Overcoming Displaced Love — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 2:1–7 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, April 11, 2021 · *We Will Overcome*

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All right, if you got a Bible, you can open it up to the book of Revelation, chapter two. We're kicking off a new series this morning as we continue our way through this great and very interesting book of the Bible, the book of the Apocalypse, the Revelation. And we're kicking off a series this morning on the seven churches— or the seven letters to the seven churches— in the book of Revelation, chapter two and chapter three. These are not the only churches that existed at the time of the writing. There were churches all over the place in the known world; Christianity had exploded by this point in time.

They're being persecuted all over. But these were what you might call influential churches, representative-type churches. And what we're going to see in studying these seven churches is not just what God had to say to those seven churches, but what God has to say to Broadview Baptist Church today. And you may say, well, how is that when we're reading somebody else's mail? What does it have to do with us? And the answer to the question is God chose these seven churches and these seven problems because they represent the kinds of challenges that every church faces.

That's also I think why he chose the number seven. In the Old Testament and New Testament, the number seven represents the totality of something, the completeness; it's the perfect number, you might have heard some say. It means the whole enchilada. And so these seven churches represent the whole enchilada in the terms of— they represent all churches, and the problems that they faced represent the problems that we face today. And so the question is not does God have something to say to us through this series of these seven churches. The question is, will we have ears to hear what God has to say.

I don't know about you, but sometimes it's easy to develop selective hearing. You guys know what I'm talking about? Selective hearing. Maybe your spouse would say that you have selective hearing. You only hear the things that you want to hear. Maybe your kids have

selective hearing. They only hear what they want to hear. And sometimes we have spiritual selective hearing in the sense that we only hear God say to us the things that we want to hear him say to us. We don't really necessarily say that must have been God when the message is something convicting or confrontational.

We say, well, that was bad beans or bad pizza, or that's the devil trying to get me down. And that's not always the case. Sometimes the Lord has things to say to us that are not comfortable, that are not very, you know, pleasant. They convict us and maybe hurt our feelings and Jesus doesn't care. I hate to tell you that. He just doesn't care. He says some very confrontational, hard to hear, emotionally harmful things to the seven churches that we're looking at. And he does it for their good because they needed to hear the rebuke that Jesus gives.

And the rebukes that they received, I believe, are rebukes that we need to hear today because we face the same exact kinds of issues that they face. And so let's just for a few minutes ask the Lord to give us ears to hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches. Let's just very quickly, right there where you're seated, bow your head and close your eyes and ask the Lord, give me ears to hear what the Holy Spirit wants to say. Father, give us ears to hear what the Spirit of God has to say to our church in particular as we study these seven churches in the book of the Apocalypse.

Amen. So last week we saw this encounter between Jesus and John, right? Jesus was in his resurrected state, his exalted glory. Flaming eyeballs, he had white hair, he had a voice like cascading waters— this very powerful, overwhelming picture of Jesus who had overcome. He tells the Apostle John, do not fear. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead, but Amen. I'm not dead anymore. I am alive forevermore, and I hold the keys to death and Hades. In other words, I have overcome, John, so you don't have to be afraid anymore.

You don't have to fear. And because I have overcome, and you are in me and I'm in you, that means you are going to overcome as well. And so what I want you to do is to send that message to these seven churches. And if you read all seven letters that we're about to read over the next seven weeks, each letter contains an exhortation from Jesus to the church to overcome, to be victorious, to conquer the challenges that they were facing. And if they would overcome, then there were these great and very precious promises, or you might call them rewards, that Jesus has to give to churches who overcome.

And I don't know about you, but I want to be a part of a church that is overcoming, that is hitting on all cylinders. If you've ever been part of a church that was hitting on all cylinders, there's nothing else like it in the world. It's one of the most exciting things to be a part of when the church is experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They're walking in obedience to God. God's blessing and favor and anointing is on that church. There is nothing like it in

the world. And that's what Jesus is promising to these churches if they would hear what he has to say and put it into practice to heed it.

