The Point
Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.

The Bible Meets Life
As we go through different stages in life, we change. And as we change, our interests change. Old interests take a backseat, and we find new interests. We find new, exciting things we love to do and lose our love for the former things. It’s all a part of growing and maturing. But what if this happened in our relationship with Jesus? In Revelation 2, we get a glimpse into a church that had been busy doing many things for God but ultimately lost their “first love” for Jesus. It can happen to us too, but there is a solution.

The Passage
Revelation 2:1-7
The Setting
The apostle John found himself on the island of Patmos, probably as a political prisoner of Rome for preaching the gospel. While there, he received an extensive revelation from God regarding the outcome of the conflict between the forces of God and the forces of evil. The revelation begins with a “state of the churches” address.

Revelation 2:1-7

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 ”I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’ ”

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GET INTO THE STUDY

ENGAGE: Begin the session with one or more of the Engage Options on the next page. (This is optional. If you’d rather skip the Engage Options, just begin with the first discussion question.)

SAY: Having a steady routine isn’t a bad thing, but sometimes that routine can become a rut. We can do things merely out of habit and lose sight of what motivated us in the first place. That’s especially troubling when applied to our walk with Christ—when what we lose sight of is our passion for Christ.

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

THE POINT: Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.

READ: Read and summarize The Bible Meets Life for your group.

In high school, soccer was a passion of mine. But as I got older, soccer took a backseat in my life. I had new interests. I found new, exciting things that I loved to do. Soccer was still an interest of mine, but I lost the love that I once had for my favorite sport. As we go through different stages in life, we change. And as we change, our interests change. Old interests take a backseat, and we find new interests. We find new, exciting things we love to do and lose our love for the former things. It’s all a part of growing and maturing. But what if this happened in our relationship with Jesus? In Revelation 2, we get a glimpse into a church that had been busy doing many things for God but ultimately lost their “first love” for Jesus. It can happen to us too, but there is a solution.

DISCUSS: Ask students the question, “What interests did you have two years ago that you no longer have?”

PRAY: Transition into the session by praying that students would see the importance of always being motivated and guided by their love for Christ.
Engage Options

► Lead with Action
Invite students to play a round of the game Telephone. Have everyone circle up and enlist a volunteer to start the game by think of a phrase and whispering it to the person next to him or her. Each person will whisper the message to the person next to him or her until it gets all the way around the circle. Have the last person say aloud what they heard and compare it with the original message. Say, “As the message was passed along, it morphed and changed. Sometimes as believers we will face the temptation to put our hope in something other than Jesus. But we’re called to remember our first love, Jesus, and trust that He is the only completely fulfilling relationship we will ever have.”

► Lead with Atmosphere
Before students arrive, hang photos and images on the walls that represent hobbies and interests of younger children. For example: hopscotch, cartoon characters, coloring books, baby dolls, bicycles with training wheels. Say, “Does anyone see images that represent an interest you once had?” Allow time for discussion. “Most likely the images you see represent interests you once had but no longer have. As you’ve gotten older you’ve picked up different hobbies and interests, and that’s OK. But in our relationship with God, we are called to remember Him as our first and true love.”

► Lead with Media
Show a clip from the movie Dumb & Dumber in which Lloyd Christmas says goodbye to a woman he just met. After showing the video, say, “Have you ever lost something you loved or a friendship with someone? How did that made you feel? It is important for us to remember who first loved us—our Creator. When the rest of the world fades, Jesus, our first love, will remain.” Always watch any video in advance that you plan to use with your students to ensure it is appropriate for your ministry and church.

OPTION: Instead of hobbies and interests, you could use children’s music. Have some fun trying to remember the words to the songs.

OPTION: Refer to the session poster and ask students to identify the objects pictured. Say, “These things were all really popular at one time but have since been replaced with newer things. Unlike these items, our relationship with the Lord is something that can never be replaced.
STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.

REVELATION 2:1-4

**SAY:** God gave John a vision about things that were to come (see Rev. 1:10-20). Jesus instructed John to write letters to seven churches. The first church was the church at Ephesus. Initially it appears that Jesus was pleased with all the church was doing, but Jesus had one very specific statement that the church needed to hear.

**GUIDE:** Help students understand the difference between focusing on loving Jesus and focusing on what they can do for Him.

First let’s look at all the positive things Jesus pointed out about the church in Ephesus:

1. They worked hard for the Lord, had endurance, and didn’t tolerate evil.
2. They rooted out lying teachers.
3. They faced many trials, but never grew tired.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “What’s the difference between doing things for Jesus and spending time with Jesus?”

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read the following:

They were doing great things, but they didn’t love Jesus like they used to. The greatest commandment is to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Our love for Jesus is the number one thing we must hold on to, not what we do for Him.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “What are some symptoms of losing sight of our first love for Jesus?”

**DO:** Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, “First Love.”

First Love

We all can lose sight of our love for Jesus. It only takes a slight distraction and we lose our focus. List ways the following things distract you from Jesus.

- Relationships
- Sports
- Friends
- School
- Church

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1. “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.’”

