# Returning to Your First Love

**Central message**

**When Christ is our first love and our hearts are filled with awe for Him, the enemy's deceptions, distractions, manipulation and counterfeits lose their power.**

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**Introduction: Activity Without Affection**

A husband and wife can still live in the same house, pay the bills, raise their children and attend family occasions, yet lose the closeness they once shared.

Everything may appear normal, but something precious has been lost.

The same thing can happen in our relationship with Jesus. We can continue attending church, serving, leading, giving and worshipping outwardly, while inwardly losing the depth of love we once had for Him.

The church in Ephesus was doing many things correctly. They worked hard. They persevered. They recognised false teaching. They remained faithful under pressure.

But Jesus looked beyond their activity and addressed their affection.

**"But I have this [charge] against you, that you have left your first love [you have lost the depth of love that you first had for Me]."**
**Revelation 2:4 AMP**

Jesus was not merely asking, **"What are you doing for Me?"**

He was asking, **"Where is the love you once had for Me?"**

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**Point 1: You Can Be Busy for Jesus and Still Drift from Jesus**

**Scripture: Revelation 2:1–5 AMP**

**' TO THE angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him Who holds the seven stars [which are the messengers of the seven churches] in His right hand, Who goes about among the seven golden lampstands [which are the seven churches]: I know your industry and activities, laborious toil and trouble, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot tolerate wicked [men] and have tested and critically appraised those who call [themselves] apostles (special messengers of Christ) and yet are not, and have found them to be impostors and liars. I know you are enduring patiently and are bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not fainted or become exhausted or**

**grown weary. But I have this [one charge to make] against you: that you have left (abandoned) the love that you had at first [you have deserted Me, your first love]. Remember then from what heights you have fallen. Repent (change the inner man to meet God's will) and do the works you did previously [when first you knew the Lord], or else I will visit you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you change your mind and repent.'**

**Revelation 2:1-5**

**Sermon thought**

Notice everything Jesus praises:

- They worked hard.
- They persevered.
- They rejected evil.
- They tested false teachers.
- They endured hardship.
- They did not give up.

This was not a lazy church. It was a busy, discerning and persevering church.

But Jesus says:

**“You have left your first love.”**

Their hands were still working, but their hearts had drifted.

The danger for committed Christians is not always that we will walk away from church. Sometimes the greater danger is that we remain in church, continue serving and become accustomed to doing everything without intimacy with Jesus.

It is possible to:

- Lead a ministry without remaining close to Jesus.
- Sing worship songs without truly worshipping.
- Read the Bible only to prepare a message.
- Pray publicly while neglecting private fellowship with Christ.
- Defend correct doctrine while losing tenderness toward Jesus.
- Work for God without enjoying the presence of God.

The problem was not their service. Their service was commendable.

The problem was that **service had replaced intimacy**.

**Jesus gives them three steps**

**1. Remember**

Remember what it was like when Jesus was not merely part of your life, but the centre of your life.

Remember the gratitude, wonder and joy you experienced when you realised that your sins were forgiven and that you belonged to Him.

**2. Repent**

Repentance is not condemnation. It is an invitation to change direction.

Jesus is not saying, "I am finished with you."

He is saying, **"Come back to Me."**

**3. Return**

Jesus says, "Do the first works."

Return to simple devotion:

- Spend time with Him.
- Worship Him.
- Listen to His voice.
- Open His Word because you want to know Him.
- Obey Him because you love Him.

**First love is not merely an emotion we try to recreate. It is the decision to give Jesus first place again.**

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**Point 2: Jesus Still Pursues Us**

**Scripture: Revelation 3:14–20 KJV**

**' And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the trusty and faithful and true Witness, the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation: [Isa. 55:4; Prov. 8:22.] I know your [record of] works and what you are doing; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth! For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [Hos. 12:8.] Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, and white clothes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nudity from being**

**seen, and salve to put on your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I [dearly and tenderly] love, I tell their faults and convict and convince and reprove and chasten [I discipline and instruct them]. So be enthusiastic and in earnest and burning with zeal and repent [changing your mind and attitude]. [Prov. 3:12.] Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me.'**

**Revelation 3:14-20**

**Sermon thought**

Revelation 3:20 is often used as an invitation for someone to receive salvation, but in its original context, **Jesus is speaking to a church**.

Think about that picture:

The Head of the Church is standing outside the door of His own church, knocking.

They still had their gatherings. They still had their activities. They still considered themselves prosperous.

Yet Jesus was outside.

But here is the hope: **Jesus had not walked away.**

He was still standing at the door.

He was still knocking.

He was still speaking.

He still wanted fellowship with them.

Jesus says in verse 19:

**“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”**

His correction is not rejection. His correction is evidence of His love. Jesus does not expose the condition of our hearts to shame us. He reveals it because He wants to restore us.

He does not say:

- “Fix everything before I come in.”
- “Prove yourself worthy.”
- “Work harder until I accept you.”
- “Punish yourself for drifting.”

