

# First Love

## How do you understand the term First Love, what does it mean?

First Love in the Bible primarily refers to the passionate, devoted, love a believer has for Jesus Christ, often characterised by the initial fervour of salvation.

## Is it possible to lose our First Love?

If so, where does Grace come in?

Is First Love then the same as Salvation?

*“Thus says the Lord: I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.”* Jeremiah 2:2

*“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”* Matthew 24:12-13

## What do you think the dangers are being removed from your First Love?

**A Mechanical Routine:** Doing the work but lacking the heart. Faith without works is dead, so is works without faith.

**Prioritising Other Things:** Becoming weighed down with the cares of this life.

*“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.”* Luke 21:34

**Declining Zeal:** Allowing passion for Christ to be replaced by indifference or legality.

If we then know that we can lose our First Love, and we know the consequences of losing our First Love ...

## How then do you get back to your First Love?

Getting back to your First Love signifies returning to that early, uncompromised devotion, prioritising Him above all else, rather than letting works replace intimacy.

*“We love Him because He first loved us.”* 1 John 4:19

*“If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!”* 1 Corinthians 16:22

*“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Revelation 2:1-7*

Ephesus: a church that lost sight of its first Love. It is also a desperate call for all of us to return to our first love.

## **Do My Actions Display My Love for God?**

Do I live a life worthy of the Gospel? Living a life worthy of the Gospel means aligning your daily conduct, attitudes, and actions with the message of Jesus Christ, reflecting His character through humility, love, and obedience.

It is not about earning salvation, that was a free gift received by Grace through faith, but rather living in a way that demonstrates the true value of the Gospel and brings honour to God, which is made possible through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

Living a life worthy of the Gospel is much more than how you live; it is also about your heart. Living a life worthy of the Gospel also involves the motive and manner by which you live and conduct our lives.

I found myself turning back to Revelation 2 and reading about the church in Ephesus.

I then asked myself, and I think everyone of us must ask ourselves:

- Is my heart and love for God worthy of the Gospel?
- Is my love for both God and others displayed in how I live?
- Do I love the Lord with all my heart and are my actions in line with the heart of God as it was when I first believed?
- Do my actions display my love for God in such a way that others see my love for Jesus and a love for people who are lost, so that they will experience the love of Jesus that I experienced, for themselves?
- With everything going on in the world; with the pressures of life: do I love others and love God in the same manner that I once did when I first believed? Or has my love faded over time?

These are legitimate questions we need to ask ourselves in light of all that is happening around us. With all the political noise swirling around; with all the violence, anger, pain, and loss: Has that affected how I view or love a person?

Over time, change is rarely noticed. Just ask the frog in the pot. Has my love for God unknowingly lessened?

***“Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*** Matthew 22:37

The devil will not try to change your heart overnight. He is not that obvious; he is much more cunning and subtle. A church on fire for Christ does not suddenly change in one day. It happens slowly. It may take a generation. Israel turned away from following the Lord in a matter of one generation.

The church in Ephesus was doing all the right things, and yet they needed to repent. They had forsaken their first love. I believe the church in Ephesus began to focus on the battle rather than Jesus. They focused on battling sin, rather than on loving the saviour. They focused on what they thought they should confront rather than focusing on Jesus. Slowly, duty replaced love. Slowly, religious actions and hard work replaced their love for Jesus. The believers had forgotten what drew them to Jesus in the first place: the love of God.

***“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”*** 1 John 4:16

May we never forget the love of God, and may we never take our spiritual eyes off of the One who first loved us and continue to love Him first. As a priority, like me saying to Nicole, “I love you more”. It does not mean that I love her more than she loves me, it just means that I love her more in this moment than I have ever loved her before. May we never replace the motive of love for Jesus and others with religious do’s and do not’s.

A wife asks her husband, “do you not love me anymore?” The husband responds, “what do you mean? Of course, I still love you. I take out the garbage; I cut the grass and wash your car. I make sure you have petrol in your car; I pay the bills. Yes, I love you, I told you that I loved you when I married you and when that changes, I will let you know.”

Taking out the garbage or washing the car does not replace the affection and acts of love that the two expressed when they first met and later got married. Sure, taking out the garbage can come from a motivation of love, but it is not to be a replacement for an expression of love towards another. To think that "I told you that I loved you" some time ago and then not to continue to say it or express it in ways that you once did is not showing your love.

Never allow duty or hard work to replace or quench the motive and love you have in your heart for Jesus. Do not allow anything to come between you and your love for Jesus.

## **Lessons from Ephesus**

The believers in Ephesus were doing all the right things but their love for God was missing. They lost their first love. Sure, the foundation of the church was based on faith in Christ. However, over time the church drifted spiritually, and they all needed to be reminded to focus on Jesus and repent when necessary.

Jesus spoke to John to call on the Ephesians to consider their actions and repent. The church in Ephesus and the other six churches were given instructions regarding their spiritual condition and needs and yet all seven churches were given a promise; but the promise was dependent on how each church responded to the message given them. Is that not true for every promise from God?

