

Historic Situation	Name Interpretation	Positive Affirmation	Corrective Exhortation	Eternal Motivation	Prophetic Revelation	Personal Application
Ephesus First Church	Let Go/Leave Darling/First Love	Perseverance Discernment	Left (not lost) First Love	Eat From the Tree of Life	Approximately 70AD to 170AD	Remember Repent and Repeat
Smyrna Persecution	Myrrh when it's Crushed is Fragrant	Rich in Poverty and Suffering	NONE	Receive the Crown of Life	Approximately 170AD to 312AD	Better not Bitter when Crushed
Pergamos Satan's Throne	Perverted/Adulterous Marriage Union	Remained True Didn't Renounce	Sexual/Spiritual Adultery/Idolatry	Hidden Manna and New Name	Approximately 312AD to 606AD	Purity not Adultery with the World
Thyatira Jezebel Doctrine	Continual Sacrifice	Love Faith Service Perseverance	Tolerate Deceptive Seductive Teachings	Authority Over the Nations	Approximately 606AD to The End	Bought at a Price as a Living Sacrifice
Sardis Rest on Laurels	Invincible Remnant	Hard Work Good Name	Wake Up and Watch Before it's too Late	Clothed in White Name in Book	Approximately 1520AD to The End	Be Watchful for The "Thief in the Night"
Philadelphia 2-Brothers Built	Brotherly Love	Little Strength kept God's Word/Name	NONE	Kept from the 7- Year Tribulation	Approximately 1750AD to The End	Known as Disciples by love for another
Laodicea Lukewarm Water	The Laity Ruled as the Diocese	NONE	Rich but Poor See but Blind Clothed but Naked	Sit with Jesus on His Throne	Approximately 1900AD to The End	Hot or Cold for and to Jesus

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**Returning To Jesus As Your First Love**  
**Pastor JD**

KAPONO: Would you join me in a word of prayer? Lord, thank You. Thank You so much, Lord. You are so good, Lord. And thank You so much for Your word. Thank You for Your word, Lord. We pray that You would be with us and guide us.

Lead us, Lord, and help our understanding as we get into Your word in the Book of Revelation. Thank You again, just for this time to worship and sing Your praises, Lord, and give You all the glory. You are worthy, Lord. We bless Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

PASTOR JD: Amen and amen. Good morning and welcome. Glad you're here. You can be seated. Those of you online, we're glad that you're joining with us.

Before we get started, I just want to take a moment and wish all the dads a happy, and more importantly, a blessed Father's Day, even more importantly — I don't know if you've thought of it like this — but blessing and honoring our Heavenly Father on the day that we celebrate and commemorate as Father's Day. So have a Blessed Father's Day this afternoon. And I'll try to do the same. Father's Day for pastors is like, I gotta work.

*Revelation Chapter 2* today. Last week, we did the overview of the seven letters to the seven churches. And today we are going to take and tackle the first letter to the first of seven churches, the church in Ephesus. So our text will be *Chapter 2*. We'll begin reading in *verse 1* through to *verse 7*. And for those of you that are able, if not, that's okay, but I'll have you stand for the reading of God's word. You can follow along as I do so.

Now, John again is told to write, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to these specific seven churches. And he starts in order with the first church, literally. And he writes *verse 1*, **“To the angel [Or messenger or pastor who's an 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. [Now listen to this list from verses 2-3] 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.”**

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Let's close in prayer. I mean, what's the problem? Sounds like a great church. I want to go to this church. I'm exhausted listening to all that they were doing. They were really busy for the Lord: Hard work, enduring, persevering.

Well, *verse 4*, we get to the heart of the matter, for lack of a better way of saying it. **“Yet I hold this against you: [Here we go] You have forsaken [Left, not lost] [Forsaken, left. Not lost] your first love. [Verse 5] Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. [The first works] If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.**

**But you have this in your favor: [Verse 6] You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”**

Now the Nicolaitans are going to come up again. I'm not going to take the time today. I will only say as it relates to the name being the nature. Nike: you're familiar with Nike Conquest, Swoosh? It's too much. I didn't — I could have left that out. Conquest. The laity. The Nico [Nike] Laitans were conquering, ruling, lording over the Laitans, and the Ephesian church hated that. And God says, I also hate that.

So we'll talk about that. I think it's the letter to Thyatira. I could be mistaken. So I probably really messed you up on just *verse 6*. Sorry.

*Verse 7*, last verse. And this is how all of them end for the most part. **“He who has an ear, [This is rhetorical, obviously] let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”**

That tree is still there, by the way.

Let's pray. If you would please join with me. Father in heaven, thank You. Thank You so much. Thank You for Your word. Thank You for this letter to this church. Though written then for them, it is so apropos for us now. And that's why we're here, Lord. We want to know what it is that You have for us in this letter, as if it were written to us in this, Your church.

Surely, Lord, You desire to speak into our lives and even put Your finger on anything in our lives that You have taken note of, or even, like with the Ephesians, have against us something in our lives that has to go.

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And So Lord, thank You that You're even so faithful to not just point it out, but explain how it is that You desire to get it out and how we can make that which is wrong, right.

