RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE:

A Biblical Look at Revelation 2 and Renewing Your Devotion to Jesus

by Olivia Humphrey

To return to your first love means coming back to Jesus Himself, not to a feeling or a past spiritual high. The phrase comes from Revelation 2:4–5, where Jesus tells the church at Ephesus they have abandoned the love they had at first and calls them to remember, repent, and do the works they did at first.

IT STARTED WITH A ROOMMATE

My friend Anna and I have been best friends since our freshman year of college. In our senior year, we finally got to live together. It was magical at first. Six months later, the adventure had died down. Nothing bad had happened, but one night we sat down in the living room, looked at each other, and said, "This just feels different, doesn't it?" I told her, "I just miss you."

Then it hit me: There have been times that has been my relationship with Jesus. He's always there, kind of like a roommate I know I'll see around, but life gets busy. I can find myself doing more ministry than ever done before, and somehow, missing Him.

JESUS' LETTER TO EPHESUS: "RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE"

The "return to your first love" passage appears in Revelation 2:4, when Jesus speaks to the church of Ephesus through the apostle John.

"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary."

"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." (Ephesians 2:2-5, ESV).

WHAT THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS GOT RIGHT

Jesus starts with what He sees and says, "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2–3, ESV).

He's saying, "Good job. I see you." This church worked hard, endured without quitting, and refused to be fooled by false teachers.

WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE

Then comes the hard part: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (Revelation 2:4, ESV).

For years, I thought the answer was to recreate the first time I felt something with Jesus. As a youth pastor's kid, I went to camp every summer and had powerful encounters with God. Afterward, I would keep replaying the camp songs, trying to feel that way again.

The love you had at first is Jesus Himself, not just an experience or a feeling. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19, ESV).

REMEMBER, REPENT, RETURN

Remember. You didn't go get Jesus. He got you. Paul told this same church, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8, ESV).

Repent. It simply means you've been walking one direction and you decide to turn around. If you've been walking away from Jesus, turn around.

Return. Good works lose their power without the presence of Jesus. When we do the works God asks us to from a place of remembering how Jesus rescued us, we can become more aware of His presence in all of it.

SIGNS YOU MAY HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE

We don't just stop loving Jesus. We trade Him for something. I wrote down what I've traded Him for. Ministry. Productivity (because I don't love being still). Comfort. Planning my future. Pride. Busyness. Money. Relationships.

Another sign is being around Jesus without actually being with Him. We know He's there. We're just too busy to engage with Him.

Maybe the clearest sign is simply this: You miss Him.

HOW TO RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE

Read the Word. This is a love letter written to you. He really died for you, and He really loves you.

Talk to Him. Talk to Jesus like He's your friend and your Lord—like He has something to say about your life.

Get creative with your Creator. I try to read the Gospels with all five senses and invite Him in. Not every day is like that, but it has changed so much for me.

Stay close to people who love Jesus. When others are so rooted in the Word and in prayer, being around them makes you want to be rooted that way too.

Returning to our first love is where personal revival starts.

JESUS SAID THAT THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW (MATTHEW 9:37). HE'S CALLING ORDINARY PEOPLE TO BE KINGDOM LABORERS WHO LOVE GOD AND LOVE PEOPLE EVERY DAY, EVERYWHERE.