

This is the time to stop defending your actions that God is telling you to surrender. Repentance opens the door back into God's presence. There is nothing that is worth sacrificing that.

3. Home to First Love

*2 "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: 'This is what the LORD says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown."
– Jeremiah 2:2 NIV*

In Jeremiah we hear the Lord say He remembers the devotion of our youth. This is not necessarily about our age. It is about our spiritual journey with Him. When we took our first steps with God we held tightly to His hand, then we toddled nearby in case we needed to lean on Him. Eventually we walked on our own and maybe we took a path that led us away from His presence. God remembers our early love and devotion to Him, do you?

Do you remember when your obedience to God was simple and your love for Him undivided? What distractions and disappointment along the way have crowded your affection? Ask Him to restore and renew your love and devotion and return to Him with your whole heart today.

WRAP-UP

Sometimes we don't realize how far we've drifted from God until we stop and look back. There may have been a time when our relationship with Jesus felt fresh, personal, and exciting, but over time, distractions, disappointments, routines, and everyday life can slowly take His place. Jesus invites us to remember where we started, recognize anything that has pulled us away, and turn our hearts back toward Him. Returning to our first love isn't about simply doing more—it's about renewing our love for Jesus, surrendering what has gotten in the way, and choosing to walk closely with Him again. God is not waiting to condemn us; He is inviting us home, ready to forgive, restore, and renew our relationship with Him.

MEMORY VERSE

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. – Matthew 22:37-38 NIV

Challenge –

This week take time to remember, repent and return whole-heartedly to God.

Returning Formed by His Presence – Week 1

INTRODUCTION

Our new sermon series follows the themes found in the devotional book Formed by His Presence by Michael D Perkins. Over time many of us have drifted from God's presence. This sermon series is an invitation to return, and to rekindle our first love experience with Jesus. Our studies will review the week's theme covered in our sermon as well as in the book. This week our theme is Returning to our first love.

Ice Breaker

Was there something in your life that once occupied first place for your time and attention but is no longer significant- a hobby, sport, or a project perhaps? Did your interest in it end suddenly or slowly?

Key Passage

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. – Revelation 2:4-5 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Drift and Awakening

36 "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" 37 Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. – Matthew 22:36-38 NLT

19 We love because he first loved us. – 1 John 4:19 NIV

When asked what the greatest or most important commandment was, Jesus replied; to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind. He didn't say obedience, or even repentance. The most important thing to God is the love relationship He seeks with each of us. Many of us have a very intense experience when we first ask Jesus to be our Lord. The

realization of God's love for us can be overwhelming. It is an experience likened to our first love.

Do you remember making a decision to surrender your life to Christ? Can you describe how you responded to God's unconditional love for you when that relationship was fresh and new?

Unfortunately, over time, we have a tendency to drift away from our closeness to God. In Rev 2:4 Jesus says the church at Ephesus had forsaken their first love. The word forsaken (Gr. *aphiēmi*) means to send away or disregard. It was used when a husband divorced his wife. If you've ever experienced rejection by a loved one you know that Jesus' heart was wounded. But He gives us a remedy.

What three steps does Jesus prescribe as the remedy?

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice--the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2 NLT

24 But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on buying it for the full price. I will not take what is yours and give it to the LORD. I will not present burnt offerings that have cost me nothing!" – 1 Chronicles 21:24 NLT

In his letter to the Romans, Paul urges them to make their lives a living sacrifice. But our lives are strongly influenced by the world around us. We may succumb to the pressure to soften our values, blur our convictions and negotiate our devotion. When offered free oxen, wood and grain David declined because he couldn't sacrifice what cost him nothing.

If the practice of our faith has become familiar, rote and predictable, we may be offering only what is convenient and comfortable as our sacrifice to God. Are you willing to sacrifice more than the minimum requirement to God? What is one area that you sense God is calling you to deeper commitment? Where can you be more fully obedient to His call?

The first step in returning to our first love is to remember where we started.

If we are going to return to our first love relationship with Jesus, we must stop asking "what is required" and start asking "what is worthy" of our God?

2. Conviction and Repentance

8 And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. – John 16:8 NLT
...For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth--the one who accuses them before our God day and night. – Revelation 12:10b NLT

Before we can return to our first love, Jesus tells us to remember where we started with Him and repent where we have fallen away. But before we repent, we need to recognize why we need to repent. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin. The act of conviction is not done to inflict punishment; it is an act of mercy that puts a spotlight on the sin that is leading us to death and draw us back to God who forgives and restores us. If awareness of sin causes you to hide from God you are hearing the voice of Satan, called the accuser in Rev 12:10. That is the voice of condemnation pushes us away from God but the conviction of the Spirit compels us to run to God for forgiveness and restoration.

Have you experienced the Spirit's conviction of sin? How do you tend to respond? Is there something that makes you feel condemned and causes you to hide from God? Pause for a moment to listen to the Spirit and respond. Don't justify or ignore anything that keeps you from the presence of God. The longer you delay, the more your conscience dulls and your heart hardens. Accept God's offer of mercy and restoration.

12 That is why the LORD says, "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. 13 Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead." Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish. – Joel 2:12-13 NLT

The natural result of conviction should be repentance. That doesn't mean feeling bad or saying "Sorry." When we repent, it means we have changed our minds about what we were doing, and we are changing our actions as well. Repentance is a change of heart and a change of direction to align ourselves with God.

If the Holy Spirit has revealed an area of misalignment in your life, what are the changes you will take to repent and return to alignment with God?