

HOW TO START A *FIRST THINGS FIRST* ROUTINE IN JUST FIVE DAYS (AND A 30-DAY CHALLENGE TO GET YOU STARTED)

A worksheet tool for Generation2Generation

Introduction from Chris

Our journey to build a legacy of faith is directly related to our connectedness to God. And First Things First is all about building that closeness first thing in the morning.

In this free tool, I've included five lessons to get your morning routine started. They are labeled as "days" but don't let that throw you off. I'm not going to check up on you. Just keep moving forward. Science tells us it takes a minimum of 21 days, sometimes more to get a new habit established. I've incorporated a 30-day challenge into this tool to help you get there.

I recommend you use a journal or notebook to chronicle your *First Things First* time.

~Chris

Why Morning?

Something special happens in the morning right after you lift your eyelids. Your foggy brain starts to wake up to the realization that there is a new day ahead; a brand new slate; a blank canvas. For some of us, that realization is only a brief moment before thoughts of the day's agenda start pushing and shoving each other for a place in the long line that will form the day.

Throughout the scriptures we see Jesus and others putting interaction with God first in their day. Why? Because setting your agenda for the day with God's priorities first will help you see your day through a new pair of glasses—with eternal vision. Before we can start in on our to-do list, we have to set our hearts and minds on things above (Col. 3:1-2).

What is First Things First?

First Things First is a commitment to five short routines you do every morning—first thing. Each routine starts with the letter "W." With a short learning curve, they can occupy as few as ten minutes of your day—total. Each "W" is totally customizable to you. We'll give you lots of ideas and tips, but you are the architect. The five routines include:

- **Wake-up call**- Dedicating your day to God
- **Water** (before coffee, tea, or sugar) – Drink at least eight good gulps.
- **Word** – spend time interacting with God's Word
- **Wait** on God with prayer and listening and remember what He has done
- **Worship** – cultivating the power of personal worship.

Put a check mark next those habits above that you already have incorporated into your morning. Underline those you need to add. Are you ready? Let's get going on our five days to First Things First?

DAY ONE: LET'S GET STARTED

An important part of setting our hearts and minds above starts right away in the morning with the first "W" of *First Things First*: **the wake-up call**.

The purpose of a wake-up call is to take advantage of that first morning moment before you get out of bed to turn your heart towards God. It is a short, heartfelt prayer thanking Him for the new day and committing the day to His purpose. Say it every morning before you get out of bed. Before your feet hit the floor. Before you pick up your phone. Before your mind engages elsewhere. Start tomorrow.

- Here's an example: "God, You are good. Thank You Lord for this new day. I ask you to lead me and guide me today in the way I should go. Bring people into my life today that you want me to influence." Keep it short, keep it simple, and pray it fervently every morning before you get up. If you need a reminder, put a sticky note on your bathroom mirror or on your bedside table.

The second "W" gets your body and mind set to focus on your day. It's **water**.

- Tomorrow morning, drink a glass of water after you get up *before* you drink or eat anything else. I (Chris) put my filled glass in my bathroom every night and drink it right after I get out of bed in the morning. Your body has gone 6-10 hours (depending on how long you sleep) without any hydration. Before you start pouring in the caffeine or sugar (or herbal tea), drink at least eight good gulps of water. Note: There may be a medical or personal issue why you can't do this. We get it. Give it your best shot if you're able. Your body will thank you.
- Why drink water first thing? [Here are eight good reasons via Life Hack](#). They include:
 - Helping rid the body of toxins that build up during dehydration
 - Improve your metabolism
 - Help maintain a healthy weight
 - Alleviate heartburn and indigestion
 - Healthy skin
 - Healthy hair
 - Help prevent bladder and kidney stones
 - Strengthens immune system

Action Step: Practice your first two "W"s everyday starting tomorrow morning. 'Nuff said.