So Lord, we're just going to yield to the Holy Spirit now, as the Holy Spirit takes over the teaching as the teacher and the guide through this text that we have before us today. So Lord, speak. Your servants are listening. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen and amen.

You can be seated. Thank you.

So I want to talk with you today about something that is of extreme importance — I don't want to sound sensational — but extreme importance concerning our love for the Lord and our love one for another. They go hand in hand. Now the text that's before us today is arguably among one of the most well known in all of scripture. I mean, we have sayings, even modern-day sayings, many modern-day sayings — I hope you know they totally plagiarized the word of God. Just so we're clear, right?

When we were in *Daniel*, I think it was *Chapter 5*, the handwriting on the wall when Belshazzar was using the vessels from the temple to get drunk and party. Then all of a sudden, the hand appears and writes on the wall. Well, we have an expression: "The handwriting is on the wall." To which I say, get your own material. It comes from the Bible.

Well, we have a saying. It's in different variations concerning your first love. That was my first love. Well, that came from our text today. I'm not angry. Maybe I am. I don't know. I thought I had dealt with this. This is the first church who had left their first love, and as such, it's the first letter that John is inspired to write, and it happens to be to a church that was extremely busy and had left their first love.

I am choosing and using the title of 'Returning To Jesus As Your First Love' for this reason. I thought about — I entertained — sometimes I anguish, overthink — anguish sounds more spiritual, but I overthink, you know, the title because I really want it to, you know, capture what the text is about, you know, the main thing. What's the main thing here? And it's not so much about, you know, with this righteous indignation, you have left your first love. Repent! I mean, that's there.

But it's more like this: I love you. I miss you. Remember when we first were in love? Remember what that was like? Come back. Return. I love you. I'm your first love.

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The Update today was ironically — that's really not the right word, but for lack of a better one, titled, 'Why Would Jesus Say To Remember Lot's Wife In the Last Days?' And it so ties in — and please, don't think for a second that I'm clever enough to connect those kinds of things because I'm not. I'm like, oh, wow, this really matches! God's like, duh.

Why am I to remember Lot's wife? Because she had a divided heart. Why did she have a divided heart? Because her heart was where her treasure was. Where was her treasure? In Sodom. Why did she look back? Because her treasure was still there and that's where her heart was. She had a divided heart.

I'm sorry if I'm yelling. I'm not — I'm not upset. But she didn't love the Lord with her whole heart. because Sodom had, in part, her heart. So now here we slide into this first letter to this first church, and it's about Jesus being our first love.

By way of an introduction, sort of dovetailing off last week's overview of the seven churches, I want to — I need to first provide you with the backstory. And by that, I mean the history of the city of Ephesus and by extension the church in the city of Ephesus.

And the reason is, is that it's going to be germane to our understanding. As with all the seven letters, Jesus is going to say specific things that are tailored to these specific churches that they would have got. The first church: the name being the nature.

So what did I do in order to accomplish this and take one for the team? I created another list, in Jesus' name. Now you're going to like the title of this one. I didn't anguish very much over it. 'Seven Fast Facts Concerning Ephesus.' And this is going to be very germane to our understanding of why Jesus writes what He writes to this particular church.

Fact number 1: Ephesus: 40 years earlier in about 55 A.D. — because when John was inspired to write this letter, received the revelation, the vision, it was in about the year 95 A.D., so we're rewinding 40 years earlier, and that's where Paul was for three years. He spent the most time at this church in Ephesus.

Now, why is that important? Because you know what happens over time. 40 years go by — I don't want to look at anybody. But for couples that have been married for 40 years, you know what I'm talking about. You know, 40 years earlier, ho! I mean, they were opening the door for, you know, their wives and, you know, write nice cards, flowers often, so that if the

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husband brought flowers, the wife wouldn't think, "What did you do?" No. They said, thank you. First love. But 40 years has gone by. And now they have since that time left their first love.

Fact number 2: Ephesus is where Paul had Timothy pastor. And it's also believed that John pastored this church, the Apostle John, for a season. And it's also believed that he wrote both his second and third epistles when he was there in Ephesus.

Number 3: Ephesus was the first and the strongest church, the first one to be planted, and it was located in a port city 250 miles south of the modern-day city of Istanbul, in modern-day Turkey. It used to be Constantinople, but they shortened it. And it was named after Constantine, who, by the way, is going to come up when we get to the letter to the church in Pergamum or Pergamos. This Constantine guy is going to come into play. Did that mess you up? Am I messing you up? Keep it going? Okay. I'll keep it going.

Number 4: Ephesus as a city — I want to put this into perspective — had a population of approximately 225,000 people at the time. That would be about a fifth of the population of our island here on Oahu. I just kind of want to give you an idea. It was — that's considered large in that day.

Number 5: This is where the name interpretation comes in. We touched on this briefly last week. The name is the nature. It's a description, an apt description of the city, and by extension the church within that city. The name Ephesus carries with it the idea of "let go," "leave," and also "first" or "darling." That's exactly what this church was all about, and it's an apt description of this first church.

