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## Returning to Your First Love

*"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance ... Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*

(Revelation 2:2, 4-5, 7)



Can a book that wants to encourage you in big ways be based on a Bible verse about repentance? This one is. God shows us the most love when He wakes us up from slipping into lifeless ritual, religious obligation, or spiritual emotionalism. Often we need to be called back to what our faith is really all about—loving and living for Jesus.

In Revelation 2, Jesus wants the members of a very good church in Ephesus to start thinking about their first love again. He wants them to get back to living a life where Jesus is first in their hearts and center of their days. He wants them to have a first love for who He is, not just what He does. He wants them to share His heart, not just His name.

Jesus wants the same for you and me since loving and living for Him can easily get lost in all of our Christian "hard work" and "perseverance." It seems like Christians these days talk more about their churches, ministries, and spiritual gifts than they talk about Jesus Himself. Sometimes they seem more loyal to these things than Jesus, when all along He is the one and only Savior, Lord, and King.

How tragic when we lose Jesus as first and center in our lives! The picture that Jesus paints of a "lampstand" being "removed" in Revelation 2:5 is true. When we lose our first love, our lives no longer shine His joy and grace. And despite all the Christian principles we live by and spiritual gifts we possess, none of our Christian programs, titles, or culture bring life to us if He is not truly the first love of our lives. The light of Jesus no longer shines through us to drive away the darkness of the world and sin. It is as if our "lampstand" has been taken away and the darkness of sin begins to be seen and felt in our ethics, our marriages, our private habits, and our public religion.

To all of this Jesus gives a very simple strategy for those who are willing to "hear what the Spirit says" and shine again. His strategy will actually encourage you and bring you great joy. Jesus' strategy is this: **"Repent and do the things you did at first."** That's it! Make a decision to turn around and do the things you would do when you first fall in love!

Now, please carefully notice that Jesus doesn't tell us to start *feeling* like we are in love. No, instead Jesus tells us to *do* the things that people who have first fallen in love *do*. That's what is so encouraging about Jesus' instructions. He is not asking us to have a certain personality, emotional make up, or to be a spiritual giant who is holier than other people. He is simply asking us to do what every person is familiar with on some level: do what people who fall in love do *and then* the feelings and reality of first love will naturally follow. Jesus gives you and me a simple way to restore our first love for Him when our lives have become too complicated and cluttered.

When we return to doing "the things you did at first" (verse 5), Jesus promises (verse 7) that we will "overcome" and enjoy a peace and joy in life that is only found in "the paradise of God". Jesus isn't promising that our circumstances will be paradise, but that His presence and love will be like paradise to us no matter what we walk through.

So, that is what this five-week devotional is all about: ***going back to "first love" actions*** and commitments that keep Jesus first and center in our hearts. At our church, we call this "making Jesus the center of everyday life." We have five "first love" actions that we commit to in order to keep Jesus in the center of our lives in a simple way (see next page). Although these actions by themselves can't force Jesus to be the center of our lives, they can be steps of obedience to God's Word that the Holy Spirit uses to make Jesus the center of who we are.

This devotional will outline and develop these simple actions for you in practical everyday ways. If you are just looking into Christianity for the first time, try starting with Appendix A and then start at the first week. Each day we will look at God's Word and His will for each of us as I share some of my own life with you. I pray that my life stories and experiences will help the actions of each "first love" focus become real and understandable in your everyday life no matter where you find yourself in your journey of faith. I pray my sharing will encourage you to keep Jesus first and center in your life from this day forward.

May you have "ears to hear" what the Holy Spirit is saying each day and fall in love with Jesus even more! As you do this, may you be greatly encouraged by this call to repentance. There is so much of His joy ahead for you!

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