

Losing Your First Love (Part 3)

“One day a farmer got pulled over by a state trooper for speeding and the trooper started to lecture the farmer about his speed. And then the trooper began to throw his weight around to try to make the farmer feel extra uncomfortable.

Well finally, the trooper got around to writing out the ticket, and as he was doing this he kept swatting at some flies that were buzzing around his head.

And the farmer noticed this and then said, ‘Having some problems with circle flies there, are ya?’

And the trooper stopped writing the ticket and said, ‘Well, yeah, if that’s what they are, I never heard of circle flies.’

So the farmer says, ‘Well, circle flies are common on farms. You see, they’re called circle flies because they’re almost always found circling around the back end of a horse.’

And the trooper says, ‘Oh,’ and goes back to writing the ticket. Then after a minute he stops and says, ‘Hey, wait a minute, are you trying to call me a name?’

The farmer says, ‘Oh no, officer. I have too much respect for law enforcement and police officers to even think about saying you’re the back end of a horse.’

So the trooper says, ‘Well, that’s a good thing,’ and he goes back to writing the ticket.

But after a long pause the farmer says, ‘Hard to fool them flies though.’”

Now how many of you would say that guy was just about ready to get another ticket? Oh, he **said** he respected the law but his **behavior** was saying something else, wasn’t it? But folks, did you know this is the same scenario

with many Christians? Oh, we say we respect **the law of God**, but a lot of the time our behavior is saying something else too? **How?** By acting like practical atheists.

Oh, we say we believe in God, but half the time, by our **lips** and by our **lives**, we act like He's not there. And this not only keeps us from growing in our own walk with God, but it also keeps others from believing in God. Therefore, to avoid this irony of Christians living like practical atheists by not knowing **Who God Is**, we're going to continue in our study from the Word of God on the Character of God entitled, "**Who Is God?**"

We've already seen that the very **first thing** we need to know about God is that **God Is Real**. The **second thing** we need to know about God is that **God Is Personal**. The **third thing** we need to know about God is that **God Is Wise**. And in the last six sermons we saw that the **fourth thing** we need to know about God is that **God Is Powerful**. And previously we explored the question, "Okay, I understand what God's Power is like and I even understand what it can do for me. But **why don't I experience it?**" And there we saw the **main reason** why we don't experience God's Power in our lives is **Because We Don't Love God Like We Used To** or in other words, we've lost our first love. And in the last two sermons we saw **four reasons** why Christians lose their first love for God and that was when **We**

No Longer Have Faith In God, We No longer Pray To God, We No Longer Read the Word of God, and We're No Longer Obedient to God.

But you might be asking yourself, “So what do I do if that’s me?”

What if I’ve lost my first love? Is it too late? Can I get it back? Is there any hope?” Great question. I’m glad you asked. Let’s take a look.

Revelation 2:1-5 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

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.”

Now folks, believe it or not, this passage is full of great news.

According to our text here, God not only reveals the **problem** of losing our first love, but He also reveals the **solution** to getting it back. And folks, it’s pretty clear. The **first step** to getting your first love back is to **Remember**

Your Previous Behavior.

1 John 1:8-9 “If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”

You see, when we confess our sinful behavior, we're acknowledging or admitting our current situation, right? **That we have sinned against God by not loving Him like He deserves. But** if we're ever going to get around to confessing, we first need to **remember** what our previous behavior was, right? We need to recall those early days of being saved and how we passionately longed to be with God.

But herein lies our problem. Instead of **remembering** how we used to love God so we can **confess** our current problem of **not loving God**, we give into **denial**. As soon as the Word of God convicts us of this, we **deny** we have a problem in the first place. We assume the preacher is talking about our neighbor, our spouse, that other guy in the pew, those weird people down south! And just to make sure they know it's them and not us, we give them the elbow or the evil eye, the head nod thing, right? But people, hello! If you're ever going to face a problem, you **first have to admit** you got one, right? For instance, how can a person be taught unless they admit they need to be taught? Or how can a doctor treat a patient unless the patient admits they need a doctor? And if this is true in the physical realm, how much more true is it in the **spiritual realm**?