Now this is where it gets interesting, number 6 because Ephesus had and was known for the Temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the world in which the temple prostitutes would worship, with unspeakable sexual immorality, Diana as the fertility sex goddess. It was actually a form of worship.

And I want you to notice something here because, again, it's going to be germane to our understanding. Notice the contrast. That's lust. God is love. They're worshipping the lusts of the flesh and these false gods which was prevalent and pronounced. You can go visit the

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ruins of this Temple of Diana that was right there in the middle of the city of Ephesus. I wouldn't recommend going to Turkey. But if you did, you could visit the remains.

Number 7, lastly, Ephesus was home to the then famous Library of Celsus, which held some 40,000 parchment scrolls behind 20-foot-thick walls. Now, why is that important? Because this was kind of the education center of the known world at the time. It rivaled, yet future, Alexandria, Egypt, which was known for having the most voluminous writings in all of the world in that famous library at the time.

All right. Let me add to this list the chart pictured here, which I put together for last week's overview. And I'm doing this for two reasons, the first of which is their historic situation as the first church to whom was written the first letter concerning them leaving their first love. Pastor, you just said that. Why are you repeating yourself? Because we're going to see why in a moment, the “why” behind the “what.”

But the second reason I wanted to just highlight this church on this chart is because it has to do with the church's prophetic revelation. What's that? A representation of the church age. All seven of these churches represent the church age commencing at the time of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

So throughout church history, which we are in presently, which is what Chapters 2 and 3 are, John is told to write that which was past, *Chapter 1*, Jesus Christ Crucified, resurrected, glorified, and seated at the right hand of the Father. Then after that, he was to write that which is now, present.

That's Chapters 2 and 3. And then after that, he was to write about that which was to come here after, meta tauta, after these things. That's why from *Chapter 4:1*, everything through to the rest of the book in *Chapter 22 of Revelation* is all yet future. So right now we are living — get this. How cool is this? We are living in *Chapter 22 of Revelation*. That was probably my best point that I had for the whole...

I'll take it one step further and suggest that we are on the cusp — I like that word “cusp” — of the end of the church age. You know why? Because of the seventh church. You remember who the seventh church is? Remember who Lot's wife was? (Chuckle)

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You remember — that was the Update. I need to move on. You remember who the last church is? Oh, it's the church of, interesting, the, “The” Laodiceans. The only of the seven letters — instead of “Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus,” no. “Or of the Ephesians,” no. “Write to the angel of the church OF THE Laodiceans.”

It's not even My church anymore. They kicked Me out a long time ago. That's why I'm knocking on the door asking to come back in and sup with them and them with Me. And notice the name and the nature.

I'm going somewhere with this. It's worth the wait. Hang in there with me. You got the first church, Ephesus, and then you got the last church, Laodicea. Well, didn't we just talk about laity? Lao = laity. Dicea = diocese. The laity ruled. The laity called the shots.

Jesus was no longer in charge. He was no longer in His rightful central place on the throne, in the midst of the lampstands as the Savior and Lord in that church. They kicked Him out. It was their church now. It's the church of the Laodiceans. The laity are deciding. They're deciding everything. I'm deciding nothing. I'm not even invited. I want to come back in. Where's the love?

So you see what happens now? If all of these churches represent a time in church history and the representation of the church of Ephesus is, keyword, approximately between 70 A.D. to 170 A.D., then pray tell, what does the church, the seventh and final church, what does that represent, what period of church history? From about 1900 to today, the present.

In other words, the last church is a representation prophetically, a revelation prophetically of what the church will be like at that time of the end. This is what the church was like at the beginning. This is what the church, fast forward to Laodicea, will be like at the end:

Lukewarm. Jesus isn't even in it, wanting to try to come back inside. That's the importance of the representation prophetically of what these churches speak to in terms of the church age of which we are at the end of now.

Now, I think we're ready to take and tackle this as it relates to leaving our first love and more importantly, returning to Jesus as our first love. What does that look like? I've organized the sermon today.



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It's — how original. I got a three–point sermon for you today. I tried to get four. And I even try to condense it into two, and that didn't work out too well. So you're stuck with a textbook three–point sermon. So build a bridge and get over it.

However, before you start thinking, well, this would be a good time to catch up on some sleep and take a nap, you might want to hear this, and here's why. God, in His love for us, has provided to us the cause, the cure, and the conclusion, or if you prefer, outcome, as it relates to Jesus as our first love.

And might I add because it's going to come up here in a moment, this applies to the marriage relationship. Because after all, what's the marriage relationship representative of? The Christian marriage is a microcosm of our marriage to Jesus Christ, the Lamb. We're the bride. He's the bridegroom. And it's for this reason that Satan targets the Christian marriage because he hates the Christian marriage.

Why does he hate the Christian marriage? Because of what the Christian marriage represents: Our relationship as the Bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the church of Christ to Jesus Christ as the bridegroom. All right, here's the “Why.” Why did they leave? Not lose.

See, if you lose something — is this a firm grasp of the obvious? If you lose something, you don't know where to find it. So how are you going to return to it? Return to your first love. I would if I could. I lost it; I don't know where it's at. You want to help me find it? If I can find it because I don't know where I lost it, I'll return to it.