And the first problem that needed to be overcome is what I'm going to call the problem of displaced love, displaced love. So if you're taking notes, the title of the message is "Overcoming Displaced Love." And it's to the church in Ephesus, and some of you may be familiar with that word because it's still pretty well preserved from antiquity; modern day, you can still see the city of Ephesus and all the cool stuff about it. But if you were to go back to the first century, this was one of those, you know, megacities.

This was a super influential, important city. It would be like a Los Angeles or Washington, DC or Houston, Texas. Chicago, Illinois. I mean it was a big important city. It was a cultural hub. It had some of the most important cultural institutions of the day headquartered there in Ephesus. And the Apostle Paul plants a church in Ephesus because he knows it is a hugely influential city. It was piping out culture to the rest of the Greco-Roman world. It was a center of idolatrous worship to the goddess Artemis, who— if you were going to worship a god, a lot of people wanted to worship that God because she was like a multi-breasted woman who the way that you would worship Artemis is by engaging in sexual intercourse at the temple, and the priests at the temple were essentially temple prostitutes, and so all the guys were signing up to worship Artemis, as you might imagine.

It was a gross city, all kinds of spiritual decay and darkness. And so the Apostle Paul plants this church in that city with that kind of a reputation because he wanted it to be a strategic outpost for the gospel. He knew that if I can get the gospel light to turn on in this darkness, then just as it is piping out the cultural decay and idolatrous worship to the rest of the Greco-Roman world. We can also make it a strategic hub for the gospel so that Ephesus becomes the thing that lights up the rest of the Greco-Roman world for the truth of the gospel.

And so he plants a church there. You can read about it in Acts chapter 19. It was an interesting kind of experience. When he starts preaching the gospel, you know, hundreds and thousands of people begin to become believers and they take their idolatrous worship and they take their paraphernalia that they were using to worship Artemis and they burn it and that was bad business for the Ephesian, you know, city of commerce, if you want to use that term. So they got really upset with the Apostle Paul. They came, tried to kick him out of the city, tried to stone him, they tried to remove his influence because he was disrupting the status quo and it didn't stop as you might imagine.

The Holy Spirit was on the church in Ephesus. The Apostle Paul stayed there longer than any other church plant that he had ever planted. He stayed there for over two years. He said, I taught you the entire counsel of God from Genesis all the way to the— well, I guess they didn't have the New Testament at that point, but from Genesis all the way to what they had at that period in time, and it was a vibrant and strong church. No church like it was hitting

on all cylinders. So with that in mind, let's read what Jesus has to say to this vibrant and strong church.

He says in chapter 2, verse 1. I want you, John, to write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. Now some people wonder, is that a literal angel? Is that like a heavenly angel with wings? Or what is that? And some people think it's an angel; it's kind of interesting to think that every church has an angel. But it could also be the messenger of the church, because the word angel literally means messenger, so it could refer to a pastor, to the pastor of the church in Ephesus. I like that approach because I like to think of myself as an angel.

But he says, write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand— remember those stars are the angels— and who walks among the seven golden lampstands. That's imagery pulled straight from the vision that John had of Jesus. So this idea is that Jesus is present in the church. He has all authority. You might think of Jesus as actually being here this morning. He's walking amongst us. He can see the truth about what's going on, our sincerity, your hypocrisy. He says, I know your works.

That doesn't mean I know it in an academic sense, but I experientially know; I am a part of what you're doing. Your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. In other words, this was a doctrinally pure church. They would put people to the test. They wouldn't just let anybody get up and preach. They were on top of things. He says, I know, verse 3, that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary.

But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers— or to the one who overcomes— I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

So interesting, interesting text, right? He has some commendations to the church, things that they're doing well and right, and then he has some condemnations of something that they were doing wrong. And then he gives them the cure for how to overcome what we're going to call displaced love. But before we get to all that, I just want you to notice what this church was doing right because sometimes you can skip over that part and focus on the negatives, but this church really was a vibrant and strong church. In your notes, there's three things that stand out to me.