—REVELATION 2:1-4
Commentary

REVELATION 2:1-4

The apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos (see Rev. 1:9). As John worshiped on the Lord’s day (see v. 10), Jesus appeared to him with a message for the churches in Asia Minor who were facing intense times of persecution. The Lord instructed John to write seven letters to seven churches. The first of these letters was to the church in Ephesus (see 2:1-7).

[Verse 1] Jesus instructed John to write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. When this letter was penned, the city of Ephesus contained a population somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 people, making it an extremely large city for its day. In the middle of this cosmopolitan city with its pagan worship, the gospel had taken hold. The apostle Paul spent three years there, more than in any other city (see Acts 20:31). Timothy served as a pastor in Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 1:3), and later John, the writer of Revelation, was its pastor. Jesus identified Himself as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and as the One who walks among the seven gold lampstands (see Rev. 1:20).

[Verse 2] Jesus commended the church for four things. First, He commended their works—a general word for the work of the church. He also praised their labor. This word described the difficult things the church had to do, probably in the face of extreme opposition. He also praised the church’s endurance; they did not shirk their responsibility in the face of persecution. Finally, the church did not tolerate evil. The church stood for purity. Also, they tested those who call themselves apostles and are not. They did not gullibly accept leaders but tested them to make sure they lined up with the truth.

[Verse 3] The church did not tolerate immoral behavior or false doctrine (see v. 2), but they did tolerate hardships and persecution. They did not grow weary because they carried in themselves the name of Jesus Christ. Based on verses 1-3, we might describe the Ephesian congregation as a diligent, hardworking church that stood strongly in the face of persecution and stood against incorrect doctrine. Yet, this wasn’t enough. Their commendation was followed by a condemnation.

[Verse 4] The word but marks a transition in tone. The church in Ephesus seemed to have everything except the main thing—love. In the midst of their work, their toil, and their endurance in opposing false teaching, they had abandoned the one thing that mattered most. Jesus condemned the church because they had abandoned the love they had at first. The greatest commandment in the Old Testament was to love the Lord with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength (see Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30). Though the church at Ephesus had maintained doctrinal purity and continued to do good works, they had forgotten that everything they did needed to be motivated by a love for Christ.
STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.

REVELATION 2:5-7

SAY: The church at Ephesus may have lost its first love, but Jesus gave them the solution—repent. The word repent, which means to change the way we are living, is more than just a one time thing. It requires that we continually turning our backs to our sin and choosing to live for Jesus instead.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, “What does it look like to repent and turn to back Jesus?”

GUIDE: Help students understand the important role listening plays in returning to God.

For the church to repent—to turn back—meant they would “do the works you did at first” (v. 5). They were to do whatever it was that led them to such a strong relationship with Jesus. If the church refused to repent, Jesus would come and remove their lampstand from its place. When you blow a candle out, the candle loses its ability to give light—to have influence over the darkness. If the church at Ephesus did not return to a love for Jesus, He would remove their influence.

Verse 7 is essential to the entire process of returning to your love for Jesus. Jesus has given you the key to the entire process in this verse and it may not be what you’re thinking. The key? “Listen.” Returning to God is only possible if we listen to God. Jesus said, “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” In other words: listen up.
REVELATION 2:5-7

[Verse 5] The cure for the loveless church at Ephesus included two steps. First, Jesus told the church to remember then how far they had fallen. They were to recall the love they had for the Lord and for one another when they first believed. The words have fallen do not indicate that they had lost their salvation; rather, they had gone backward in their devotion to Christ. The first step in changing an attitude or behavior must be an admission of guilt. By remembering where they once were in their love for the Lord, they would immediately see the need for the next step.

Second, as the Ephesian Christians compared their love for the Lord with what it was when they first believed, they would naturally see the need to repent. Repentance involves a change of mind or a turning from one thing to another. Jesus encouraged the Ephesian Christians to turn from good works that were not motivated by love and do the works they did at first.

Have you noticed that you can do the same activity with two different attitudes and get two different results? You can do the right thing out of duty and obligation alone and miss the joy of doing it out of love. That’s how one child can get bitter while caring for an aging parent—because love is absent—while another can receive joy out of what many think is a thankless task because the love for the parent is what motivates him.

Jesus promised that if the Ephesian Christians did not repent, He would come and remove their lampstand from its place. Some inaccurately believe that this teaches He will take away a Christian’s salvation if he or she does not repent. However, we must remember that the lampstand represented the church. The congregation would cease to exist because it had lost its love for the Lord, which in turn caused it to lose its love for people.

God’s judgment on a loveless church is necessary and actually enhances His kingdom’s work. Certainly it is tragic when a church’s lampstand is removed; however, it’s even more tragic for that church to remain open without loving the Lord and loving people. This removal is not automatic, though. The hope is that by remembering their first love, the church will turn back to Him.

Jesus used the word repent for a second time in verse 5, which emphasizes the importance of the command. He didn’t reprimand the church to make them feel bad, but to heal them.
STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.

REVELATION 2:5-7 (CONTINUED)

SUMMARIZE: Help students see how the message God was sending to the church at Ephesus is also a message for us.