No. When you leave something, you're shelving it. To forsake is a deliberate act, though it can be very subtle over a prolonged period of time and involve many contributing factors. There has to be a reason. Now let's bring the marriage — I hope you don't mind or tire of me using the comparison because it is apropos.

But in a marriage relationship, you'll oftentimes hear the husband or the wife say, you know, we've kind of fallen out of love. We've grown apart. You know, I just don't — I've lost that loving feeling. Is that a song? Is that stuck in your head? I'm so very sorry.

So we have the cause in the first three verses. I mean, at first read, you're like, wow, what a church, I mean, endurance, perseverance, works, good deeds. I mean, these were servants,

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man. They were serving the Lord. But at what cost? They sacrificed their love for the Lord, their first love for the Lord, on the altar of their busyness in their service to the Lord.

Think about it. Just let's bring it into the context, again, of our marriage relationships. Isn't it overworking, busyness? I mean, your work, especially in Hawaii, especially today — what is it now? You gotta have five jobs? Some of you — I commend you, by the way. I applaud you. I mean, I work seven days a week myself. I mean, I don't want to — I hope that didn't come off wrong.

But if you're going to survive in one of the most expensive states in the United States of America — how depressing is this sermon so far — you gotta work like five, six jobs or be independently wealthy in order to survive. Things have quadrupled in price. Let me have this one. I need to get this off my chest. I went to the store the other day to buy — you know what I bought. Spicy ahi poke.

You know, there was a day not too long ago in a land not so far away, a few blocks away, where that stuff didn't cost that much per pound. I mean, I said, yeah, I want 2 pounds spicy ahi poke. And they say okay. And then they gave me the price. I'm like, do you have financing for this? Are you kidding me? I think there's an error. Can you re...

Remember when you used to go — one last thing, just — hopefully, I'll feel better after this and spare you of more. But remember when you used to go to the grocery store and buy groceries and walk out of there without having to take out a second mortgage on your house? Well, I don't feel better, but there it is. It is what it is.

So what happens? We get — we have to get busy and work hard. And what gets lost in that? That loving relationship. The husband and the wife are, as they say, two ships passing in the night. I mean, I got three jobs just to put food on the table, and my wife's got to work. We got kids, we got a mortgage, we got a car that needs repair every week and then a safety check that's expired. Did you ever get a ticket for one of those? You know how much that is? Neither do I. I mean, I got bills to pay. So my marriage takes a backseat.

And that's the cause. Do you know the number one — I learned this when I was a certified Christian financial counselor for Christian Financial Concepts that was founded by the late Larry Burkett, who's now with the Lord. And so I would counsel couples.

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Don't look at me like, hey, will you do that? No. That ship sailed. The dock that that ship was docked to sunk, so... But my wife and I would sit down with couples and go over their finances and try to provide biblical guidance concerning finances. Why? Because the number one cause of divorce in a Christian marriage is finances.

Did you know that? The cause, number one cause of divorce in a Christian marriage is finances. And here you've got this church that is the busy bee church: Working hard, thriving, going, growing, glowing. Busy like Martha and not like Mary, who just sat at the feet of Jesus, her love, her first love and would hang on every word.

And where's Martha? Martha's in the kitchen in Ephesus. (Chuckle) The church of Ephesus, they had a kitchen there, and Martha was head of the kitchen. And she is angry at her sister and talks to her sister through the Lord. "Lord, will You tell my sister to get in here and help me prepare a meal for You?"

"Martha, Martha, *[And never imagine Jesus having disdain in His voice]* you are busy about many things. Mary has chosen the better thing." What you're doing is a good thing, to be busy about the things of God, but Mary's chosen the better thing. What's that? To sit at the feet of the Son of God and the word of God. Why?

Because what is the word of God? It's 66 books of love letters of how much God loves you, **"...in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** Because **"Greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for another."**

And His agape love, unconditional love for us — do you realize — this is so cool. This helped me tremendously when I first heard it. It changed everything. Because I never really had a good relationship with my earthly father, and it created a problem with my relationship with my Heavenly Father because I always saw my Heavenly Father through the lens of my always mad at me earthly father.

I gave him every reason to be mad at me. It was very justifiable. But I just kept my distance. I couldn't imagine — you know, I'm in trouble. I've been a bad boy, which was all the time, so I'd just stay away from my father. This is not a Father's Day sermon, though it could be.

And then one time — and this was a word fitly spoken. The Lord knew I needed to hear it. There's nothing, JD, that you can do to make God love you less. And then just the icing on

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the cake, Father's Day cake, was this. Not only does He love you, He likes you. I'm like, He does? It's almost like "He likes me" packs more punch than "He loves me."

Because when somebody says, "God loves you," "Yeah, yeah, yeah, God's love. I know, I know, I know."

But when you tell somebody, "Hey, God likes you," "You mean He's not mad at me?"

"No."

"Yeah, but I didn't have a very good week. I'm not going to tell you." *[You know, you start looking at them like, what'd you do?]*

"I'm not going to tell you."

