

When Sacred Becomes Normal: Finding Your Way Back to First Love

There's something quietly devastating about the moment when what once moved us stops moving us at all. Not because we've rejected it, but because we've grown accustomed to it.

Think about the things you're naturally passionate about—your family, a favorite song, a cherished memory. Nobody has to remind you to care about these things. Affection flows naturally toward what we treasure. But here's the uncomfortable question: What happens when the things of God stop moving us like that?

The Galatian Problem—and Ours

The early believers in Galatia faced this exact struggle. These weren't people with religious pedigrees or childhood memories of synagogue services. They were former pagans who had worshiped idols and lived under spiritual systems that promised control but never delivered freedom.

Then they heard about Jesus.

Grace hit them like fresh air after living in a smoke-filled room their entire lives. Forgiveness wasn't something they had to earn. Belonging wasn't something they had to prove. Freedom wasn't something they had to perform for.

Imagine someone who has only known transactional love suddenly experiencing unconditional love for the first time. That was Galatia.

But then something shifted.

After encountering radical grace, they slowly began drifting back toward performance. Not back to their old paganism, but toward something equally dangerous: the belief that grace wasn't enough. That maybe they needed to prove they belonged. That perhaps they had to earn what was already freely given.

And before we judge them too harshly, we should look at ourselves.

The Drift Toward Performance

We may not be adding ancient rituals to our faith, but we add other things. Achievement. Image. Spiritual aesthetics. Church attendance metrics. Quiet time streaks. We say we believe in grace, but we live as though God is grading us.

The Apostle Paul, writing to these believers, asked a piercing question: "Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then?"

He reminded them of their beginning. When he first came to them, weak and sick, they didn't reject him—they embraced him. They treasured him. They received him as though he were sent from God himself. There was affection, gratitude, and joy.

Then he asked the painful question: What changed?

How did we go from intimacy to tension? From joy to suspicion? From family to distant relatives?

The Labor of Love

Paul's language becomes intensely personal. He calls them "my dear children" and says he feels as though he's going through labor pains for them again—pains that will continue "until Christ is fully developed in your lives."

This isn't an apostle scolding a church. This is a father grieving for his children.

He's not fighting for their church attendance. He's fighting for Christ to be shaped in them. Because here's the sad reality: You can believe in Jesus and still stop becoming like him. You can attend church and still resist being formed by him.

The Galatians had accepted Christ, but Christ wasn't being formed in them anymore. They had salvation, but they were stunting sanctification. They were alive spiritually but drifting relationally.

The Power of Remembering

Do you remember when grace first overwhelmed you?

When worship made you emotional and you didn't even know why? When a lyric wrecked you because it felt personal? When you opened Scripture and it felt as though God was speaking directly to your situation?

Do you remember when you didn't need a platform, just his presence? When you didn't check the clock during prayer? When you didn't care who saw you worship? When obedience wasn't complicated, it was just joyful?

You weren't perfect back then, but you were grateful. And that gratitude made everything else make sense.

Sometimes we don't need a new encounter. We just need to remember the first one.

Waiting for the Wrong Thing

Many of us are waiting for something dramatic. We're waiting for the lights to dim just right, for that song to hit the perfect bridge, for that sermon to say the exact phrase that unlocks something. We're waiting for a conference moment or a camp moment or a tearful altar moment.

We think what we need is intensity, but what if we really just need affection?

The goal isn't to recreate the emotion—it's to return to the affection. Because emotions rise and fall, but affection is chosen. Affection is cultivated. Affection is sustained by presence.

If you believe you need a new encounter to feel close to God again, you'll spend your entire life chasing moments instead of cultivating a relationship. You'll measure your faith by how strongly you feel rather than how faithfully you're walking. And when emotions dip, you'll assume that intimacy is gone.

But what if it's not gone? What if it's just buried under familiarity?

The Return to First Love

Familiarity dulls wonder, but it doesn't have to. Remembering is powerful.

When you remember what he saved you from, gratitude returns. When you remember what he carried you through, trust returns. When you remember the peace you felt when you surrendered, affection returns—not because you recreated the emotion, but because you refocused your heart.

Here are three questions to help you get back there:

What used to move me that now feels normal? Was there a time when singing "Amazing Grace" felt personal? When taking communion made you pause because you remembered what it cost him? Sometimes it's not that we reject truth—it's that we get used to it.

What gets my first attention in the morning? When your eyes open and the day hasn't started talking yet, where does your heart instinctively point? Worry? Responsibility? Notifications? Or is there still that quiet moment when you say, "Good morning, Lord"?

When did God become a part of my life instead of the center? Was it gradual? During a busy season? After disappointment? Maybe nothing dramatic happened. Maybe you just slowly moved him from the throne to the table—still present, just not central.

Everything Falls Into Place

The beautiful part is this: the moment you can identify that shift isn't shame. It's the Spirit pointing you back to return.

When Jesus is first again, everything else falls into its place. Your schedule may not change overnight. Your responsibilities won't disappear. The world won't get quieter. But your affections will shift. And when your affections shift, your peace shifts, your joy shifts, and your witness shifts.

We don't fall away from God—we drift away from him. And drift always happens when our first love stops being first.

The invitation is simple: Let your heart remember. Let your affection return. Put Jesus back where he's always belonged.

Because when Jesus is first, everything else finds its place.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Directly Referenced and Quoted:

1. **Galatians 4:8-12** - Primary text for the sermon, quoted extensively:
 - Galatians 4:8 - "Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist"
 - Galatians 4:9 - "So now that you know God, or should I say, now that God knows you, why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world?"
 - Galatians 4:10 - "You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years"
 - Galatians 4:11 - "I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing"
 - Galatians 4:12 - "Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things"
2. **Galatians 4:13-16** - Referenced regarding Paul's relationship with the Galatians:
 - Galatians 4:15 - "Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then?"
 - Galatians 4:16 - "Have I now become your enemy because I'm telling you the truth?"
3. **Galatians 4:19** - "Oh, my dear children. I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again. And they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives"

Alluded to or Thematically Connected:

4. **John 1:12** - Theme of being known by God and belonging to Him
5. **Ephesians 2:8-9** - "We are saved by grace and we live by grace" (central theme)
6. **Romans (entire book)** - Mentioned as written after Galatians
7. **1 Corinthians (entire book)** - Mentioned as written after Galatians
8. **Colossians 2:16-17** - Allusion to observing days, months, seasons (similar to Galatians 4:10)
9. **Revelation 2:4** - Theme of leaving "first love"
10. **Psalm 139:1-6** - God's intimate knowledge of us ("knowing your thoughts before you finish thinking them")
11. **Matthew 28:19-20** - Baptism reference at the beginning
12. **Hebrews 12:1-2** - Theme of keeping eyes on Jesus

Suggested Verses Aligned with Main Themes:

- **John 15:4-5** - Abiding in Christ (theme of remaining close to Jesus)
- **Jeremiah 2:13** - Forsaking the fountain of living water (theme of drifting from God)
- **Hosea 6:6** - God desires relationship over ritual
- **2 Corinthians 3:17** - "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"
- **Philippians 3:7-9** - Counting everything as loss compared to knowing Christ
- **1 John 4:19** - "We love because he first loved us" (affection theme)
- **Deuteronomy 6:5** - First and greatest commandment (first love theme)