DAY TWO: GOD'S WORD – THE 30-DAY CHALLENGE

The Word of God; the Bible; your Sword. We are so blessed to live in a time when we have God's Word available in so many forms. And now that we have smartphones and tablets, we can have the Bible at our fingertips wherever we go. The **Word** is the third "W" in First Things First.

We think the time we spend in the Bible should be more Bible-applying than Bible-reading. Time in God's Word needs to include conversation with God; listening and committing to do what the Word says, not just a cursory read. Notice the warning in James 1:22-25:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—**not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it**—they will be blessed in what they do.

I've put together a 30-Day Challenge for you to turbo boost the time you spend in the Word reading, listening, and applying the message to your life. We believe that the third "W" in First Things First is critical to establish. So, this third day is actually the start of a 30-day challenge we're throwing into your court. Think of it as an added bonus. For this challenge, you'll need your smartphone or device, or access to the internet.

First, I'd like to help you become familiar with the electronic Bibles and reading plans available online. In this lesson, you'll need your smartphone, device, or your computer and a journal.

- *If you have a smartphone, a tablet (such as an iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, or Kindle Fire, you can download the YouVersion Holy Bible app directly from your device's app store. It is free. Download it by going to your app store and searching for "Holy Bible." Make sure you search and download the "YouVersion" Holy Bible app. Download the app to your phone or device. If you don't have a smartphone or device, you can access the YouVersion Bible app online at <https://my.bible.com/>. Download the app now or find it online and bookmark the site on your browser.*
- After you download the app or access it on your computer, you'll have to set up a free account with an email. Next, spend a few minutes getting familiar with the app's home screen. Some things you can find here:
 - a. The **Read** tab will allow you to search the Bible by chapter and verse in any version of the Bible you want. When you tap the version of the Bible, it will open a list of versions available.
 - b. The **Search** tab will help you find verses that contain certain words or phrases. You can also search by topic there.

- c. The **Plans** tab houses hundreds of devotional reading plans you can do alone or with friends. Click or tap on that tab. Explore the various plans available. Do a search of a topic that interests you to get familiar with how the search works.
- More options: Another excellent Bible app to explore on your smart devices or computer is the *Lectio 365* app from the 24-7 prayer movement. I use this everyday in the morning. It's a 7-minute devotional that includes pausing, rejoicing, reflecting, and asking. You will be amazed at the depth of closeness you get with God in this short daily interaction.

The 30-Day Challenge

For the 30-Day Challenge, we'll be using a reading plan from the *YouVersion* Holy Bible. Since our initial goal is to get you through your First Things First in around 15 minutes, we're going to start with a short but powerful daily devotion called *Heartbeat of God* by Chris Baxter.

- Open your YouVersion Holy Bible app. Go to the "plans" tab.
- On the plans screen you will find two tabs: My Plans and Find Plans.
- Tap or click on the Find Plans tab and then tap or click on the magnifying glass (search icon) on the top.
- Type "*The Heartbeat of God*" in the search box. The name should pop up. If it doesn't, search for Chris Baxter and it should come up. You'll see the reading plan on the list.
- Tap on the *Heartbeat of God* and it will take you to a "Start Plan" page.
- Tap on start plan and you'll be asked to set your preferences. Use "By Myself" and "Private." Now you will notice the reading plan is listed under the My Plans tab. Access the reading plan through "My Plans" from now on.

Tomorrow Morning

- Make sure you have your journal and device with you. Start a page in your journal with today's date at the top. Open *The Heartbeat of God* reading plan in "My Plans." Notice that under the cover image, the first reading is designated with today's date. That is a handy reference to have, but don't let it become a guilt trap if you miss one day. You have our permission to be human. Click on the Devotional button to start.
- We recommend you read the devotional out loud the first time through. Chris' daily readings are all written in the first person as a conversation with God and it will be more impactful if you read it out loud first as though you are talking directly to God—because, hey, you are.
- Go back and read it through silently, taking your time to listen and pause when something grabs at your heart. Write down your thoughts. What is getting your attention? What is the message of the passage that is making you stop?

