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One day, a man was cleaning out an old dresser when he noticed a small box tucked away in the back of one of the drawers. It was covered with dust, wrapped with a faded ribbon, and written across the top were two simple words: “Always Remember.” He couldn't remember the last time he had seen the box. It had probably been decades. He carefully untied the ribbon and lifted the lid. Inside was a collection of handwritten letters. Some were faded with age. Others were still folded exactly as they had been the day they were placed there. He picked up the first letter and began to read.

Dear Jane,

What a remarkable day this has been! To see you walking down the aisle in your beautiful dress and then to hear the words “I do” so easily come from your lips made my heart leap for joy. From the day I met you, I knew there was something different about you. You make me want to be a better man—to be gentler, kinder, more forgiving, and more compassionate. Somehow, when you look at me, you are able to see beyond my failures and shortcomings and see the man that, by God's grace, I might become. Today I promised to have and to hold you, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, and to cherish you until death parts us.

Jane, I never want you to forget this: I will never stop loving you.

Your happily married husband,

John.

John sat silently for a moment, and then the tears began to come. Jane was still his wife. He had never left her. There had been no affair, no abandonment, and no great crisis that had torn their marriage apart. They still ate supper together,

paid the bills, maintained the house, attended family gatherings, and remembered birthdays and anniversaries. From the outside, everything looked fine. But as John held that old letter in his hands, he realized something that broke his heart. Somewhere along the way, he had stopped delighting in the woman he had once been so excited to know. The relationship had gradually become more about maintaining a life together than cherishing the person with whom he was sharing that life. And it hadn't happened overnight. Love had simply been crowded by familiarity, responsibility, busyness, and routine. The marriage remained, but the fire had grown cold.

And I wonder this morning whether something very similar can happen in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Think back to when you first came to know Him. There was a time when you realized that you were a sinner separated from a holy God, unable to save yourself. But then someone with those “beautiful feet” Paul speaks about in [Romans 10:15](#) brought you the good news of Jesus Christ. You heard that Christ loved you, that He died for your sins, that He rose from the grave, and by God's grace, you repented and believed. You who had been lost were found ([Luke 15:24](#)). You who had been condemned were declared free from condemnation ([Romans 8:1](#)). You who had been far from God were brought near by the blood of Christ ([Ephesians 2:13](#)). You were adopted into God's family and made His child and heir ([Romans 8:15-17](#)). Everything seemed new. You sang songs of praise because the words meant something deeply personal to you. You opened the Bible wanting to hear from God. You prayed because you wanted to talk with Him. You wanted other people to know about Jesus. You wanted your decisions, your relationships, your plans, and even your footsteps to belong to Him. Christ wasn't merely part of your life. He had become the treasure of your life.

But then the years passed. Life became busy. Responsibilities increased. And almost without realizing it, something began to change. You still believe in Jesus. You still come to church. You still read your Bible. You still pray. You still worship. You may still teach, serve, give, help others, and faithfully fulfill the responsibilities God has given you. But apparently doing the right things does

not always mean that the heart remains in the right place. Because if we are willing to be truthful before God, some of us may have to admit, I still serve Him, but I don't seek Him the way I once did. I still worship Him, but I don't stand in awe of Him the way I once did. I still read His Word, but I don't always hunger to hear His voice. I still love Jesus, but somewhere along the way, the fire has grown cold.

And perhaps the most frightening thing about spiritual coldness is that everything on the outside can still look right. That brings us to a church called Ephesus. If we had visited this church near the end of the first century, we probably would have been impressed. They worked hard. They persevered through hardship. They would not tolerate wickedness. They tested those who claimed to be apostles and exposed false teachers. They had endured suffering for the name of Christ and had not grown weary ([Revelation 2:2-3](#)). This was a busy church, a discerning church, a doctrinally careful church, and a persevering church. We might have walked out of their service and said, "Now that is a healthy church."