Oh but we don't stop there. If denying doesn't work, we still don't want to remember, so we start **blaming**. For instance, we say, "My health

isn't what it used to be," or "My job requires so much of my time," or "My spouse doesn't love God like I do and it's hard." But people, blaming others for all your problems will get you nowhere fast. In fact, sometimes it downright embarrassing, like this lady learned.

"A woman was waiting for her flight at the airport so she bought a book and a bag of cookies to pass the time. As she was reading her book, she noticed the man sitting next to her take a cookie from her bag.

This, of course, made her furious and she thought to herself, 'If I wasn't a Christian, I'd give this guy a black eye!' But it didn't stop there. Every time she took a cookie, he too took a cookie. And this went on until only one cookie was left.

And now, she wondered, what would this cookie thief do? Well, with a smile on his face and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half and offered her half as he ate the other.

So she snatched the cookie from this rude man and fumed about his behavior. Just then her flight was called, so without even looking at the thief, she got up and boarded her plane.

But as she got into her seat, she reached into her bag to pull out her book and gasping with surprise, she pulled out *her* bag of cookies.

'If mine are here,' she moaned with despair. 'Then the others were his and he tried to share!' Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, That SHE was the rude one, she was the cookie thief!"

Now that lady was blaming all her problems on somebody else **when the whole time**, who was the problem? **She was**, wasn't she? And people I'm telling you, it's the same thing with you and I. We can blame all kinds of people or things as to why we don't love God like we should, **but** do you

really think that God, **Who is beside you right now**, is going to fall for it? I don't think so!

People, that's why we've got to realize that denying or blaming others for our spiritual condition isn't going to change a thing! In fact, all it guarantees is that our condition **will never change**. People, we've got to take that first step and **remember our previous behavior** so we can confess our current behavior. Why? Because unless we do, our lives will never change, and we'll never get that first love for Jesus back again. It's that simple.

Oh but that's not all. The **second step** to getting your first love back is to **Repent of Your Current Behavior**.

Revelation 2:5 "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

You see, folks, it's not enough to merely confess your sins. If you really want that first love back, you need to repent **or turn away from** your sins. But herein lies our problem. Hey, if denying or blaming others for our problem doesn't work, we simply start **making excuses** for our problem.

Why? Because our flesh **hates** the word repent. Why, that involves change, that involves sacrifice! And if that wasn't bad enough, now our society **feeds our natural desire** of not wanting to repent by making an art form out of excuse-making.

For instance, our society today no longer calls sin, sin. Are you kidding! They've **changed the terminology for sin**. For instance, sinful behavior is now being called a “disease” or a “social dysfunction” or a “psychological aberration.” People are no longer sinners. No! **They're victims!** And people it's because of this victim mentality that people are no longer repenting of their sins, but they're actually getting paid for their sins!

- A man who was shot and paralyzed while committing a burglary in New York recovered damages from the store owner who shot him. His attorney told a jury that the man was first of all a victim of society, driven to crime by economic disadvantages. Now, the lawyer said, he is a victim of the insensitivity of the man who shot him. Because of that man's callous disregard of the thief's plight as a victim, the poor criminal will be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Therefore, he deserves some compensation. Believe it or not, the jury agreed. So the store owner paid a large settlement. And several months later, the same man, still in his wheelchair, was arrested while committing another armed robbery.
- After mugging and brutally beating an elderly New York man in the subway, Bernard McCummings was shot while fleeing the scene. Permanently paralyzed, he sued and won \$4.8 million in compensation from the New York Transit Authority. The man he mugged, a cancer patient, is still paying doctor bills. McCummings, the mugger—whom the courts deemed the greater victim—is now a multimillionaire.
- In two separate cases in England, a barmaid who stabbed another woman to death in a barroom brawl, and a woman who angrily drove her car into her lover were both acquitted of murder after they claimed acute PMS hampered their thinking and caused them to act in ways they could not control. Both received therapy rather than punishment.
- A San Francisco city supervisor murdered a fellow supervisor and Mayor George Moscone but claimed it was because of too much junk food—especially Hostess Twinkies—that made him act irrationally. Thus the famous ‘Twinkie’ defense was born. A lenient jury bought the line and