- Pray for God to open the eyes of your heart that you may see wonderful things in His Word (Ps. 119:18) and go through the scripture verses by tapping on the green arrow at the bottom of the devotional. Write down your personal reflections as you read each scripture. What are the verses saying to you?
- Take a few moments to reflect on what you've read and ask God how He wants you to apply these words to your day; your life; your relationships. If you come away with a specific action, make a plan to do what the Word says
- **Repeat this portion of First Things First for 30 days.** You'll be amazed at how the Word will become a living breathing conversation between you and the Holy Spirit. Chris Baxter's print book, *The Heartbeat of God*, has 365 daily readings in it and can be found on Amazon. Next, try exploring other reading plans.

DAY THREE: NEVER STOP PRAYING (1 THESS. 5:17)

Wait in prayer is the fourth "W" in our *First Things First* morning routine. I like to use Philippians 4:6-7 for a formula to get started. Using the popular acronym PRAY as a template for prayer, I recommend you incorporate four ingredients into your prayer routine from this passage: praise, repent, ask, and yield.

Look up each Bible reference and read the verses out loud. Declaring God's word out loud helps you remember.

- *Praise: Start your prayer time with a period of listening quietly—this is the wait part of wait in prayer. Praise God for His holiness and lift up his name in praise. Use Psalm 100 as an inspiration.* In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul gives us two simple instructions about praying: "Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done." Asking and thanksgiving (praise) are directly related. But we start with praise.

In this part of your prayer routine, take a few moments to think over your last day or so. Was there some specific way God showed up? A healing, an answer to prayer, a confirmation of His truth in your life, a blessing?

When you first start this new routine, set up a section in your journal (maybe on the back pages) and title the section, Remember What God Has Done. If something comes to mind as a true God-sighting in your life, write a phrase or short sentence down about what happened—just enough to help you remember the event. Then date it. As part of your daily praise time with God, look over this section to help you remember specific things God has done in your life. They will give you hope and remind you that God is working (Philippians 1:6).

- *Repent: Confess and forgive (Mt. 6:12-13).* Clear every obstruction in the pathway between you and God. Thank God for His faithfulness in forgiving your sins (1 Jn. 1:9). Ask God to protect you from evil and empower you to live in the armor (Eph. 6:11).
- *Ask: Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need (Philippians 4:6).* God actually knows your needs before you even open your mouth (Mt. 6:13). I recommend keeping two types of requests in mind: your own needs and the needs of others.
 - a. *Your needs:* Remember our biggest need is to dwell in God's presence. Whatever your needs are, they should always include a prayer to remain in God's presence throughout the day, to be able to listen, and keep your eyes open for opportunities. Whatever you bring to God in prayer, be confident that He hears you and loves you. If you have a list, use it. If you pray from the heart, go for it. We like to keep a list so we can look back and see how God is at work in us.
 - b. *Needs of others:* I pray regularly for people in my circle of influence and my immediate family members. I also keep track of other requests that come my way. Some days I can't get through my whole list because of time, but God knows what is on my heart. You might not be a list keeper but we find it's a great tool for remembering what God has done.
- *Yield: Surrender to God's peace in your life.* Leave the answer, the timing, and the prayers with God. Express thanks to be able to leave your requests with God (Philippians. 4:7). This is a peace protector you will come back to throughout your day.

If you are looking for some inspired prayers to get started, here is a list of Paul's prayers you can personalize and pray. We recommend looking each one up and writing it in your prayer journal to

- Eph. 3:16-19
- Eph. 1:17-19
- Rom. 15:13
- Php. 1:9
- Heb. 13:20-21
- Col. 1:9-12
- 2 Thes. 1:11

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:6-8: it isn't the quantity of time you spend in prayer, but the quality. Just be sure you are listening, waiting, and responding. As this time in prayer becomes a habit, you'll gain more confidence in your method and time frame.

