

“My desire and hope is that Spiritual Gold will reach our world with the positive message that God is alive and has the answers for the problems facing us today. In his messages at SpiritualGold.org, my husband, Richard, takes the Scriptures and breaks them down so that we can understand and receive practical advice as we live one day at a time.” —Mary Strauss



## First Things First in 2018

Adapted from *First Things First*, Dr. Richard L. Strauss,  
MS-260 delivered December 27, 1987

In the season that precedes a list of resolutions, Dr. Strauss asks, “What do you think is important to the Lord? If He could hand us a priority list for the new year, what would He have at the top?”

Too many Christians are majoring in minor things, busily checking things off a list—but are those things important? We ought to evaluate our priorities for the new year. Fortunately, God helps us do that by calling several important priorities out in His word.

In his message *First Things First*, Dr. Strauss guides us to these things. We outline them here but encourage you to listen to the message in its entirety before considering what you hope to accomplish in 2018.

### The First Thing in our Walk

What do you think God considers most important in your walk with Him? Stop reading and think about it for a minute. Did you come up with something on this list?

- Getting to know Him better
- Growing in His likeness
- Learning to trust Him in every situation
- Learning to abide in Him
- Studying His Word
- Spending time in His presence through prayer

All of these are important parts of our walk with Christ, but we won’t make much progress without *first* yielding our lives to Him. Let’s look at this in 2 Corinthians 8. The people in the church of Macedonia were living below the poverty line and yet were giving

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## Take Note(s)

Written transcripts can help you follow along with the audio, allowing you to highlight text and write notes as you listen. They are available for the following series:

- Attributes of God (partial series)
- Balaam, Life of
- Big Things in Little Books
- Christian Adventure (partial series)
- Christ in Hebrews
- Galatians (partial series)
- James (partial series)
- Jonah
- Miscellaneous (selected sermons)
- Revelation
- Rewards
- Romans

Be the first to know when new transcripts are posted by liking us on Facebook.

## Year-End Giving

If you’d like to make a donation, please send a check payable to Spiritual Gold, Inc., 749 Willow Glen, Escondido, CA 92025.

You may use a credit card online via PayPal (<http://spiritualgold.org/donate.html>). Spiritual Gold is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization. Your donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

This ministry operates solely on gifts. In fulfillment of our ministry’s mission, our Board of Directors strategically supports pastoral training ministries here and around the world—including Africa and the Middle East.

## First Things First in 2018 (*continued*)

liberally, insisting to Paul that he take their money in service to the saints. How did they do that? Before they ever gave any money, they *first* gave themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

They dedicated themselves to Him. Their lives were living sacrifices. They yielded themselves to Him and made themselves available to do His will. They expressed their willingness to do whatever He wanted them to do, to go wherever He wanted them to go. If we don't first yield ourselves to Him, frankly, everything God asks of us will be too much.

### The First Thing in our Wishes

At the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus teaches us not to worry. He tells us we don't have to seek after material things such as food and clothing. So what should we seek? Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). To *seek* in this context means something more than simply to look for something. Rather, implies a motive: We are to look for in a desire to obtain and possess.

What do you really *want* in life? I mean really, really want it. The first thing you desire ought to be the kingdom of God.

Yes, the kingdom of God in a physical sense will be consummated at Christ's second coming to earth. For now, in this day and age, the kingdom of God is spiritual. To seek it is to desire to participate in it more fully in that kingdom and experience more of what God has for us in it. The primary thing to attain in the kingdom today is our growth in Christ and His righteousness. We need to get to know Him better so we can be more like Him.

It's good to take care of our bodies, and resolve to do so.

It's good to expand our minds, and resolve to do so.

It's good to develop emotional strength, and resolve to do so.

But above these things, it's good to expand the spiritual part of your being—to become more like Christ. You won't do this unless it's at the top of your list. So how might you go about doing that? Planned neglect.

I read of a talented young concert-violinist who was asked the secret of her success. "Planned neglect," she said. "Years ago I discovered that there were many things demanding my time. After washing breakfast dishes, I made my bed, straightened my room, dusted the furniture, and did a host of other chores before I gave my attention to violin practice. I realized I had to reverse things. I deliberately set aside everything else until my practice period ended. That program of planned neglect accounts for my success."