What did the Spirit say to the church at Ephesus—and to us? Listen and hear these three words:

1. Remember. If you find yourself at a place where your love for Jesus has dwindled, return to the things that were present when you were walking closely with God.

2. Repent. Anything, no matter how good, that keeps you from your love for Jesus is a sin. Surrender these things to Jesus and watch Him begin to move in your life once more.

3. Return. At the heart of Jesus’ message is a loving call: “Return to me.” As we turn from sin, we turn toward Jesus.

READ: Ask for a volunteer to read the following:

When we return to Jesus, we will regain a love that truly does fill everything we do. When our love for Jesus is wrong, nothing is right. But when our love for Jesus is right, He makes everything else right.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, “How do we train ourselves to listen to God’s Spirit throughout the day?”

—REVELATION 2:5-7
[Verse 6] After chiding the church for losing its first love, Jesus again stated a positive aspect of the church. He commended them because they hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans were a heretical group that had infiltrated the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, as well as Ephesus. This group taught immoral practices and idolatry, probably in a similar style to the heresy taught by Balaam (see Num. 31:16; 2 Pet. 2:15). Once again, the doctrinal purity and moral behavior of the Ephesian Christians did matter; the Lord revealed that He also hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. Love does not mean turning a blind eye to wrong doctrine or behavior. But without love, the church could not continue to thrive and exist.

[Verse 7] Jesus echoed the warning He had given to His hearers at the end of the parable of the sower (see Matt. 13:9) when He said, “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” All seven letters in Revelation 2–3 include this expression. The church needs to listen to the reward for those who heed Jesus’ words.

Jesus promised a reward to the victor. The victor obviously was the one who has remembered from where he had fallen and repented of his sin. Ultimately, a believer’s victory is based on the blood of Jesus Christ (see Rev. 12:11), not human effort. Since the Holy Spirit is active in remembering and repentance, this victory is not some human achievement, but a work of God in the life of a believer.

The victorious one was promised a special privilege: the right to eat from the tree of life. The tree of life first appeared in Genesis 2:9, where it was one of the many trees that God made available to Adam and Eve for food. However, when Adam and Eve instead ate from the one forbidden tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—God made this tree off limits (see Gen. 3:22,24) and banned Adam and Eve from the garden. The tree of life is mentioned again in Revelation 22:2.

Jesus mentioned the location of the tree with the phrase, in God’s paradise. Paradise was a word that literally meant a garden. The Book of Revelation, beginning here in chapter two, portrays Jesus as the Restorer of the lost paradise (see Rev. 22:1-4). What a beautiful thought to think that Jesus is able to restore everything that was lost in the fall of humanity. By eating of the tree of life, death and suffering are banished and cannot touch the one who has trusted in Jesus (v. 2).

Sometimes Christians and churches get caught in a routine or rut. They go through the motions rather than doing what they do out of love for Christ and love for people. True awakening involves remembering one’s first love and repenting of the deeds that are done without it.
APPLY IT

**ASK:** How do we return to our first love?

**READ:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It.**

- **Remember.** Write down the top three things that describe your journey with Jesus when you felt closest to Him.
- **Repent.** Write down the stuff in your life that chokes your relationship with Jesus. Take your list to God. Ask Him for wisdom to make changes in your life so you can get back to your “first love.”
- **Return.** Write down a practical plan for returning to God. This may be a new commitment to reading the Bible, prayer, or sharing your faith with others.

**GUIDE:** Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

**SAY:** Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

WRAP UP

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to help students always act out of and be motivated by their passionate love for Christ.

**ASK:** Ask students about last week’s **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

**GUIDE:** Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them the next time you meet.

For free online training on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife

**TIP:** Help your students write out a plan to return to God. Help them make practical decisions that will keep their hearts pointed toward their first love.
LEADER LIVE IT OUT

Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.

Never Forget | Psalm 77:11-12

It’s easy to forget the good times, but for some strange reason it’s easy to remember the bad times. You should never forget the good times, especially when they surround Jesus. Write down your greatest memory from your relationship with God. Write out what you were feeling, the changes you experienced, and what His presence was like. Cherish that memory and never forget it, because that memory will help you return to God when you’ve wandered.

► My greatest memory from my relationship with God:
  ► What I was feeling:
  ► The changes I experienced:
  ► What His presence was like:

LIVE IT OUT: Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

If he or she plans to complete Never Forget:
  • Share with your student a memory of something great God did for you. Then ask him or her to do the same.
  • Talk about how recalling these memories can help draw you back to God when you wander from Him.

If he or she plans to complete A Helping Hand:
  • Spend time praying with your student for a friend who has wandered from God. Talk about how he or she hopes to reach out and help that friend.

ONE CONVERSATION™

Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.

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THE POINT: Come back to a love for Jesus that fills your life.
  • What are the things in your life that have drawn you away from your love for the Lord?
  • Tell your student about a time when something distracted you from your passion for Christ.

Discuss this quote: “God’s gifts put man’s best dreams to shame.”1
—Elizabeth Barrett Browning


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