

Restoring Our First Love

Richard Choi

Revelation 2:4-5a. “Yet I told this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”

The Ephesian church received Jesus as their Lord and Savior and served Him with Bible study, prayer, praise worship and fellowship among believers. The glorified Jesus was with them and walked with them in the church as their sovereign Lord and Shepherd. They were loyal to Jesus, worked hard and devoted themselves fully to the work of the Lord. Jesus commended them for their hard work, faithfulness and perseverance. They also kept the gospel faith in that they did not tolerate those whose teachings were not Biblical. But they had to repent of one thing. In verse 4b Jesus says, “You have forsaken the love you had at first.” They had forsaken their first love for Jesus. The Ephesian church was pioneered by Paul and succeeded by Timothy. In Ephesus Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God by teaching the gospel intensively for two years. The work of the Holy Spirit was so strong that the whole city of Ephesus was stirred. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Ac 19:20). Inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus, Paul saw God’s vision to visit Rome as well (Ac 19:21). As time passed by, however, the Ephesian believers became habitual and lost passion for the word of God. Gradually they lost their pioneering spirit and forsook their first love for Christ. A husband forgot his wedding anniversary. So his wife was very unhappy and gave him a hard time. Jesus was holding the hands of his servants and walked among the church. But the church was busy doing activities leaving Jesus out of their worship. God is love. God seeks us, not our sacrifices. Jesus wants us to love him because he loved us first by redeeming us from sins through his holy blood. Jesus wants us not to forsake our first love for him because he has never forsaken us. Even when we were still sinners, he loved us and gave his life for us by being forsaken by his Father God on the cross. We are his treasured possessions, dearest brides, belonging to him and purchased by him through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus wants us to restore our first love for him and maintain our love relationship with him.

How can we restore our first love? Look at verse 5a. “Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”

First, we must remember God’s grace of forgiveness of sin and salvation through his Son Jesus. Love is not static but is growing like a plant. Unless our love for Christ grows, the first love soon fades. In order to have the first love in us, our love should constantly grow by remembering Jesus’ grace of salvation through deep Bible study and prayer. We can find the love letters we received from Jesus in the Bible; we can continue sweet dialogue with Jesus through prayer. When we are full of Jesus, we love Jesus in obedience and love others in humility.

Second, we should repent of one thing at a time. Sometimes we have too many things to repent of. But we can repent of one thing at a time. Do you know we come to meet Jesus and worship him on Sundays? Do you know he is holding us in his right hand, walking among us to strengthen and bless us today in this gathering? Are you prepared to meet your first love, Jesus, when you come to worship on Lord's day? Based on our personal key verse and Church's key verse, we can honestly find one repentant topic and bring it to God in repentance for restoration of our first love for Jesus.

Third, we should rededicate ourselves to Jesus and his world salvation work. Jesus commands us in verse 5b. "Repent and do the things you did at first." What did we do when we met Jesus first and experienced his grace of salvation and joy from heaven? Here are some of the things that I remember. We woke up with prayer by attending 5 o'clock early morning daily bread prayer; whether we were students or workers we went to the campus to brag about our wonderful bridegroom, Jesus, through fishing and one-to-ones; we devoted ourselves to the ministry of God's word and prayer by studying the word of God, sharing testimonies and heavenly spiritual fellowship with psalms, hymns and songs of praises. We also had joyful and delicious eating fellowship. The Bible house's rooms were always packed with Bible studies that we had to wait outside for our turn. During lunch time, the kitchen was so crowded with gospel workers young and old that any kind of food was welcomed and consumed in minutes. We sometimes argued with each other over trivial things such as babysitting; but we quickly forgave and loved each other, calling one another "brother" or "sister" as a family of God, our Father. We were ready to go anywhere for Him and marry for God's glory. We laughed aloud and at times cried together because some students who promised to come did not show up for the Bible study. We were full of Jesus with his vision to pioneer American campuses.

Last week at the North America (NA) staff conference I saw many of my friends from our college days were still young and spirited with spiritual fervor and strength. Their children grew as next gen leaders and they were blessed to see their grandchildren in their arms. More than 92 chapters in the USA and 20 in Canada are established by 108 house churches. Forty-five missionaries have been sent out from NA and more than 28 short-term missionaries served the world mission in 2019. We studied 1 Peter and accepted Jesus the Living Stone as the foundation of the church. With repentance we rededicated ourselves to Jesus and his world salvation work and many of us prayed again to raise 10,000 house churches and 100,000 missionaries for NA to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In order not to forsake our first love for Jesus we must remember Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for us; we must repent of one thing at a time by the help of the Holy Spirit based on one word of God; we must rededicate ourselves to Jesus and serve his world salvation work by raising Bible teachers, house churches, and missionaries. Jesus rebukes us when we need to repent. Unless we repent, we will lose the presence of Jesus among us. We must repent and should not forsake our first love and have the right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God. During the Staff Conference last week there were ministry reports from 8 different regions. Most of the chapters consisted of one or two house-churches. I thanked God for their first love for Jesus by growing in faith and his love. At the same time, I was rebuked by their pioneering