[ Laughter ]

But I don't think God's very happy with me. I don't think He likes me right now." You know how the husband will say to the wife — it's usually the wife to the husband — of course, you know I have a perfect marriage, so this is all hypothetical, you know, theoretical, when I use these comparisons — but the wife will say to the husband, "You know, I love you, but I don't like you right now."

Now, sometimes it's for good reasons. You jerk!

[ Laughter ]

I'm speaking for myself. No, this is — I'm speaking for myself. But not with God. There's nothing — God would never say, "Yeah, I have to love you." Wow. Or "I love you, but I don't really like you right now because of what you did."

No. You cannot do anything. Read *Romans 8*. If this is an issue for you, can I just encourage you to spend some time meditating on *Romans Chapter 8* in its entirety? I mean, if you're doubting or questioning the love that God has for you — this is, again, is going somewhere — if you doubt that, then the enemy's got you right where he wants you. You start questioning the love of God.

Now all of a sudden, your relationship with God is meritorious, and that's where it's based on the law instead of love. That's where legalism comes in. I'm a bad boy, bad, I'm in big

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trouble. I'm a good boy, you know, it's good. God's going to be good to me. I'm bad, God's going to do something bad to me. That's meritorious. That is nowhere in Scripture. That is not the God we serve.

Now, why do I expound on it like that? Because we're going to see the cure in a moment. But we need to understand the cause and the source, and it works both ways. The source of leaving your first love is busyness, overworking, time commitments, not prioritizing, which we talked about in First Service. I think I brought this up recently too. Don't miss this. This is very important. Something I'm learning the hard way. I got the scars to prove it.

When you say, "I just don't have time," you are not being honest with yourself. And let me explain. You have time. Let me use prayer. I mean, man, I just, I don't have the time to pray. Actually, you don't have time not to pray. Not a legalistic thing. It's a get-to not a got-to. No, I got to pray. (Said grudgingly)

Oh, God's like, You know what? Don't bother. Because prayer is talking with God. No, I get to — what a profound privilege it is to be able to pray and have unfettered access to God who created the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is. And I never get voicemail. Are you kidding me? And I can call upon Him at any time and ask Him about anything, and I don't avail myself of that?

Here's where I'm going with this. You have the time if you value or prioritize it. Because you'll make time for that which you love. Well, I don't have... No, if you valued that, this, prioritized that, this, you'll make time for it. But you have the time. You're just not going to make the time because it doesn't rise to the level of being important enough to do so.

Well, I'm glad we got that out of the way. Are you convicted? I am very convicted, actually. I have to confess this is an issue for me because I'm a workaholic and trying to balance those competing time demands and to be discerning when it comes to this being one of the main reasons that love is left behind.

You know on the mainland my first church that I planted, I would never let a couple serve — many served, couples served together in various areas of the ministry, and I would never let them serve if it was coming at the expense of their time with their children because they didn't want to sacrifice their family on the altar of their service to the Lord.

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That does not honor God. And that's what this church was doing. And look at the high price they paid, all of this hard work. And notice the Lord's not necessarily commending them for that. All He's doing is acknowledging it. He doesn't say, I commend you for your hard work. No, He says, I know your hard work.

Don't miss that. It's a seemingly minor detail but a very important one because He's not endorsing it. He's not blessing it. He's not pleased by it. In fact, the only thing that He's really pleased about, apparently, are these Nicolaitans that the Ephesian church hated. I hate them, too. So there you go.

But He's not commending them for their hard work, their perseverance, their endurance. He's only acknowledging it. I see how hard you're working. I see how busy you are. I see all the good deeds that you do. I see how you're persevering and enduring and you're not growing weary. In fact, you just keep going.

You almost get the impression that I wish you would just get weary, so you'd come back home, come to the end of yourself. Get Martha out of the kitchen. Get her over here with Mary. She's tired. Sit down. Take a load off. I had an uncle who used to say, "take five to revive."

Well, this church needed to stop all the busyness because it was the cause of them leaving their first love. If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the main reasons in the marriage relationship, this would be at the top of the list. I'm going to take it one step further, and I know I'm treading where angels fear to. This is not meddling. This is preaching. I'm just going to mention this. I believe the Holy Spirit has prompted me to mention this.

What in the world is the family doing going to 18 soccer games, 5 basketball tournaments, 3 baseball games? There's a basket weaving class. There's a paddling club. I can just keep going. I won't. I could, but I won't. You get my point?

You know this is also the cause, one of the main causes for people not attending church. I mean, there are other causes, and especially in these last days, it's hard to find a church that preaches the Word. But if there's a church that teaches the Bible, especially expositionally

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and you're not going to it because you've got a golf tee time set for that, oh, I see. Golf is your first love, not Jesus. Jesus lost out to golf.

I wonder how Jesus felt with Martha. Here's Mary: "the better thing." Here's Martha: You mean to tell me Jesus is competing with the tuna casserole that Martha's preparing in the kitchen? Because apparently, that is her priority. I would imagine Martha loved to cook. You can't blame her. Jesus is gonna be in my home. I'm going to cook Him a meal. I want this to be flawless.