He simply says:

**“Hear My voice and open the door.”**

The invitation is relational:

**“I will come in and eat with you, and you with Me.”**

This is the language of closeness, friendship and restored fellowship.

The message of Revelation is not merely, **“The Church has failed.”**

The message is, **“Jesus is still knocking.”**

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**Point 3: What Have We Tolerated?**

**Scripture: Revelation 2:18–23 AMP**

**' And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, Who has eyes that flash like a flame of fire, and Whose feet glow like bright and burnished and white-hot bronze: [Dan. 10:6.] I know your record and what you are doing, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones. But I have this against you: that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired], and who is teaching and leading astray my servants and beguiling them into practicing sexual vice and eating food sacrificed to idols. [I Kings 16:31; II Kings 9:22, 30.] I gave her time to repent, but she has no desire to repent of her immorality [symbolic of idolatry] and refuses to do so. Take note: I will throw her on a bed [of anguish], and those who commit adultery with her [her paramours] I will bring down to pressing distress and severe affliction, unless they turn away their minds from conduct [such as] hers and repent of their doings. And I will strike her children (her proper followers) dead [thoroughly exterminating them]. And all the assemblies (churches) shall recognize and understand that I am He Who searches minds (the thoughts, feelings, and purposes) and the [inmost] hearts, and I will give to each of you [the reward for what you have done] as your work deserves. [Ps. 62:12; Jer. 17:10.]'**

**Revelation 2:18-23**

**Sermon thought**

Once again, Jesus begins by recognising what is good.

The church in Thyatira had:

- Love
- Faith
- Service
- Perseverance
- Increasing good works

Jesus saw all of it.

But then He said:

**“You tolerate that woman Jezebel.”**

This sermon should not become an attempt to identify a particular woman, personality or individual as “Jezebel.” The warning is about the church tolerating teaching and influence that seduced people away from wholehearted devotion and obedience to Christ.

The central problem was not that the enemy had tried to influence the church. The enemy will always try.

The problem was that the church had **tolerated** what Jesus had called them to confront.

They had become comfortable with something that was gradually drawing their hearts away from Christ.

**The pattern represented by Jezebel**

The Jezebel pattern can be seen wherever there is:

- Control instead of trust in God
- Manipulation instead of honest relationship
- Seduction instead of holiness
- Deception instead of truth
- Self-promotion instead of worship
- Compromise instead of obedience
- Fear and intimidation instead of faith
- Idolatry instead of wholehearted devotion to Jesus

But we must be careful not to become obsessed with identifying a “Jezebel spirit” in everyone else.

The important question is:

**“Lord, what have I tolerated in my own heart that is competing with my love for You?”**

Maybe we have tolerated:

- Bitterness
- Unforgiveness
- Secret compromise
- Pride
- The need to control everything
- The approval of people
- A divided heart
- Constant distraction
- Spiritual passivity
- Ministry activity without intimacy

The enemy does not always need to make us reject Jesus.

Sometimes he only needs to **distract us from Jesus**.

If he cannot make us hate Christ, he will try to fill our lives with so many competing affections that Christ is no longer first.

**A necessary word of hope**

Even in this serious passage, Jesus says:

**"I gave her space to repent."**

That reveals the heart of Christ.

Even when Jesus confronts deception, compromise and sin, He still makes room for repentance.

Repentance is not God pushing us away.

Repentance is God opening the way home.

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**Point 4: First Love Is the Antidote**

**Scripture: Revelation 2:24–29 AMP**

**' But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not explored and known the depths of Satan, as they say–I tell you that I do not lay upon you any other [fresh] burden: Only hold fast to what you have until I come. And he who overcomes (is victorious) and who obeys My commands to the [very] end [doing the works that please Me], I will give him authority and power over the nations; And he shall rule them with a sceptre (rod) of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, and [his power over them shall be] like that which I Myself have received from My Father; [Ps. 2:8, 9.] And I will give him the Morning Star. He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the**

**assemblies (churches).'**

**Revelation 2:24-29**

**Supporting Scripture: John 8:31–32 AMP**

**' As He said these things, many believed in Him [trusted, relied on, and adhered to Him]. So Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him, If you abide in My word [hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them], you are truly My disciples.'**

**John 8:30-31**

**Supporting Scripture: James 4:7–8 AMP**

**' So be subject to God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him], and he will flee from you. Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery].'**

**James 4:7-8**

**Point 4 thought: First love is the antidote**

**Key idea:** The enemy's counterfeits lose their power when our hearts are filled with Jesus. You don't beat distraction by trying harder. You beat it by returning to Him.

- **Hold fast (Rev 2:25).** Jesus lays no new burden on the faithful remnant in Thyatira. He says, "Only hold fast to what you have until I come."
- **Abide (John 8:31).** Being a disciple means staying in His word. That is a relationship, not a performance.
- **Submit, resist, draw near (James 4:7–8).** The order matters. We draw near to God first, and then the enemy flees. We don't have to fight the enemy in our own strength.