spirit and devotion to Jesus. I am a complacent sinner who forsook my first love for Jesus like a Christian in Ephesus. I repented and rededicated myself to praying for and supporting the small house churches as a prayer servant in humble servanthip. We also thank God for the new North America Coordinator, P. Teddy Hembekides. We pray that 112 churches in NA may be united in Christ as a spiritual house whose foundation is Jesus, the Living Stone. We pray they may serve the ministry of God's words and prayer by raising disciples of Jesus, house churches and missionaries as well as next gen leaders for NA to be a shepherd's nation and missionary sending nation for the world! May God let the message of Christ dwell richly in us and bring spiritual revival to our families, campuses, Chicago and NA by raising 120 new disciples of Jesus!

Kevin Albright

We have already studied risen and glorified Jesus' message to the first of seven churches: Ephesus. In his message, Jesus commended their hard work and perseverance. Then he rebuked them saying, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." Actually, we don't know the things they did at first. But we can guess.

We know that Apostle Paul brought the gospel to Ephesus. Under Apostle Paul they had daily discussions in a lecture hall for two years. Through this, the word of the Lord spread through the whole province. So they were earnest Bible students and they engaged in serious evangelism. Also they fought against idolatry and were persecuted for it. However, they had forsaken the love they had at first. Jesus said they had a love problem. Once Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment. Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt 22:35; Dt 6:5). Why is it so important that we love God first and foremost? Because if we don't, we love something in the world. If we don't love God fervently, we end up putting something else in the place of God. We become idol worshippers.

I thought about what this could mean personally for me and for our church. I think if I repent personally and give my heart to Jesus, then I can be a blessing and good influence to my church as well. So I thought of a few ways I loved Jesus when I came to believe wholeheartedly in Christ as a college freshman. I also think that these ways are common ways that Christians are blessed and grow. What I am thinking is not unique to our church. These are 4 very common ways of earnestly seeking God and growing in a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ.

First, earnest study of God's word. When I graduated from college, I wrote a college life reflection. When I reflected on my four years at Northwestern University, I was mostly thankful for one thing. I don't say this to boast. I share it to show the grace of God who was with me. Every week I wrote and shared two testimonies: one at my fellowship meeting and one at the united Friday meeting at the Chicago UBF Center. As we all know, it is not easy to make time in our busy schedules to sit down and write a reflection on God's word. It takes time. Usually a few hours. I would say a minimum of two hours. Yet those two testimonies each week is what I especially remembered from my college days. I remember sitting at my desk in my fraternity house with my lamp on and my Bible open. It was precious time with my Lord Jesus. I remember going to College of Lake County when I felt burned out and discouraged by NU

ministry. I sat down in the CLC library and prepared Genesis notes and reflections newly. I was studying 1:1 with Mother Sarah Barry at that time. This Genesis Bible study greatly restored my spirit, faith and peace. I remember reading the whole Bible once a year for about 10 years at the start of my fervent Christian life. In a word, I delighted in God's word. Those were formative years in my Christian life. I recently repented my habitual Bible study and decided to prepare a Revelation binder with questions answered and testimonies printed. I believe when our church deeply and personally studies the Bible, God will bless the individuals who do so. And God will bless our church as well.

Second, prayer. Again, while I was a student, another growing disciple and I used to help each other get up for prayer. We each lived on the first floor: he in the fraternity and I in the dorm. So whoever got up first would go to the other person's window and tap on it to wake the other person up (since alarm clocks didn't always succeed and I didn't have a cell phone at that time). In this way, I got up to pray. I remember how on fire I was with the gospel through these times of early morning prayer. Recently, I decided to help my children to have God's word in the morning. Rather than dropping them off 5 minutes from our house to take the bus, my wife and I drive them 30 minutes to school each morning to read the Bible and pray together. This is also a blessing for me to spend more time in God's word and prayer every week day morning. I usually attend 5:30am prayer meeting at the church just once every 2 weeks, on the day that my wife gives the morning message. Our church has some prayer warriors who attend this 5:30am prayer meeting six days a week (since we don't have it on Sunday). I'm sure they are blessed through it, and our church is blessed as well through their prayers. May we all earnestly seek God through morning prayer, whether it is at home with our families, or at the church.