They had fervent service. They were industrious. They were hardworking. Just like Jesus had come into the world to serve people and help people, to feed the poor, to help the helpless so

also did this church follow in the way of their Lord in being active in service. In our church, we have, as a part of our 2020 vision, is to bless the city through acts of generosity and mobilizing our small groups to engage in bless the city projects. That was this church on steroids. They were super sacrificial and dedicated to blessing people in their community, and they were making an impact.

This church, like I said, was pastored by the Apostle Paul, but it wasn't just pastored by Paul. It was also pastored by Paul's protégé, Timothy, whose letters you can read in 1 and 2 Timothy. And then it was also pastored by none other than John himself, who is right now on Patmos. He pastored that church for thirty plus years. And so this was a church that knew the vision for what the Christian church is supposed to do, the impact it was supposed to make, and it was making a tremendous impact and it wasn't just kind of sort of.

That word, I know your toil, means working to the point of exhaustion. So this was a church that was dedicated to doing good things all the way to the point of exhaustion. They would do whatever it takes. Not only were they fervent in their service, they were also orthodox in their doctrine. That's just a ten-letter word that means straight; that's where we get our word orthodontist to straighten your teeth. You had straight doctrine. It meant that you believed the right things, that you weren't moving to the left or moving to the right in terms of what you believed about Jesus.

And it's not as though it was for lack of trying. There were all kinds of heresies that were cropping up in the church at that time. You had heresies like Gnosticism, which would be sort of like our New Age mysticism today. You know people today they'll say things like I'm not religious, I'm spiritual. Have you heard that phrase before? Not religious, I'm spiritual. That just means that they believe that there's a God and that they want to connect with God in some spiritual way, but they denounce the dogma and the doctrine and those kinds of things.

There was that kind of thing going on. In the early church, there were people who were saying that the flesh is evil, that the physical is evil, it's all about the spirit, it's all about tuning yourself to the frequencies of the universe. And so the church was having to fight against that by saying, no, Jesus had a physical body. He was a literal man. There were people who were denying the deity of Jesus, there were other people who were denying the humanity of Jesus, and all the while churches were saying, no, this is the truth of the gospel.

This is what the apostles have entrusted to us. This is what's true about Jesus. Everything else is false. And this church was doing a bang-up job of protecting right doctrine. In fact, if you go back to Acts chapter 20, which is right after Paul planted the church in Ephesus, he tells them, he warns them, when I leave, there are going to be people from within your own congregation who rise up and lead people away from the truth. He says, after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. And you can imagine in a city like Ephesus just how easy it would be to lure people into sexual temptation because of the temple to Artemis and the previous religious practices that many of these Gentile Christians were being saved out of, it would have been very easy to go back to that old way of life. But this was a church that made that very difficult, because they had right doctrine. And not only did they have fervent service and right doctrine, lastly, they were patient in tribulation.

And it wasn't just suffering for suffering's sake, they were suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ. We'll see a little bit more about this next week, but essentially the Jewish Christians had— I'm sorry, the Jewish people had disassociated themselves from Christianity as a sect of Judaism. They're saying, no, they don't have anything to do with us. And so they didn't have the protection of being under that umbrella, but neither did they have the protection from the Romans of not having to do emperor worship. They were basically being pressured by Rome to worship.

Domitian as god, and so they were getting it from the Romans and they were getting it from the Jews, and everybody was kind of putting pressure on the Christians to denounce their faith, and the church in Ephesus was refusing to do that. They were patient in tribulation. The word means intense pressure, like shaking up a Coke can, just a pressure that you get from all sides. Social and physical and just literal persecution to the point of death. They didn't buckle. They stood strong in the midst of it. I call them the Delta Force of the early church.

They were fervent in service, orthodox in doctrine, patient in tribulation. They did everything right. If you were looking for a church to attend or to join, I would tell you go join the church in Ephesus because they are awesome. They are the church to belong to. So imagine the shock when you, as a member of the church in Ephesus are sitting there in the congregation and you get a letter from your old pastor who says, I had a vision from Jesus, and he's got something to say to our church. And Jesus starts listing off these amazing things, and you're saying, yeah, oh yeah, we're the best; you're kind of doing your little dance.