DAY FOUR: CULTIVATING THE POWER OF PERSONAL WORSHIP

Music is a powerful tool. It intensifies our focus and engages our emotions. One of God's greatest gifts, music can soothe the soul (1 Sam. 6:23), provide motivation and courage (1 Chron. 25:1), and even prepare our hearts to hear from God (2 Kings 3:15-16).

How important is music in your everyday routine? We believe it can turbo charge your time with God. And we'll show you a number of different tools and applications to incorporate music into your day and your *First Things First* routine.

Worship is the fifth "W" in your *First Things First* morning routine. First, let's look at how to incorporate it into your routine using your smart phone or laptop computer.

- After you've finished your daily Bible reading and journaling, ask God to show you a song that will help you retain and apply what you have studied. It may be an old chorus, a hymn, or a contemporary worship song. On your phone or computer, try searching for the song in the search box on YouTube. You may get some options: a performance video or just a lyric video. We prefer the lyric videos, if they're available, because we can sing along. If you already have a worship playlist on YouTube, Spotify, or iTunes you may want to glance over those lists for inspiration. *Note:* There is information in the next section on how to set up a YouTube channel to save favorite songs.
- Write the name of the song at the top of your journal entry for that day and add the song to your worship list or favorites, if it isn't already there.
- Play the song and listen or sing along. You may be prompted to stand, raise your hands, kneel down, or just stay seated. Respond as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Sometimes God will prompt us to think of a song during a prayer time as well. Use the same bullets from above if that's a better time for you to worship. It doesn't really matter where in your morning routine you worship; just make sure worship is a part of your morning routine. Don't forget your earbuds or ear phones if you're not the only one in the house. We have friends that also do this during a morning walk so they can get out of the house and sing with all their might.

Some mornings you may find that just reciting song lyrics or an inspirational poem is a moving worship experience. Or recite a worship psalm. Here are some good ones: 8, 27, 42, 47, 66, 84, 95-106, 117, 121, 134-136, 146-150. We recommend experimenting with this part of your morning routine.

How Do You Use Your Drive Time?

- What do you listen to when you are driving? Consider tuning your car radios to Christian music. We spend hours in our cars and it's a perfect opportunity to keep our hearts focused. Most urban areas have Christian stations on both AM and FM. If you don't know if there is one in your area, search Google or find one on this data base: <https://www.christianradio.com/stations/>. Make your drive time God time.
- If your car's radio has Bluetooth capability and you have a smart phone, you can listen to Spotify, Pandora, or an iTunes list in your car. In Pandora's free version, you will have to listen to occasional commercials, but you can build a playlist based from searches of your favorite kind of music like instrumental praise, or contemporary Christian. You can even build "stations" using popular Christian groups or artists such as *Hillsong*, *Bethel Music* or *Chris Tomlin*.
- YouTube is also a good place to build a worship list. Most smart TVs have a dedicated YouTube app and you can download the app to your smart phone as well. You will need a YouTube account (free with email login). Once you have an account you can mark songs you like as Favorites or build specific lists. Start by searching for your favorite Christian songs on YouTube. To learn more about how to build worship lists on YouTube, watch the video here with instructions for iPhone, Android phones or computers: (<http://bit.ly/youtubelists>).

Action Step: Next time you get in your car, crank up the Christian music.

DAY FIVE: PUT IT ALL TOGETHER!

You now *officially* have all five parts of your *First Things First* routine ready to go. Tonight, before you go to bed, get all your pieces gathered and ready to go for tomorrow. Preparation is the key to a successful morning time.

You're on your way to a new experience that will radically change your life. You'll never regret doing the work it takes to establish a morning routine. And never, we repeat, never be hard on yourself if miss. Just start again tomorrow. God is still there. You can do it—I'm praying for you!

My prayer for you:

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. And we pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge* that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3: 16-19).