### The First Thing in our Works

When we read the account of Jesus calling His disciples, we learn about Andrew. Andrew heard Jesus, spent time with Him, and followed Him. Thereafter, the first thing he did was to find his brother Simon Peter to tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41).

There were many things Andrew could have done for the Lord. Give. Serve. Andrew chose first to tell others about Jesus. How important is that to you? Is it at the front of your mind? Do you keep alert for opportunities to develop relationships with others to tell them about Christ?

Did you hear about the guy who missed the birth of his baby because he was waiting in line to ride Space Mountain at Disneyland? I read about it in the *Times-Advocate*. This guy was so pre-occupied with riding Space Mountain that by the time he got off the roller coaster, his wife had given birth at a first-aid station and then she and the baby were rushed to the hospital. I think too many of us are so occupied with pursuing other things—including even Christian service—that we are missing out in assisting with some spiritual births.

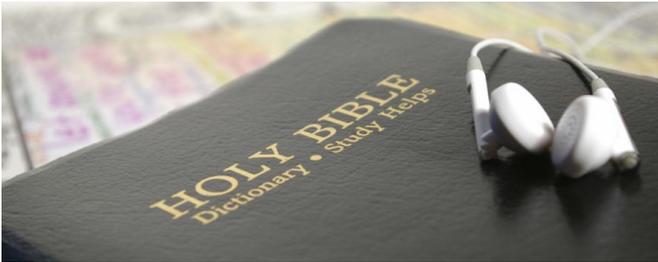
## The First Thing in our Worship

Worship is the giving of ourselves and our resources to glorify God. Bringing a gift to the altar was an act of worship. In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells us the story of someone who was doing just that, but he had to leave and take of something first. We must prepare ourselves for worship.

“Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3-4a).

The preparation that Jesus suggests (Matthew 5:23) has to do with personal relationships with another brother or sister in Christ. Is there something you need to take care of with someone? Is it possible that even at church you aren't talking to someone you see in the service? Do you awkwardly avoid him or her? Maybe it's even your spouse, with whom you fought all the way to the church service. Jesus says to first handle that, then you will be ready to worship God. If we don't honor God with our lives, worship given with our lips is in vain.

What to resolve in 2018? First things first.



### More Messages Online

You can find over 1500 messages at [SpiritualGold.org](http://SpiritualGold.org), including *First Things First* (MS-260), the message of the month for January 2018.

Over 1,000 hours of material covers 23 books of the Bible and 52 topics, from Aging Gracefully to the Will of God. Consider using these resources in your own personal study this year, or as a help in preparing a sermon or study for others.

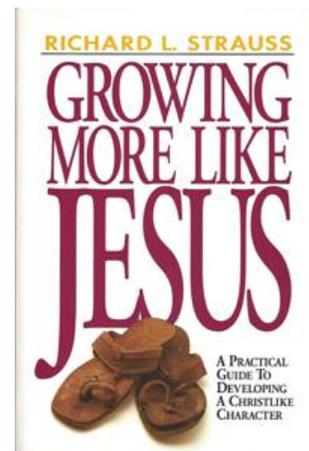
### Email Reminders



Need a friendly nudge to listen to the Sermon of the Month? Go to [SpiritualGold.org](http://SpiritualGold.org) to sign up for email reminders and a link to the message. Or send your own email to us at [info@spiritualgold.org](mailto:info@spiritualgold.org) and ask us to add you to the monthly reminder.

### Book Spotlight

Christlikeness is what God wants to accomplish in us above all else. He wants to reproduce in us the character of Christ: His love, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, and His willingness to forgive. *Growing More Like Jesus* takes an intimate look at each of these characteristics and provides practical guidance for developing them in our own lives.



### Way Back Machine

In 1960, long before Dr. Strauss came to Emmanuel Faith, he gave a four-part series on Jonah and how the prophet went from being rebellious to being reprovved. No audio is available, but you can read the transcript:

<http://spiritualgold.org/transcripts/JON-1.html>