Reminds me of a story, very quick, of a father who was widowed, and he had only his daughter left. And as Christmas drew near, his daughter would ask to be excused from the dinner table that they would eat at every night and go up to her room. And he would grant her permission, and she would go up.

And this took place for a couple months right before Christmas. Every night, right after dinner, he would excuse her. She would ask to be excused. She would leave. She'd go to her room, and he wouldn't see her the rest of the night. Good night.

Christmas morning comes. She presents him with this gift that she was working on during that time, which is why she was asking to be excused from the dinner table, of these really warm stockings that she had hand knitted that were perfect, flawless. And she wanted to bless her father. And her father, as gracious as he was, says to his daughter, "Oh, sweetheart, thank you. But oh, how I would have loved to have just had you all those nights."

Oh, this is a Father's Day sermon. That's how He is with us. We're His first love. And all of the things that clamor and compete for our attention, to steal our hearts away from Him, like Lot's wife who had a divided heart. "Love the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind..." Heart, all — not half. I can't because I've kind of committed that part of my heart to this. Well then, that's not wholehearted. That's only halfhearted.

Well, that's the cost: the busyness and over a prolonged period of time. Now, what's the cure? Well, that's in *verses 4-5*. And this; you want to talk about a textbook three-point sermon? This is already pre-made for me, right here, three-point sermon in a can. All I have

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to do is warm it up and serve it. Three ways, and the three have been affectionately referred to as the three R's: Remember, repent, and repeat.

Let's start with remember. Jesus says, "Remember the height from which you have fallen." More like this: Remember the high when you were first in love, the way you would talk to each other in that voice? You know what I'm talking about. So sappy. And all your friends were like, you're killing me. You're going to make me throw up. The way you treated each other. The way you talked to each other. Oh, don't mind them. They're in love.

In other words, you had to have an excuse to act so stupid like that. I just only — I'll only use it one time. Don't look at me. I said this First Service too. It's in the Bible. *Proverbs 12:1*. Stupid is in the Bible. So there.

But then time kind of goes on, and things change, and we get busy. But remember what it was like at first, how high you were, the height you were at? I mean, you couldn't wait to go home. Oh, I won't do it. I can't. I don't have time. Maybe that's an excuse.

My wife and I would sing a song when we would get home from work together. I won't do that to you. It would ruin your Father's Day for sure. But it was just a silly, sappy, love song. I get to be with — you know, we would join in and — it was just disgusting for anyone who didn't understand how in love we were. We'd just come home from work, and we get to be together. Are you kidding me? Remember what that was like?

Here's what I've biblically guided Christian couples to do when — I don't do marriage — well, what do you do? You have no idea. But when I would — in fact, my wife and I used to do premarital biblical guidance before they get married, you know, just in case. Let's get it ahead of time so that we can avoid a train wreck. And actually, there was one couple that after I got through with them, they did not get married. But that was a good thing, by the way, I just want you to know.

But one of the things I would have the couple do is to just take some time together. If they have to go out — maybe, if they can afford it — don't add more financial pressure — go rent a hotel room, go out to dinner, go out on a date. This is where date nights came in. And I just — all I want you to do is just reflect on the memories of what it was like when you were first in love and first married and just share those stories.



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If you have kids, don't talk about the kids. You do that, right? You go, we're not going to talk about the kids. What's the first thing we do when we go out to dinner? We're talking about the kids. Can we stop? We're talking about the kids. Stop talking about the kids. Okay, we're talking maybe a minute, and we're talking about the kids again. It's kind of like we can't get away from these kids.

No, I just want you to talk about your guys' love for each other. I want you to remember. And then once you remember the high of that first love, I want you to do a 180. That's what the word repent means. I want you to do a turn-around and go back. Remember what that was like? Do you want it back? Then go back, turn around, repent, do a 180 and go back and do, repeat, the first works. Did you get it? Remember, repent, repeat.

What does repeat the first works mean? Do what worked at first. Come on guys, remember when you were courting your wives? Young people have no idea what that word means. They have different words now, like, "Well, we're talking." Oh, what did you talk about? No, we're talking. I guess that's dating. Oh, in our day, back in my day, we called it courting.

I'll never forget when my son came home from school many years ago. He goes, "Wow, man, that's sick." I'm like, "Who's sick?" He says, "No, Baba. Sick's a good thing now." I said, Jesus is coming back if sick is good, evil is whatever. Just I don't — I don't want to know. How long have they been courting? No, the basketball court was closed. Forget it, forget it.

So guys, remember what worked at first? Oh, we were on our best behavior. We wanted them to marry us, right? Some of you guys are looking at me like, please don't go there. I'm going to go there because I have a Ph.D. in this. I mean, I would — I proposed to my wife — how romantic is this? I worked for Mercedes. I didn't own it. But you know the 450 SL convertible, red, palomino leather? Top down, middle of the summer, beautiful summer night. I had a friend who was a helicopter pilot.

I said, "Hey, I want to propose to Kellie." He's like, hey, on the fueling, when I go get fuel for my helicopter, we'll plan it out, I'll pick you guys up. You could just say, hey, Steve's going to take us on a helicopter ride. You know, so — but, you know, Kellie's a smart cookie. She

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knew something was up. You know, I'm trying to hide the ring, and she's looking where I'm hiding the ring.