And then there's this but that comes out of the lips of Jesus. And it's not a little but, it's a big old but. It's a strong but. In the Greek language, there's two ways to say but. I don't mean B-U-T-T, by the way, I mean B-U-T. You can do it with the kai, or you can do it with what's called the alla. That's a strong adversative; that's the word he uses here. But I have an issue with you guys. Imagine the emotional shock of hearing that from the lips of Jesus.

When you spend so much time and effort doing the right things and serving him and protecting the doctrine and being patient in tribulation— and, Jesus, I lost my mother for you, my grandfather was killed for— what do you mean you have a problem with me? He

says, oh, I have a problem, and it is a big problem. It is not an inconsequential thing, it is a serious thing. I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. The church at Ephesus had abandoned the love for Jesus that they had at first.

Other translations say you left it. You left your first love. And this is important. Sometimes when I would quote this verse, I would say they lost their first love. And that's not right. They did not lose their love for Jesus. Obviously, they had love for Jesus. Otherwise, they wouldn't have done the things that they did. You know, nobody does those things without some kind of love for Jesus. They didn't lose it, they left it. It's kind of like I didn't lose my keys, I just left them somewhere I can't find right now.

Anybody ever had that experience? It's not as though I don't still possess them; it's that they're not where they're supposed to be. That's the idea here. And the idea actually includes this concept of being distracted and drifting away or being unattentive for a long period of time, so that thing is no longer where it's supposed to be. They left it. And what did they leave? They left the love that they had at first. Some translations say your first love. The first love wasn't first in terms of what you might say chronology.

It wasn't the love they had at the beginning; rather, it's love in terms of the priority of the affections of your heart. Whose voice carries the most weight? What relationship motivates you more than anything else? What is the why behind why you do what you do? That's the first love. It's the impetus. It's the engine. It's the core; it's the fountain that causes you to do everything that you do in life. Jesus said, that used to be me. It's not me anymore. It used to be I was the primary thing, I was the main thing, but now I'm not the main thing anymore.

Instead, something else is the main thing. So the primary problem at Ephesus is that secondary things, even good things like service and right doctrine and being patient in tribulation, those were secondary things, and those secondary things displaced the primary thing, which is love for Jesus. And the primary thing, love for Jesus, became secondary. And when that happens in the Christian life, you're off track. You've missed it. And it doesn't matter how good you are, doesn't matter how gifted you are, doesn't matter how dedicated to service that you are. It doesn't matter how good your attendance record is.

None of that stuff matters. If you lose the core, if you lose the engine, if you lose the love, then Jesus says, you've lost it all. And it's a big deal to me. It's kind of like if you've ever been married, to just give you an example, because sometimes when you think about your relationship with God, it seems very ethereal and hard to articulate and to manage. So think about marriage if you've been married or if you are married. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 says that marriage is a picture, it's a mirror of the gospel.

So this kind of thing happens in marriages as well, right? When you get married— well, I have this course that I'll do with premarried couples. Premarital counseling. And it's like this

quiz, it's a questionnaire that they fill out, and it's really cool; it basically figures out their personality type and how they think about marriage and their worldview. It kind of looks at some of their baggage that they're bringing into the marriage and we get to talk about all that stuff. So it's a lot of fun. And every quiz is different, right?

People have different personalities, different outlooks on marriage, different answers to the questions, but there's one part of that assessment that's always the same. I've done it I don't know how many times now, and it's always the same. When you get to this part of the assessment, it talks about how to maintain lifelong love, right? How do you keep the heat, in other words. And what it says to the women is that the longer that you stay married, the easier it will become for you to do things with your spouse. And they say your husband as a man likes shared activity, like doing things together, which, ladies, by the way, men do life side to side, not face to face.