But Jesus saw something no visitor could see. He looked beyond their doctrine, beyond their service, and beyond their perseverance, and He looked directly into their hearts. Then He said, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" ([Revelation 2:4](#)). They had not abandoned Christ. They had not abandoned the church. They had not abandoned sound doctrine. But somewhere along the way, their love for Christ had grown cold. What I love about this passage is that Jesus doesn't simply tell them what is wrong. He tells them how to come back. He tells them to remember from where they have fallen, to repent, and to return to the works they did at first ([Revelation 2:5](#)). So this morning I want us to ask a very personal question: What do you do when the fire grows cold? How does a Christian who still believes, still serves, and still knows the truth rediscover the love of Jesus Christ? Because perhaps what some of us need most this morning isn't more religious activity. Perhaps we need to return to the love we once had for Jesus.

Christ Sees More Than our Service

Revelation 2:1–3 NIV

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Jesus begins His message to Ephesus by reminding them who is speaking: “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands” ([Revelation 2:1](#)). The seven stars represent the angels, or messengers, of the seven churches, while the seven golden lampstands symbolize the churches themselves. By holding the stars and walking among the lampstands, Christ presents Himself as the One who possesses, oversees, and remains intimately present with His church [1]. “God is not an absentee landlord or a disinterested deity. He is there, up close and personal, intimately present” [2], and ultimately controls the destiny of all creation [3]. Jesus knows His church. He sees its struggles, its sacrifices, its faithfulness—and, as we will soon discover, He also sees the condition of its heart.

When Christ looked at Ephesus, He saw much that was worthy of commendation: “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance” ([Revelation 2:2](#)). Ephesus was home to the magnificent temple of Artemis, known to the Romans as Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and a source of enormous civic pride and idolatry [4]. We see just how deeply this worship permeated the city in [Acts 19:23–28](#), when Paul's preaching

threatened the business of those who made silver shrines of Artemis. To openly follow Jesus in such a culture came at a price. Because Christians would not bow to Diana or worship the emperor, they could become the targets of slander, boycotts, social ostracism, economic oppression, and even physical violence [5]. Yet Jesus says they persevered. They had become tired in the work, but they had not become tired of the work.

They were also committed to the truth. Jesus says, “You cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false” ([Revelation 2:2](#)). Years earlier, Paul had specifically warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure “savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” ([Acts 20:29](#)). Now, decades later, Jesus essentially tells them, you listened. They had guarded the gospel, rejected false teaching, and remained faithful despite opposition. Jesus concludes, “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary” ([Revelation 2:3](#)).

The Greatest Danger is Losing Our Love for Christ

Jesus saw something in Ephesus that no one else could see. Their hands were still working, their doctrine was still sound, and their perseverance was remarkable, but their hearts were no longer where they once had been. Christ tells them in [Revelation 2:4](#), “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.” Apparently, doing the right things does not necessarily mean the heart remains in the right place. As Scripture reminds us, “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” ([1 Samuel 16:7](#), KJV).

Interestingly, the history of Ephesus gives us a picture of what can happen spiritually. Ephesus was known as the “Supreme Metropolis of Asia,” partly because of its important seaport [6]. Yet the Cayster River continually deposited sediment into its harbor. Ancient sources describe both the problem and the

attempts made to keep the harbor open [7]. The sediment kept returning until eventually the coastline moved so far away that today the ruins of ancient Ephesus lie approximately three miles inland from the Aegean Sea [8]. The harbor wasn't destroyed in a day. It slowly filled in. A little sediment today and a little more tomorrow. From one day to the next, hardly anyone would have noticed the difference, but eventually something that had once brought life to the city became disconnected from its source.

Perhaps something similar had happened in the church. Their love for Christ had not disappeared through one dramatic act of rebellion; it had gradually been crowded out. Decades of serving, enduring opposition, and defending the truth may have shifted their attention from delighting in Christ to simply accomplishing the work [9]. The church once commended for its “love for all God's people” ([Ephesians 1:15](#)) was now being warned that something precious had been lost [10]. And that is the danger for us. We can become so busy working for Christ that we neglect being with Christ. Duty can replace devotion. We can defend His Word without delighting in His presence, sing about Him without being amazed by Him, and gradually become more focused on the work of Christ than on Christ Himself [11]. Jesus said the greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” ([Matthew 22:37](#)). So perhaps the question is not simply, “Am I still serving Jesus?” The Ephesians could answer yes. The deeper question is: “Do I still treasure Jesus?” Because our hands can remain busy for Christ even while our hearts slowly drift from Him.