So I go, okay, we're going to go up in helicopter. We get up in the helicopter. It's a very thin plexiglass, you know, door. And we had to have the headphones because it's really loud. And so, you know, I got the headphones on, and I proposed to her. It was kind of like, you know, this: Will you marry me? (Static sound) Over. (Static sound)

[ Laughter ]

And her response? All I heard was her just crying. (Weeping and static sounds) I'm like, oh, she's so touched. She wasn't touched at all. She was terrified. She said, "Yes, I will. Just get me out of this thing!" Turns out she has a fear of heights. And she's got a Plexiglas door that separates her from imminent death. And I'm asking her to marry me. Yeah, yes! Can we talk about this on the ground?

[ Laughter ]

You guys are very gracious to me. I know I — I love to laugh, you know? It's so medicinal and it's so healthy. And God gave us laughter, and it's a healing of our bodies, a healing. It's better than any prescription medication, laughter. You know that? That's my story and I'm sticking with it. Anyway...

So what's my point? My point is, guys, go back and do what you did at first, what worked at first. Repeat the first works. Why don't you start opening up the door for her again? You know, there was a time where I — my wife never touched the door handle. In the mornings, I knew exactly what she liked, and I had a tray waiting for her every morning. (Chuckling) I'm really — this is self — talk about self-serving.

Oh, Pastor JD, you're so holy, godly, loving husband, you. Yeah. It didn't last very long. I got busy. But she would wake up to breakfast in bed. I'd make a little bagel and orange juice, and I'd get a rose from her rose garden in the summer. I was such a romantic.

So I'm going to use myself as an example. I stopped doing that. And it started showing up in our marriage relationship. I mean, we have a perfect, perfect marriage. Again,

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hypothetically, but I started noticing, you know, I'm not loving her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. I'm not loving her as I love myself.

And that's why she's not responding. Because God wired her to respond. Proportionate to my loving her she would respect me. And I was noticing that she wasn't respecting me, you know, and being the godly husband that I am, it was kind of like, "Respect me, woman!"

I didn't, no, I didn't do that. I wanted to. But it was really more like this: I'm not loving you the way Christ loved the church. That's why you're having a hard time respecting me. So if that's the cause, then that's the cure. So I went back and repeated. And it was rough at first.

She's like, "What do you want?"

"No, I just — I love you; I love you."

"You haven't done this in years. What did you do?"

"No, no, nothing. I love you."

No, I just — hey, guys — I remember to saying this to a friend of mine in the mainland that was a business associate. "Hey, you need to take your wife flowers."

He goes, "It's not her birthday."

I said, "You need to take — that's why you need to take her flowers."

"Yeah, but it's not our anniversary."

I said, "Just get her flowers."

"No, I can't. You don't understand. If I show up with flowers, she's going to think I did something terribly wrong."

How sad is that, when you get a marriage to a place where the husband brings home flowers, and the wife's looking at him out of the corner of her eye because now something's up because you don't usually do that.

So what'd you do? No, I love you. And be patient. It might take time. They'll test you, especially depending on the temperament of the wife. They'll test your resolve, you know

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because you know how patient we are as men, right? We want the first time to work. We're back. We're good.

No. It's going to take time. She's going to — she's going to test your resolve. Oh, yeah. I've seen this before. I give it a week, a week. So she'll wait.

Sure enough, a week goes by. You give up. She's not responding. I'm spending a fortune on flowers. I'm going broke. I have to get another job. It's not working. No, no. She's watching. She's waiting. She's testing you.

You keep doing it, and I promise you, on the authority of God's word, that she will find you irresistible. Here's the problem, though. We say, "I don't feel like it." I don't feel like it? Oh, so we live by feelings now? (Singing) ♪ Feelings ♪

That's another song, right? Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. That'll be the last one. I'm here all week, so...

[ Laughter ]

Well, here's the cool thing. You remember the high? Oh, man, you guys were just so high on love, in love, first love. You repent. It's a genuine change of heart. Godly sorrow leads to true repentance. And you do a 180, and you go back, and you repeat what worked at first, you know, when you were courting her.

And the way God has wonderfully and marvelously made our precious wives, the schematics, to use that word, for lack of a better one, the blueprint, He made her to respond to that.

You know in the Proverbs, "**Things that the earth cannot stand up under.**" It's either Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. My memory is like my hair. It's gone.

An unloved wife, an unloved wife — it's too high for my understanding. I cannot — a wife who is not loved — see God has wired her to be loved. And when she's loved like that...

When I do weddings — I actually still do some weddings, by the way, renewal of vows as well. I love weddings. But I'll say to the husband, and I usually take him to *Ephesians 5*, and say, "Man, if you love her like that, she can't help herself."

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She may — if she's stubborn — I won't look at anybody. If she's stubborn, she'll try to fight it. But the way God made her is to respond with respect in kind because that kind of love is irresistible.