Women like to talk talk talk face to face. Men don't like to do that, they just like to go fishing, right? Just side to side. So they say shared activity is a big deal. And then to the men, it'll say, so your wife needs you to cherish her, needs you to pursue her, to speak words of affection, words are powerful. But the longer you stay married, it says to the man, you're going to have a tendency to shift. From cherishing and prizing your wife to providing and protecting. Every man does.

And it's a warning to every premarital couple: the longer you stay married, you're going to be sent on those trajectories of less shared time and less cherishing, more providing, more protecting. And then if you do not come back together and make love the primary thing and speaking love to one another through those languages, then your marriage will become stale. And it'll become difficult. And it's not as though you're less active. You're more active than you've ever been. You're doing more things than you've ever done before. You know, now you have kids and now you have jobs and now you have all kinds of extracurricular activities.

So you're doing, doing, doing, protecting, protecting, protecting, providing, providing, providing, but the love is gone. And when the love is gone, the lights go off, and it's not a good thing. And Jesus is saying, that thing happens spiritually with me. Your activity increases, you're doing, you're doing, you're doing, you're serving, you're serving, you're serving, you're protecting, you're providing, you're doing all the things that you're supposed to do, but somewhere along the way you stopped loving me. I stopped being the reason for why you do what you do. It's like how marriages— well, they're staying together, but are they staying together because they love each other or because of the kids?

Do they stay together because they love each other or because it's convenient? A divorce is too much money. Ships passing in the night, there's no love there anymore. Jesus is saying that happens to you spiritually, and that's what happened in the church in Ephesus. So they were doing all the right things and they were saying all the right things and they were even

experiencing persecution and remaining steadfast in that persecution. And Jesus says, it really doesn't matter to me. Oh, wow, you signed up for VBS. You've been serving in the preschool wing for 20 plus years.

You are always volunteering, you're cooking, you're cooking meals for every funeral. Where's your love for me? Why? Why are you doing what you're doing? It stopped being for me and now it's just because it's what you do. It's because you want to be well received. You want people to think good about you. It's because it's tradition. It's because you feel pressure from other sources. It's no longer because of love. Oh, you've got the right doctrine. You're great at apologetics. You can persuade people and defend and really excellent. But where's your love for me?

Who cares if you can discern all mysteries? If you do not have love, you're like a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. Say, Jesus, I was persecuted for you. My grandma was killed because of her commitment to Jesus Christ. I've remained faithful, even though all kinds of terrible things have happened, and Jesus would say I appreciate it, but if it's not done out of a heart of love and affection for me, then you've missed it. I've got this against you. And during this COVID-19 deal and all the stuff that happened with COVID-19, one of the things that the Lord convicted me on personally was this issue.

And I'm sure I'm not alone. What happens is as activity increases in your life, your intimacy and communion with Jesus will decrease. And it goes something like this. I'm so busy, I'm so tired, I'm always going. Something has to cut, I got to cut something out of my life. So the first thing that you cut out of your life is any meaningful solitude you have with Jesus Christ. You stop reading the Bible, you stop praying, maybe you stop going to church. You stop going to your small group. You stop connecting in a meaningful way with Jesus.

And maybe, maybe it didn't look like that. Maybe you were still doing all of those things, but you were doing them for the wrong reasons. And that was more my case. When COVID hit, I was working more than I'd ever worked in my life. Just ask my wife. She'll tell you. I mean, hours and hours and hours. And because we had to, we had to make it work, had to get it going, and all that stuff. And the more that the activity increased, the more the intimacy began to decrease. And Jesus is saying, what's the point?

What's the point if you spend all that time and all that effort and all that work, but you lose me? I've got to be the reason. I've got to be the motivating factor. And it's tempting to say, well, it's not that big a deal. It's not like I was living in sin. It's not like I was, you know, doing some terrible thing. I didn't pick up drugs or drinking or anything like that. Does Jesus really have that big of a problem just because I don't love him the way that I used to love him?

And he would say it's a big deal. Look at what he says in verse 5. He says, you need to remember then how far you have fallen. Repent and do the works you did at first. Otherwise — this is crazy— otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Now remember, he's talking to a church. He's basically saying to the church, if the love is gone, the lights go out. To a church that persists in a state of displaced love, Jesus is going to turn off the lights.

