

RISE Part 1 – Week 1

How to Keep Your First Love

(Male Edition)



By Pastor Jane Evans – March 2022

Immediately following salvation, the Spirit of God enters our life and confirms that a new relationship has been established with God.

“For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:16, NLT)

God’s Spirit within us produces love for, and obedience to, God and His Word. As long as we’re dependent upon God for our strength and are obedient to His Word, we experience the grace of a new Christian’s “first love.”

CAN WE LEAVE OUR “FIRST LOVE?”

The Bible warns us about the fact that we can lose this “first love” and allow it to dwindle into something that is born out of duty, tradition, familiarity, or even guilt.

“I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the

*test, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured on account of my name and have not become weary. But I have this against you, that **you have left your first love**. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”* (Revelation 2:2-5, NASB)

HOW DO WE LEAVE OUR “FIRST LOVE?”

Is it because we're not working for God?

No. We can be very busy for God and still not have the joy of our “first love.” The church which left its “first love” had “works” and “labor.” They even labored for the right Person and the right cause.

Is it because we're not reading the Bible?

No. We can have all the knowledge of the Bible and still lose our “first love.” The Pharisees knew the Scriptures well. The church which left its “first love” also knew the Word. They used the Word to check the authenticity of apostles.

Is it because we're not praying?

No. We can pray and still be spiritually cold.

Is it because we're not witnessing?

No. It's possible to share Christ with others and still have a dullness in our souls. The work of the church which left its “first love” certainly included witnessing.

We leave our “first love” when we lose our daily awareness of our need for God.

Our need for God is the very motivation that brings us to salvation—this is why we reach out to God. We recognize that we need Him in our lives. However, once God begins to meet our needs, we tend to forget that we have any. We become rich and increase with goods and feel that we don't have need for anything. Then we lose our “first love.” (See Revelation 3:17)

We see a process in God's dealings with His own people. God led Israel out of the bondage of Egypt to the Promised Land. Each step of the way brought new needs which were far beyond their ability to meet: deliverance from the pursuing Egyptian army, food and water in the barren desert, and direction regarding where and when to move.

All through those years, God did not allow the Israelites to plant crops or to build houses—they were totally dependent on His provision, direction and protection. Even the absence of manna one day each week was a powerful reminder ***not to take Him for granted.***

When the Israelites reached the edge of the Promised Land, God predicted that they would lose their love for Him, and He told them exactly how it would happen. The very same sequence takes place in our lives today!

HOW DO WE KEEP OUR “FIRST LOVE”?

Our “first love” is kept by realizing our daily need for God.

1. By Not Allowing Things to Become Idols

When God provides for our needs, we tend to become vain and think that it was our own strength or wisdom that met our needs. We become ungrateful and fail to maintain our dependence upon God. Instead, we depend upon our own abilities, wisdom, strength, and resources. For example, if we expect money to do for us what only God can do, then money has become our god. We begin to build our lives around our source of security.

When problems which are beyond our resources to solve come and threaten our security, we experience fear.

Fear of loss is God’s signal that something or someone else is a priority instead of God. That thing has become god in place of God.

2. By Practicing Gratitude Daily

As soon as God allowed His people to enjoy the abundant provisions of the Promised Land, they forgot the idea of a day-by-day provision for their needs. They no longer counted on the hand of God for bread, but trusted in their own hands and land to raise crops. They no longer needed God to keep their shoes from wearing out, like they did in the wilderness. They multiplied their gold and silver so they could make and buy all the shoes they wanted.

Before long the very warning that God gave them beforehand came true.

“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14, NIV)



DISCUSS

Talk about an experience you've had where someone lost gratitude for what you've done for him/her and how you felt about it.

We're often very aware of physical needs, but ***we must also become more and more aware of our spiritual, mental and emotional needs...***

- The more we're aware of all these needs, the more intense is ***our prayer.***
- The more we're aware of the needs of others, the more intense is ***our intercession.***
- The more we're aware of God's meeting these needs, the more genuine is ***our thanksgiving.***
- The more we tell others of His greatness in meeting needs, the more sincere ***our praise*** is.

When we're secure for the future and well-fed for the present, we begin to believe that we can avoid the consequences of violating God's standards. We lose our fear of the Lord. We become bold in doing those things which displease Him. We don't fear His not meeting our needs, because they're already met.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few moments to reflect on what's important to you. Write down at least five things, in order of importance.

Now, ask yourself, have I committed each one of these things to the Lord? Remind yourself: by doing so, I'll be able to thank God—whether or not He allows me to continue having it.

11 SYMPTOMS THAT I HAVE LEFT MY “FIRST LOVE”

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” (Revelations 2:4, NASB)

1. When my delight in the Lord is no longer greater than my delight in someone else, I have left my “first love.”

*“And you must love the Lord your God with all your **heart**...”* (Mark 12:30, NLT)

2. When my soul doesn’t long for times of rich fellowship in God’s Word or in prayer, I have left my “first love.”

*“And you must love the Lord your God with all your... **soul**...”* (Mark 12:30, NLT)

3. When my thoughts during leisure moments don’t EVER reflect upon the Lord, I have left my “first love.”

*“And you must love the Lord your God with... all your **mind**...”* (Mark 12:30, NLT)

“...in his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” (Psalm 10:4, NLT)

4. When I claim to be only human, and when I easily give in to those things which I know displease the Lord, I have left my “first love.”