Why The Fire Grows Cold

Revelation 2:4 NIV

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

How does this happen? How can people who once seemed passionate about Christ gradually become indifferent toward Him?

Scripture gives us sobering examples of how quickly spiritual devotion can begin to drift. Paul was astonished that the Galatians were “so quickly deserting the One who called you” ([Galatians 1:6](#)). Even some who personally heard Jesus teach eventually “turned back and no longer followed Him” ([John 6:66](#)). Spiritual decline is possible, but usually the fire does not go out all at once. Think again about the harbor at Ephesus. It wasn't destroyed by one enormous deposit, but by the slow accumulation of sediment. Our hearts can drift from Christ in much the same way. Jesus warned that “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word” ([Matthew 13:22](#)). Responsibilities multiply. Worries consume our attention. Comfort becomes increasingly important. Entertainment occupies more of our thoughts. None of these things may seem significant by themselves, but gradually they can begin occupying places in our hearts that once belonged to Christ. Then there is the influence of the world. John warns, “Do not love the world or anything in the world” ([1 John 2:15–17](#)). Demas illustrates that danger—his love for Christ was eventually overcome by his love for the present world ([2 Timothy 4:10](#)). Jesus Himself warned that as wickedness increases, “the love of most will grow cold” ([Matthew 24:12](#)). Sin can work just as quietly. Scripture warns about “sin's deceitfulness” because it can gradually harden the heart ([Hebrews 3:12–13](#)). Sin often works silently, gaining ground if its earliest movements are not resisted [12]. One compromise seems insignificant. One wrong attitude is tolerated. One desire is entertained. One spiritual discipline is neglected. And another layer of sediment settles upon the heart.

Even prosperity can become spiritual sediment. Moses warned Israel that when life became comfortable, “then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God” ([Deuteronomy 8:11–14](#)). The Laodiceans eventually said, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing,” while Christ described them as spiritually poor and lukewarm ([Revelation 3:15–17](#)). Perhaps most dangerous of all is simply neglecting our communion with Christ. We can

continue attending church, serving, reading Scripture, and defending sound doctrine while slowly losing our delight in Christ Himself. If we pursue yesterday's spiritual experiences without continuing to grow in fellowship with Christ, even our early joy can eventually give way to spiritual apathy [13].

Perhaps that is what happened at Ephesus. The fire did not necessarily go out because they suddenly rejected Christ. It grew cold because other things gradually crowded Him out. Like sediment filling their harbor, worries, worldly desires, tolerated sin, comfort, distraction, and spiritual neglect can accumulate almost unnoticed—a little today, a little tomorrow—until increasingly our thoughts and affections are occupied by everything except the One who saved us. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters” ([Matthew 6:24](#)). So perhaps the question is not simply, “Have I abandoned Christ?” The more searching question is, “What has been slowly accumulating in my heart that is crowding out my love for Christ?” Because the fire usually doesn't grow cold in a day. It grows cold when we stop feeding it.

Christ Shows us the Way Back

Revelation 2:5 NIV

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.

Jesus does not merely tell the Ephesians what is wrong; He tells them how to come back: “Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” ([Revelation 2:5](#)). There are three movements in Christ's prescription: remember, repent, and return. First, remember. Jesus tells them to consider where they once were and how far they had drifted. Remember when Christ was your greatest treasure. Remember the wonder of realizing that your sins were forgiven, that you had passed from death to life, and that salvation was entirely

the gift of God's grace. Scripture teaches that this rescue includes forgiveness and deliverance from the bondage of sin and the powers that once held us [15]. Paul reminds us that we were spiritually dead, but God “made us alive with Christ” entirely by His grace ([Ephesians 2:1–5](#)) [16]. Sometimes the road back begins simply by remembering the grace that first captured our hearts.