And sometimes churches get their lights turned off and they don't turn back on. You just think about Abilene, Texas. We have a church on every corner. How many of those churches have their lights off right now? How many churches have shut the door, locked the doors, and sold the keys, and now it's another building for another use because Jesus turned the light off? And how many of those churches had the lights turned off because they lost their love for Jesus? It's not that they fell into doctrinal error. It's not that they no longer had people who were willing to serve and to do those things.

It's that the love was gone. And when the love is gone, the heat is gone, then the lights go out, and sometimes Jesus turns off the lights and they don't turn back on. And in your life, what is the light? It's the, I don't know how to put it into words, it's like the blessing of the Holy Spirit. It's the presence of God in your worship services. It is this "it" factor; it is this difference. I think all of us can tell the difference between attending a church that is full of the Holy Spirit, that is blessed by God, and attending a church that is dead on the inside, right?

You ever been to a church that just felt dead? You go in, it's just blah. And that's a light, that's a church that had the lights turned off. And the preacher can preach a true sermon and the music guys can be awesome and great, but the Spirit is gone, the anointing is gone. And Jesus is saying, I will remove that from your church if you continue in a state of displaced love for me. I don't care how talented you are, I don't care how generous you are to the city, I will turn off the lights.

And this is a message that I think God has to say to us as our church. You know, we do a lot of things right in this church and a lot of things that are good. And I wouldn't say that Jesus is about to turn the lights off in our church. I would just warn us that he could and might if we lose this. And one of the things I was most convicted over in COVID is that our church was going that direction. And thankfully, over the last couple of weeks and months, I began to see a turn.

And I think that's something God is doing as we're pursuing him and trying to do some of the things that we're going to talk about in just a minute. But I noticed that when COVID hit, not only was that happening in my life, I was watching it happen in the lives of many people in our church. So when COVID hit, you got more time on your hands than you ever had before. You had an opportunity to invest more time with Jesus. You get to grow in your

relationship with God, grow in your knowledge of God, but instead of doing that, many people did the opposite.

And they could tell you everything there was to know about the latest Netflix episode, but they were totally blind and oblivious to what God was doing in their life or around their life. There were people who got consumed with earthly politics, which is kind of hard not to do that when there's an election year and— you know, and you live in Abilene, Texas. But some of us got so wrapped up in it and so passionate about earthly politics, we became totally ignorant to kingdom politics. And what God wanted to do through the church in the culture.

You know earthly politics is important. I'm a political guy, but when that becomes the primary thing and the kingdom becomes a secondary thing, then we've missed it. And a lot of us missed it. Some of us were crippled by fear, crippled. Fear of the virus, fear of the economic impact of the virus. You were controlled by anxiety instead of being full of the peace of God and the Spirit of God and resting and being a shining light of what a life looks like when they believe in the sovereignty of God and the goodness of God in the midst of hardship and persecution.

All that began to wane. Instead, we began to have our lives dictated by fear and anxiety because we lost our first love. And maybe we didn't lose it then, maybe we lost it years before that, but the crisis just exposed a lovelessness. It exposed a displaced love that had been existing for years and years and years. And the warning for churches like ours is: if you continue in a state of displaced love, I will turn the lights off. I don't care about your reputation. I don't care about your history. All the other good things that you're doing are irrelevant to me if you've lost your love for me.

And that's one of the reasons we started doing these Monday prayer meetings. It's one of the reasons that in my own life, at least leading in staff, we stopped having strategic meetings and we started having prayer meetings. You know, the leadership is great, the talent is great, all that stuff is great, but is the love there? And we needed to make sure that it was there. And what about your life? Would you be described as someone who knew everything there was about the latest episode of Netflix but I was blind and oblivious to what God was doing in the world?

Did you get too wrapped up in earthly politics and ignore the kingdom politics? Was your life crippled by fear because you were no longer resting in a God who loves you and cares for you. The thing is it happens gradually. You got to be careful. Sometimes it happens and you don't even know it. It's kind of like going on a road trip and you miss your exit and you didn't know you missed your exit and so you drive and drive and drive, and you just start looking around: I feel like I've seen this before.