*“And you must love the Lord your God with all your... **strength**.”* (Mark 12:30, NLT)

“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love...” (John 15:10, NIV)

“If you love me, keep my commands.” (John 14:15, NLT).

5. When I don’t willingly and cheerfully give to God’s work or to the needs of others, I have left my “first love.”

“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?”
(1 John 3:17, NLT)

6. When I cease to treat every Christian as I would the Lord, I have left my “first love.”

“...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40, NIV)

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34, NIV)

7. When I view the commands of Christ as restrictions to my happiness rather than expressions of His love, I have left my “first love.”

“Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.” (John 14:21, NLT)

8. When I inwardly strive for the acclaim of this world rather than the approval of the Lord, I have left my “first love.”

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.” (1 John 2:15, NLT)

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world.” (John 15:19, NLT)

9. When I fail to make Christ of His words known I have left my first love.

10. When I become complacent to sinful conditions around me, I have left my “first love.”

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12, NIV)

11. When I am unable to forgive another for offending me, I have left my “first love.”

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar...” (1 John 4:20, NLT)

PERSONAL EVALUATION



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few moments to reflect on which of the following 11 symptoms apply to you.

Do I delight in someone else more than in the Lord?

Do I no longer long for times of fellowship in God's Word and in prayer?

Do I no longer reflect at all upon the Lord during leisure moments?

Do I easily give in to those things which I know displease the Lord?

Do I give grudgingly to God's work or to the needs of other people?

Do I fail to treat every Christian as I would treat the Lord?

Do I view the commands of Christ as restrictions to my happiness rather than expressions of His love?

Do I inwardly strive for public acclaim more than the approval of the Lord?

Do I fail to witness to others because my fear is greater than my love for God.

Do I overlook or ignore the sinful conditions in my life?

Do I hold grudges against those who have offended me?

DOING "THE FIRST WORKS" WITH DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

The disciplines of prayer, Bible study, giving, fasting, and Christian service lead to new love for the Lord and are actually designed to maintain a sense of our need for Him.

We tend to think that the more faithful we are to God, the more "spiritual" we will feel, but quite the reverse should take place. The more Paul grew in spiritual maturity, the more he realized how unworthy and needy he was. Paul described himself as:

"...the least of the apostles, that are not meant to be called an apostle..." (1 Corinthians 15:9, NLT)

That is the kind of spiritual progress that will keep our "first love" alive. If our goal in each of these disciplines is to understand more deeply our total need of and dependence on God, then we will discover the "poverty of spirit" to which the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, NIV)

A Deeper Look at Prayer

Each aspect of prayer is designed to maintain our "first love" by reminding us of our sense of need before God.

Petitions reveal our motives. Do they seek to advance God's Kingdom, or are they attempts to build up our reserves so we won't have to call on Him so much in the future?

Confession cleanses us of our misalignment with God. It reminds us of Jesus' imputed righteousness and removes any hindrance from walking in victory through His power.

Thanksgiving measures our sense of need as we thank God for meeting specific needs during each day.

Intercession is the means by which we share the needs of others before God's throne.

A Deeper Look at Studying the Bible

Reading Scripture certainly causes us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The initial function of getting into God's Word, however, is not only to grow, but also to see our need to grow. As "newborn babies" we are to "...crave pure spiritual milk..." (1 Peter 2:2). Our sense of need turns into our desire for the Word.

Studying the Bible may sometimes lead to discouragement as we learn more about God's holy standards and realize how far short we fall in reaching them. Yet, this very sense of discouragement can be transformed into a deeper sense of need before a loving, merciful God.

"For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust." (Psalm 103:14, NLT)

A Deeper Look at Giving

The command to “freely give” when we have “freely received” is a practical necessity if we are to maintain our sense of dependence upon the Lord. The tithe is not just “a giving of the tenth,” but it’s a weekly reminder that all belongs to God.

The more we build assets for our future, the more prone we are to feel that we don’t need God in ways that other people do.

“You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”
(Revelation 3:17, NLT)

That which we do not give away represents responsibility, not ownership.

A Deeper Look at Fasting

Fasting is one of the most effective reminders of our need to depend upon God for “our daily bread.” It is also a vital reminder of the warning which God gave to His own people.

“Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God... for when you have become full and prosperous... do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God...” (Deuteronomy 8:11-12, 14, NLT)

Fasting illustrates the reality that life doesn’t consist of things we possess and that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. (See Luke 12:15 and Deuteronomy 8:3). Fasting dims the things of this world and opens up a deeper awareness of our spiritual, mental, and emotional needs.

A Deeper Look at Serving

One of the greatest benefits of Christian service is not to those who are served, but to those who are *serving*. The requirement of ministering to the spiritual needs of others forces us to see what is lacking in ourselves, and as a result, we have a greater dependence on God.

The statements “I’m not capable of teaching that class” or “I can’t witness” totally miss the point of Spirit-led Christian service. It’s not that we’re sufficient within ourselves but that we are totally inadequate to do anything apart from God’s power working through us. Paul explained,

“I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling... so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” (1 Corinthians 2:3, 5, NIV)

 ACTION STEP

Throughout your appointments this week, take one minute before each to pause and pray, “God I need your help in this appointment.”

Let this simple prayer rekindle that fresh, heartfelt connection to God, turning your routine meetings into moments where you invite Him into your life.