produced a verdict of voluntary manslaughter rather than murder. They ruled that the junk food resulted in ‘diminished mental capacity,’ which mitigated the killer’s guilt. He was out of prison before the mayor’s next term would have been complete.

Now folks, you can call sin a PMS problem or a Twinkie problem. I don’t care. And neither does God. Call it what you will but sin is still sin and it needs to be repented of, **if** you’re ever going to get your first love back. And no amount of excuses is going to change that!

Oh but that’s not all. If denying, blaming, or excuses don’t work we simply start **rationalizing**. For instance we say, “Well, none of my friends love God like they used to” or “At least I show up on Sunday each week” or “No one can love God all the time. Eventually your fire for God will die down. It happens all the time. But people, once you head down this road, you’re going to start to label your behavior as a **necessary evil**. And once you call it a necessary evil, it starts to look more and more necessary and less and less evil. And you will actually rationalize your lack of love for God as something **not to be repented of** but a necessary evil! And do you really think that God, **Who’s still right beside you**, is going to fall for that? I don’t think so!

Therefore, we’ve got to **get rid of our excuses** and **stop our rationalizing** and make a clean break. We’ve got to repent and **do whatever**

it takes to ensure that we never go back where we came from, like Julius Caesar did with his army.

“When Julius Caesar landed on the shores of England with his well-armed legions, he simultaneously made a bold and decisive move to guarantee the success of his campaign.

He marched his men to the edge of the Cliffs of Dover and ordered them to look down at the ships that had brought them across the channel. Every one of them was ablaze! General Caesar had cut off the possibility of a pullback.

Now that his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, there was nothing left for them to do but advance and conquer. And that is precisely what they did.”

People, if it’s been a long time since you’ve advanced in your walk with Christ, then maybe it’s because you’ve been **retreating by rationalizing**. And if it’s been years since you’ve walked in victory with Jesus, then maybe it’s time to **burn your boatload of excuses**. People of God, we’ve got to take that **second** step and **repent our current behavior**. Why? Because unless we do, our lives will never change, and we’ll never get that first love for Jesus back again. It’s that simple.

Oh but that’s not all. The **third step** to getting your first love back is to **Redo the Right Behavior**.

Revelation 2:5 “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.”

Now according to our text here, Jesus says that the test of **true repentance** is not in what you **say** about your sin, but in what you **do about it**, right? People, repentance isn't just being sorry for your sins. It being sorry enough to stop your sins **right now**. In fact, He says if we don't do something about it **right now** we're in some serious danger aren't we?

But herein lies our problem. Hey, if denying, blaming, excuses, or rationalizing doesn't work, we simply start **procrastinating**. For instance, we say, "Okay, first thing Monday morning" or "Okay, that will be my New Year's resolution" or "Okay, the first thing I'm going to do when I retire is..." and on and on it goes! But people, hello! If we ever want to experience **personal revival**, it requires **immediate action NOT good intentions!**

Patrick Morley states, "The Church's integrity problem is in the misconception that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior. It is revival without reformation, revival without repentance."

And I got to thinking about this whole process of repentance and procrastination. I thought, "Gee, maybe this is the whole reason why the moral fiber of our country is going down the tubes so fast. Maybe the problem with our nation isn't so much with the unsaved rebel but the **saved rebel**. Maybe the problem isn't with the world, but the Church." **Why?** Because we're quick to pray for revival tomorrow, but we don't practice repentance today! We want the whole world to change but we don't want to

change ourselves! But people, if you want that first love back, you need to turn around **today**. If you want our country to get back on track then **we the Church** need to get back on track! No more delay!