You know, and then you pull up your phone, and sure enough you're 40 miles down the road in the wrong direction because you missed it. So the only thing you can do if that's true of you, is to stop the car, turn around, and go the other direction. And that's exactly what Jesus says. He says you need to do three things. Verse 5, you got to remember from which you have fallen. You need to repent and you need to repeat the things you did at first. Three R's: remember, repent, and repeat.

In your notes, I say that memory is the handmaiden to revival. That's so true. That's why Jesus gave us things like the Lord's Supper. He says, when you take the Lord's Supper, do it in remembrance of me. I want you to remember what I did. I want you to remember who you were. I want you to remember what you were like. I want you to remember what you were saved from. I want you to remember who you would be without me. Remember the trajectory that you were on. Remember that you had nothing to offer me.

Remember that on your best day your righteousness was as a filthy rag before the Lord. Remember, remember, remember. It's actually a double entendre in the Greek. It's like this idea of remembering and rehearsing. Go back and experience it again. Remember what it was like when you first became a Christian. Your desire for the word, your hunger for the presence of God, your commitment to grow. You would pay someone to get to read the Bible. Remember, and then repent. Metanoia means to change your thinking and express sorrow over the offense that you've caused and go the opposite direction.

Repentance is like in your marriage example, it's like it's this aha moment. Sometimes in counseling you'll see it happen. The lights will turn on. The other person will say something that resonates in just the right way, and the husband or the wife will go, I had no idea. I'm so sorry. I had no idea. Had no idea that me saying that had that effect. I'm sorry. It was not my intention. You express sorrow and regret, and then you go the other direction. You turn around. Repentance is agreeing with God about his assessment of the facts.

Saying, Jesus, I'm sorry that I loved my career more than you. I'm sorry I loved my kids more than you. I'm sorry I loved my spouse more than you. I'm sorry I loved money or success or pleasure more than you. And then the last thing he says is to do the things you did at first or to do the works you did at first. And I find that fascinating. He doesn't say feel the feelings that you did at first. Because that's what you would think. If you lost that love and feeling, then you would say, go back and feel the feelings.

But he doesn't say go back and feel the feelings. He says go back and do the works. And it's good advice. You know, if you have problems in your marriage, your counselor's not going to say, go back and feel the feelings. Because they'll say, well, you can't tell me how to feel. Because you can't tell somebody how to feel because your feelings are your feelings. But a good counselor would say, go back and do the things you did at first. Go back and start dating your spouse again. Start spending time with them.

Talk to them. Pursue them. Well, the same thing is true with the Lord. Start pursuing him again. Get yourself back in church. Start talking to him again. Start praying. Start reading the Bible. Spend time with him. Solitude. Fasting. That's how you rekindle. Those are the works. And in the Christian life, the reason he says to do the works you did at first instead of feel the feelings you did at first because the Christian life is not lived on feelings. The Christian life is lived— you don't act your way, you don't feel your way into actions in the Christian life, you act your way into feelings.

You don't wait until you feel forgiving to forgive; you forgive so that you can feel forgiving. And the same is true in regaining your first love for Jesus. You go back and do the things you did at first. So if you're watching online and this is the first time you've watched online for the last eight months. First, thank you for watching. Secondly, go back and start watching. Start getting back into the flow of things. And if you'll do the things, if you'll do the works, then the feelings will follow. So here's how I want us to respond.

For a lot of us, maybe this morning this resonates for you. If it doesn't resonate, then praise God it doesn't resonate. But here's what I know. For us to be a church that doesn't lose our first love, we've got to be people who haven't lost our first love. And so only you can say whether or not this is true of you. And so as Taylor comes up and leads us, I just want you right there where you're seated, with the head bowed and the eye closed, both eyes closed, to allow the Lord to examine your heart honestly.