Third, outreach. I can testify that when I'm on fire with love for Jesus I can't help but share the gospel with others. Love for Jesus naturally includes love for people. For example, whenever I have a ready spirit to share the gospel with someone, I always find opportunities to do so. But when I'm not thinking about, but caught up in other things, I miss opportunities. Here is an example. One day I was shoveling snow outside. I was thinking that if I love God I should share the gospel with everyone I see. A few minutes later a young man asked to borrow one of my two shovels to dig his car out of the snow. I said, "Sure." Then he left with my shovel. One minute later I said to myself, "I just missed the chance to share the gospel or invite him to church." But then I remembered, "But he has to bring the shovel back." So when he did, I invited him, and he came to church a few times with his girlfriend. He even bought me a new shovel since he broke mine. My point is: unless I'm thinking and praying about it, I don't really try to invite others to church or Bible study or to simply share God's word and promises with them.

Fourth, fellowship. This is also very important. Sometimes we don't have enough spirit or desire to push ourselves to grow spiritually. But if we have an accountability partner, it can make all the difference. For example, I already told you how a friend in Christ would help me to get up for Daily Bread prayer. I do this for running too. I've often gone running alone. But when I have an appointment to go running with someone, I can't make excuses for being busy or having no desire. I went running yesterday morning indoors with my friend Steve who got me into running 19 years ago. I've gone running with well over 10 people with whom I have studied the Bible with as well. It's good fellowship, friendship and accountability. My point is: if we have a person to seek God together with in Bible study or Bible reading or prayer, or a group testimony sharing meeting to attend, it can go a long way in restoring and deepening our love for Jesus. I pray that

God may revive me and our church with burning love for Jesus through earnest Bible study, prayer, outreach and fellowship. Amen.

David Choi

Everyone loves love stories, especially the story of first love. We never forget about our first love. I would like to speak about my first love with Jesus.

When I was a junior in college, I saw a sign on campus which said, "Come and see." So I went and that led me to see Jesus and fell in love with him. I found myself a great sinner before Jesus through Luke 5:8, "Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man." When I confessed all my sins one after another asking for his forgiveness, Jesus did not condemn me. Rather he cleansed all my sins with his crimson blood. The world I used to see became a different world, full of hope and vision. Since then, I began to follow Jesus and I became a fisher of men.

In 1982, I arrived in America as a missionary full of hope and vision, holding on to Genesis 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." After marriage, my wife and I gave everything we had for preaching the gospel for young students. We lived in a very small one bedroom apartment until my second son became two years old. My wife quit her full time job as a nurse to assist Dr. Lee, Mother Barry and HBF ministry and we lived on my teacher's salary until I entered my 50s. We were financially poor, but we never thought we were poor because we chose to serve the Lord with all our hearts. 24 hours a day was not enough. We wished we could have 48 hours a day instead of 24. Even though I worked hard day and night, I was full of the wonderful grace of Jesus upon this unworthy sinner.

Many times I felt very sorry that my wife and I did not spend enough time with my children because we were always busy. My children had to spend many hours under the care of sitters. TV programs or movies such as Power rangers, Sesame Street, or Beauty and the Beast babysat them for many hours. But God did not lose them in the world. By God's mercy, he grew them well to be very nice and responsible people in Christ.

God put me to serve HBF ministry for 30 years. Through that, God raised many spiritual giants like Sam Toh, Tony King, Joshua Jeon, Francis Choi, Viola Bockenfeld at IIT, etc. I spent the best part of my youth to serve HBF ministry and young American people. It was not easy, and sometimes I wanted to quit, but Jesus never quit on me. This great love of God enabled me to carry out my mission.

When I entered my 50s, my role has changed to be an elder of our church, a vice principal at Lane Tech High School and after that, a business owner. God has been gracious to me to be fruitful in all the areas of my life. Truly God has been my great reward.

I am still working hard for our church with a full time job. Some people talk about midlife crisis. But I do not have time even to think about such things. However, my first love for Jesus has cooled down gradually as I get older.

This year, I decided to step down from all the leadership positions in UBF. I believe that it is time for me to step down so that the next generation leaders can step up and lead our ministry.

I was wondering how God would lead my life Part 2 and I was praying about it. Jesus says, "Repent and do the things you did at first." I know it does not mean to go back and do the things I did when I was young. But Jesus wants me to restore my zeal, passion and love for God's flock.

As one of my repentance topics, I began to visit young people of our church and those who left our ministry to pray for them together with my wife and we will continue to do that even more diligently. I am full of hope and vision to rededicate the second part of my life filled with his kingdom work.

As Jesus my Lord grew me thus far, I want to restore my first love with Jesus and start my 2nd love life with him from now on. I pray that I can love him all the more as he never stopped loving me from the first day of our first love. Amen.