Each church and each individual is responsible to act in a way that Glorifies God and to repent as needed. Each needed to respond as instructed and to overcome the negative / evil opposition that may come from both outside and inside influences. Each church needed to determine to live by faith and in obedience to Christ. No matter the church; no matter the individual, over time each can drift

away from God. It is not my purpose to judge anyone but myself, by the word of God.

***“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;”*** 2 Corinthians 5:14

Have we died for the Gospel or is it our flesh that still calls the shots? With that in mind, let us consider what the church in Ephesus was doing correctly.

***“I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary.”*** (Revelation 2:2-3).

In other words, the believers in Ephesus appeared to be working at doing all the right things. They were hard at work fighting the good fight of faith. The believers were hard at work protecting the Gospel. The believers were zealous for righteousness. They considered how people were living and confronted the sin. They scrutinised what others were teaching and called them out when teaching was in error. The church endured both spiritual and physical attacks from outside the church. The believers were not about to weaken or compromise what they believed, and yet their love for God and others changed.

I suspect the church may have become spiritually ridged regarding the Gospel.

***“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I***

***have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*** 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

You cannot have any of these gifts without the Holy Spirit, Paul is talking to believers here.

At one point, the church was motivated by the love of God and to share the message of God's love with others; but the hardship and attacks of everyday life soon took its toll and the love for Jesus and others soon began to fade.

We all had baggage in life as unbelievers:

- We did not look like believers because we were not believers.
- We did not sound like believers.
- We did not act like believers.

Yet we all were shown the love of God. We heard the Gospel message and responded to the love of God and in faith.

***"In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins."*** 1 Joh  
4:10

I believe if we will love Jesus with all our heart and love others as ourselves; if we focus on and love the Word of God:

- We will avoid sin.

- We will not run after false teaching.
- We will not forsake our first love.

The believers in Ephesus knew all about loving God and loving others and yet in less than 30 years they had forsaken their first love.

Ask yourself, how long have I been saved? When was the last time I checked my own spiritual barometer?

Was it intentional that the Ephesians forsook their first love? No, but they got spiritually distracted in confronting error rather than loving Jesus. Was it more important to confront sin rather than loving God and loving others? NO!

John wanted the believers to realise that the promise of God could still be theirs; that God loved them and they could once again return to their first love. First, they needed to know and remember just how far they had fallen. Second, they needed to repent. Third, they were to return to their first love.

To do that, the believers needed to have ears to hear and a heart that responds and repents.

At times fighting the spiritual battle before us can become so consuming that all we can do is focus on the battle and we forget about loving the One who died for us. We forget about loving those who are hurting. We forget about loving one another. We forget about the fact that we were once that person, living in rebellion to God.

It is at times like this that we need to stop and listen for the voice of God and repent.

## A Call to Return to Your First Love

Do not let the love of God and the love for others grow faint because you have gotten so busy fighting the battles of life. It is not that you do not love God, but you know your love for Jesus is not what it once was.

Listen to the Spirit of God and press into Him in your prayer closet. This is a me thing, not a we thing:

- Take time to absorb the love and presence of God each day.
- Take time to pray and receive from God.
- Take time to be refreshed by reading the word of God each day.

Returning to your first love is to rekindle an initial, passionate devotion to God, and it involves three easy and actionable steps:

- remembering the intensity of your early faith,
- repenting of complacency, and
- doing the initial works of service and devotion.

This process requires active commitment, not just emotion, to restore a relationship.

These 3 actionable steps can be accessed through 7 key to return to this First Love:

- **Recall.** Reflect on when your devotion was at its strongest, remembering the joy, gratitude, and urgency of your initial faith.
- **Spend Time.** Prioritise time in God's presence, rather than just doing work for Him.
- **Realign.** Actively change direction from complacency, pride, or worldly distractions back toward God.

- **Repentance**: Acknowledge and turn away from specific behaviours or attitudes that have created distance.
- **Re-engage**: Reinitiate habits of devotion, such as prayer, Bible study, and serving others, which are fuelled by love rather than duty.
- **Study and Pray**: Dedicate time to reading the Word and prayer to realign with Him.
- **Accountability**: Share your commitment to renew your devotion with a trusted friend.

Who knows what the Mercy Seat is? The mercy seat, or atonement cover, was the solid gold lid placed on top of the Ark of the Covenant, it featured two cherubim facing each other with wings almost touching and served as the site where blood was sprinkled, acting as the place where God's presence dwelled.

Can we all make a decision to return to a place where we surrender the throne of our hearts back to God, in essence giving God back the Mercy Seat of our hearts, and allow His presence to continually dwell within us, and reign through us.

Remember, you cannot crucify your will, only your flesh. An idle will is the playground of the enemy. As believers we are to be in full control of our will, actively choosing to follow the unction's of the Holy Spirit, or the deceptions of the devil, there is no middle ground.

The call from Revelation 2 instructs us to remember how far we have fallen, repent, and return to the original, passionate actions to avoid losing our impact (lampstand).