People when are we going to realize that delaying in doing something about our spiritual condition isn't going to change a thing? All it guarantees is that our condition will never change. People, we've got to take that **third and final step** and **redo our previous behavior** today! Why? Because unless we do, our lives will never change, and we'll never get that first love for Jesus back again. It's that simple.

But you might be thinking, "Ah, come on. You're making a big deal out of nothing. Okay, so my love for Jesus isn't what it used to be. It's not that big of a deal. Besides, my behavior only affects me." But folks, if you really think that, then you need to listen to how one life not only affects other lives today, but future ones as well **in a profound way**.

"America's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards and his wife Sarah had eleven children. Despite a rigorous work schedule that included rising as early as 4:30 a.m. to read and write in his library, extensive travels, and endless administrative meetings, he always made time for his children.

Indeed, he committed to spending at least one hour a day with them. And if he missed a day because he was traveling, he diligently made up the hour when he returned.

One scholar decided to chart the 1,394 known descendents of Edwards. What he found was an incredible testament to Jonathan Edwards. Of his known descendents there were 13 college presidents, 65 college professors,

30 judges, 100 lawyers, 60 physicians, 75 army and navy officers, 100 pastors, 60 authors of prominence, 3 United States senators, 80 public servants including governors, ministers to foreign countries, and one vice-president of the United States.

The story of Jonathan Edwards is an example of what some sociologists call the “five-generation rule.” But the five-generation rule works both ways.

Consider the case of Max Jukes, a contemporary of Edwards. As an adult, Jukes had a drinking problem that kept him from holding a steady job. It also kept him from showing much concern for his wife and children. He would disappear sometimes for days and return drunk and made little time for loving and instructing his children.

Of Jukes’ known descendents, 310 died as paupers, at least 150 were criminals (including 7 murderers), more than 100 were drunkards and half of his female descendents ended up as prostitutes.

The stories of Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes offers a powerful lesson about the legacy we will all leave. Five generations from now, it is likely that our professional accomplishments will be forgotten.

In fact, our descendents may know little about us or our lives. But the way we live today will directly affect not only our children, but also our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren and the generations that follow.”

People of God, whether you realize it or not, the decisions you make today not only affect **your life**, but they affect **your legacy**. And the kind of legacy you leave for the future, will always hinge on what you do with Christ today. People please hear my heart. Don’t give into procrastination. Don’t stay in the pigpen of life. Come back to the Father today!

And people, this is the great news. God is so gracious to His children. I mean think about it. He could nuke us on the spot for not loving Him like

we should, **but** He doesn't! Every single day He lovingly, patiently waits for you and I to fall in love with Him again. **How? By remembering, repenting and redoing right now!** And people, once you do that, then you'll discover just like with the prodigal son, you're not only out of that pigpen, but God's going to wrap His arms around you and shower you with His love just like when you first got saved. **Why?** Because he loves you and he doesn't want you to lose your first love for Him!

And people this is the awesome message we get to tell to the nations, "God not only exists, but through Jesus Christ people **really can** have an intimate personal relationship with the Creator of the universe **before it's too late!**" But people, I'm telling you, if the world is ever going to believe our message, then we've got to stop acting like practical atheists. We've got to start demonstrating by our **lips** as well as our **lives** that God is not just **Real**, He's not just **Personal**, He's not just **Wise**, but **God is Powerful!**

To find the way to God, to understand the *truth* of God's Word, and to received the gift of eternal *life*, begin by repentance and faith through a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I understand that I have broken Your Law and sinned against You. Please forgive my sins. Thank You that Jesus suffered on the cross in my place. I now place my trust in Him as My Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."