And all of a sudden, here comes that high again. The feelings follow. The feelings follow. If you're going to wait to feel like it before you do it, I promise you; you're never going to do it. Why? Because you're never going to feel like it. But when you do it, then the feelings follow because that's the way God has made us.

Okay, we're going to conclude. Don't look at your watches. This is *verses 6-7*, and it's the conclusion, or if you prefer, the outcome, and it's predicated upon, as with all the letters to all the churches, having ears to hear. The rhetorical nature of that is, **“Let he who has an ear.”**

Well, wait a minute. Show of hands. How many have ears? Well, I'll got to raise both my hands because I have two ears. So that's kind of a rhetorical question. In other words, you can have ears — this is the point of it — you can have ears, but you're not listening. You're not really hearing.

You know how it is when you're in a conversation with somebody and they're talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk? And you're inserting the uh-huh; oh, wow; oh, is that right — at the proper places. You're not hearing a word they say.

Again, the marriage relationship — the wife starts going in on you, and you deserve it. And all you hear is just her voice but not the words. You're hearing her. She's talking to you. Your brain goes, “She is yelling at you right now.”

“What’s she saying?”

“I don't know. I can't hear what she's saying. I have ears, but I can't hear. All I hear is (High pitched mumbling) but I'm not really hearing.”

So just because you have ears doesn't mean you're hearing. No. The outcome, the result, the conclusion of the matter will come predicated upon having ears to hear, better understood, take heed. Just because you're a hearer of God's word does not mean you're a doer of God's word.

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So this, **“Let him who has an ear hear”** implies that you heard it, you got it, and now you're going to take heed to it. And if you do, then I'm going to reward you. And each of the churches has a very unique reward promised. And to the church in Ephesus, it is promised to them that they will eat from the tree of life. I want to close this way. Each letter has its own unique reward and even rebuke.

In other words, let me put like this just to illustrate it. You could not write the letter to the church of Smyrna and send it to the church in Ephesus. They'd be going, huh? And vice versa. Each letter was specific to that church, and they would have got it.

They would have known exactly what Jesus was talking about when He wrote about — have you ever been in the word of God when the word of God gets in you? You're reading God's word, and you come across a passage, and you conclude this: this is God's word because only God knows that about me. And that's the conclusion you draw because it's unique to you. Only God knows. Only God knows that.

So every single one of these letters — and I want to leave you with this — if that letter was written to you, what would it say to you uniquely? Because see, God knows everything you're doing. He doesn't necessarily approve of it. He acknowledges it. He will commend you if it's commendable. He'll rebuke you if need be because He chastises and disciplines those whom He loves. These are all love letters, by the way. If Jesus didn't love His church, His body, why would He bother? He wouldn't write them a letter, a love letter.

I think I mentioned this last week. I saved all the letters, the love letters, and cards I wrote my wife when we were courting. This thick. Again because I'm such a romantic, godly, you know... But one time I made the fatal mistake of taking that thing out, and I read her a few of them, and we both got sick.

It was like, (Stumbling over words) You know, 37 years ago you wrote that? 37 years ago. Yeah. I would not write that today. (Chuckling) I mean, I would write — surely, I would write on a card, but it wouldn't say that. That was, wow.

But unique to that relationship, unique to our relationship with the Lord, it's so precision and precise — that's a redundancy, I know — to where we're at in our relationship with the Lord. Because the objective at the end of all of this is to get us to return to Him as our first love.

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No other loves. Nothing else has my heart. He's got my whole heart. So something wants to compete for or try to get a part of my heart, ain't gonna happen. I've given my whole heart to Him and Him alone. He's my love, my first love.

Maybe you're here or watching online. and you've really paid attention to the marriage comparison because I just described your marriage. And this is too good to be true to be able to have that love again. No, it's not too good to be true. I hate that saying, by the way, "If it's too good to be true, that means it's too good to be true."

Well, wait a minute. If it's too good to be true, it must be God because God is true, and God is good. So if God said that you can return and repeat after you repent and remember, and return to your first love by doing what worked at first, then that should give you hope, shouldn't it, especially in the marriage relationship?

If this describes your relationship with the Lord, come back. Where did you go? Why are you so busy running to and fro doing all these things, oh, for the Lord? No. He wants — He doesn't want those knitted stockings. He wants you. He wants it to be just you and Him. He loves you so much. And He misses you.

All right. That was my abrupt closing. Smooth, wasn't it, this time? Kaponono, come on up. Why don't you stand up? I hope this is helpful. It doesn't sound like it was, but the word of God does not return unto Him void. That's my concession, consolation.

Father, thank You. On this day we celebrate as Father's Day, we want to honor You, Father, as our heavenly Father and bless You and thank You. Thank You for inspiring John, by the Holy Spirit, to write these letters. Because while they may have been to those churches and those Christians in those churches then, they are certainly for us now. Lord, I pray that we'll take home with us that which it is that applies to our lives.

And Lord, we need the Holy Spirit to do the work. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. We can't do it in our own strength. So would You please, Lord, by the Holy Spirit, whether it's the marriage relationship or our relationship with You, Lord, would You rekindle, restore that love, that light that burns so bright at first? Thank You, Lord, for Your love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.