Truly, if you stopped making excuses, if you stopped justifying your actions, if it was nobody else's fault and it just is what it is, what is true of you? Has your love for Jesus been displaced by something else? Has he stopped being the priority? And maybe it was a good thing, but it's not the ultimate thing. Jesus says, let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says. And so would you just ask the Lord, Father, would you give me ears to hear what you're saying? And then just listen.

Father, would you give me ears to hear what you're saying? Jesus Christ is in this place. He is walking amongst the lampstands, which means he's walking up and down these aisles and he sees everything. He sees above it all. He sees through it all. And so ask the Lord, help me to see what you see. Help me to see what you see about me. Some of you may be here this morning and you're not a Christian. You'd say I've never received this kind of love for Jesus. I've never expressed it.

I've never given my life to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Maybe that's your case if you're watching online. And if that's true of you, and the Lord's Spirit is moving in your heart, then the way to enter the Christian life is the way you stay in the Christian life. It's through repentance and faith. It's just what Jesus said for the rest of us to do, to remember, repent, and believe. Start doing the things you did at first. And so if you're not a Christian and this morning the Holy Spirit is calling you to salvation, then would you repent?

Agree with God about his assessment of the facts in your life? Agree with God that your sin has separated you from Him, that you are deserving of punishment and wrath. And then believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, that God raised him from the dead, and that he is Lord. And if you would confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you'll be saved. And so you can just do that right there where you're seated.

If you're watching online, give your life to Jesus Christ. And then let us know about it. Tell somebody. Probably most of us in the room are believers. And so as you have prayed for the Lord to reveal to you if this is true of you, if love for Jesus has been displaced by something else, then here's what I want you to do. I want you to ask the Lord, what do I need to do? What are the first works that I need to do? Because some of you are doing a lot, but you're not doing what Jesus wants you to do.

So just ask the Lord, what does it look like for me to return to the things I did at first? Go back to when you first became a Christian. Okay, you didn't have a seminary education. You weren't gifted, you didn't have a reputation of 30 years in the preschool wing or the kids wing. All you had was a big fat thank you to Jesus. Thank you for saving me. So maybe he's calling you back to a place of worship and gratitude and humility. Maybe he's calling you back to a place of prayer and solitude and fasting.

Maybe he's calling you to consistent attendance and worship. Just ask the Lord. Lord, what are the first works for me? Father in heaven, we thank you for this time and we thank you for your rebuke. Even though it's difficult to hear, we remind ourselves that you discipline the son that you love. You discipline the daughter that you love. And so you wouldn't say these things if you didn't love us and care about us and want what's best for us. And so help us to receive it in love and to put into practice the things that you're calling us to do.

Lord, we do not want to be a church where you turn off the lights. One of the scariest things in my mind is to pastor a dead church. It's to belong to a church that's lost the light because we lost the love. So would you rekindle in our hearts an affection for Jesus that supplants everything else? Rekindle a love for Jesus that becomes the core, the primary core that it never fades. That when people ask us why do you do what you do? it wouldn't be because of the reputation that it gives us or the guilt that we feel.

It would be because of the love that we have for you. That that's the motivation. I pray for people who in our church have served for decades. They've served for decades. I pray that you would renew in them a love for Jesus as the passion of their heart, as the fountain that energizes their commitment to get up in the morning and to show up in the preschool wing and to change those diapers and to teach kids— that love would be the reason why we bless the city and why we multiply disciples and why we plant churches, it wouldn't be for anything else.

And then lastly, Lord, would you rekindle in us an affection for Jesus that expresses itself through prayer? That our church would become a house of prayer. Because all of those other things we can do to be seen by men. We can plant churches to be seen. We can bless the city to be seen. We can give to be seen. But private prayer isn't seen by anybody other than you. It's the one thing we do in the Christian life that only you can see. And so that's what we need more than anything else.

And so would you make us a congregation that prays in the prayer closet? A people that hunger and thirst for unhurried, undistracted time alone with God. And that through those times you would refuel, re-energize, reposition us to make a true impact in the world, revive us again, for your name's sake. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.