

ACTION STEPS

- Write down at least three instances in which you can remember “God sightings” in your life.
- Pray that you will be able to recognize His leading in interruptions, disappointments and relationships.
- Finally, in light of what God has taught us during these eight weeks, what do you think He wants you to do: in your private life, in your personal relationships and in your giving?

FOR THE FAMILY

- Talking Time: Can you think of when God changed your family plans and you were able to help someone because of the change?
- Read Romans 12: See who in your family can list the most ways that we can know the will of God.
- Prayer: "Dear God, thank You for saving me and adopting me as Your child. Give me boldness and courage to share Jesus with the people around me. Amen."

Celebration and Commitment Sunday

November 23, 2003

You don't want to miss this special Sunday. We will have a powerful praise and worship service to celebrate and give thanks for God's gifts to us and we'll have a special time of commitment when we each can come forward to make our personal pledges to making and keeping God first in our lives.

**My Commitment to Making God First in My Life
During the Next Twelve Months.**

I have earnestly prayed and thoughtfully considered what things God wants me to do to make Him first in my life and I am this day making my commitment to:

Share my faith with others by my life and my words.

Read and study my Bible each week for _____.
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

Devote time in thoughtful prayer each week for _____.
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

Dedicate my spiritual gifts in service to the _____
ministries as the Lord leads me. (Fill which ministries you plan to serve)

Tithe \$ _____ weekly/monthly to meet the day-to-day operational needs of the ministries of The Moody Church.

Give sacrificially \$ _____ weekly/monthly/annually, over the coming year, to meet the Reaching Toward Tomorrow capital needs of The Moody Church.

Date: _____

Keep this copy as a personal reminder of your commitment to make God first in your life.

**My Commitment to Making God First in My Life
During the Next Twelve Months.**

I have earnestly prayed and thoughtfully considered what things God wants me to do to make Him first in my life and I am this day making my commitment to:

Share my faith with others by my life and my words.

- Check here if you would like additional information or personal assistance with this commitment.

Read and study my Bible each week for _____.
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

- Check here if you would like additional information or personal assistance with this commitment.

Devote time in thoughtful prayer each week for _____.
(Fill in how much time you will spend)

- Check here if you would like additional information or personal assistance with this commitment.

Dedicate my spiritual gifts in service to the _____
ministries as the Lord leads me. (Fill in which ministries you plan to serve)

- Check here if you would like additional information or personal assistance with this commitment.

Tithe \$_____ weekly/monthly to meet the day-to-day financial needs of the ministries of The Moody Church.

Over the coming year, give sacrificially \$_____ weekly/monthly/annually to meet the Reaching Toward Tomorrow capital needs of The Moody Church.

(Name)

(Address)

(City, State, Zip Code)

(Telephone)

(E-mail)

This copy is to be used to make your commitment,
as the Lord leads you, in a church wide Celebration
on Sunday, November 23, 2003.