Second, Jesus says, repent. Repentance means recognizing what has taken Christ's rightful place in our affections and turning from it back to Him. “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near” ([Isaiah 55:6–7](#)). And when we recognize that our hearts have drifted, we do not need to hide from God. We are invited to “approach God's throne of grace with confidence” to receive mercy and find grace ([Hebrews 4:16](#)). We come back to the Potter and allow Him once again to shape the clay: “We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” ([Isaiah 64:8](#)). Finally, Jesus says, return—“do the things you did at first” ([Revelation 2:5](#)). He isn't telling them to earn their salvation by doing more religious work. They were already working. He is calling them back to works that flow from love. Jesus said, “Remain in me... Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” ([John 15:4–5](#)). The branch does not produce fruit by simply trying harder; it bears fruit by remaining connected to the Vine. And when Christ produces that fruit through us, our good works cause others to “glorify your Father in heaven” ([Matthew 5:16](#)).

The warning is serious. Jesus says, “If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” ([Revelation 2:5](#)). Since the lampstand represents the church ([Revelation 1:20](#)), Christ is warning that a church can retain its activity and outward appearance while eventually losing its place as a light-bearing witness for Him [14]. A church may have polished music, impressive programs, and powerful preaching, but without a living love for Christ, it can become little more than religious activity. The way back, then, is not simply “work harder.” The Ephesians were already doing that. Christ says: Remember the grace that saved you. Repent of whatever has crowded Me out. Return to the fellowship and obedience that once flowed from love. Jesus does not call us merely to recover an old feeling. He calls us to return to an old love.

Christ's Promise to Those Who Return

Revelation 2:7 NIV

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The Tree of Life takes us all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. In Eden, “the tree of life” stood in the midst of the garden ([Genesis 2:9](#)). Adam and Eve enjoyed fellowship with God, but sin shattered that fellowship. After they sinned, they were driven from the garden, and the way to the Tree of Life was guarded ([Genesis 3:22–24](#)). Humanity had lost Paradise through sin. But when we come to the end of the Bible, the Tree of Life appears again. In the New Jerusalem, John sees “the tree of life” beside the river flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ([Revelation 22:1–2](#)). What humanity lost through sin, God restores through Christ. The promise of the Tree of Life points us toward eternal life and unbroken fellowship with God in His restored creation. Genesis begins with the Tree of Life. Revelation ends with the Tree of Life. What sin destroyed, Christ restores. Jesus isn't merely calling the Ephesians back to something they once experienced; He is calling them forward to something infinitely greater—to enjoy Christ forever.

So as we finish, let me ask you: Are you still serving Christ? Probably. Are you still believing the right things? Probably. But here is the question Jesus asked Ephesus: Do you still delight in Him? Do you still treasure Jesus? If the fire has grown cold, Jesus does not simply say, Try harder. He says, Remember. Repent. Return. And don't spend all your time staring at the coldness of your own heart. Look again at Christ. Scripture tells us to be “fixing our eyes on Jesus” ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). When Isaiah saw the Lord, he was changed ([Isaiah 6:1–8](#)). When Paul saw the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, everything else became loss ([Philippians 3:7–10](#)). And when the disciples encountered the risen Christ on the

road to Emmaus, they said, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” ([Luke 24:32](#)). The Christ we sometimes become accustomed to is the Christ heaven cannot stop worshipping ([Revelation 5:9–12](#)).

So look again at Jesus. Look at His grace. Look at His cross. Look at the empty tomb. Remember the Savior who loved you and gave Himself for you. And remember where He is taking you—to the Paradise of God, to the Tree of Life, and ultimately into His presence forever. The fire grows cold when our eyes drift from Christ. May God rekindle it as we behold Him again.

Footnotes

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, “Revelation,” in *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 12:569–570.

[2] Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 33.

[3] Michael Youssef, Mohler Albert, and R. Albert, *God’s Final Call: How the Book of Revelation Pulls Back the Veil on Current Events and Our Ultimate Future* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2025), 40.

[4] Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 32.

- [5] Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 34.
- [6] Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 39:80
- [7] David E. Graves, *Cities of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the Places of the Bible in the Steps of Jesus and the Apostles*, Cultural Background of the Bible (New Brunswick, Canada: Electronic Christian Media, 2023), 3:330–332.
- [8] David A. deSilva, *Archaeology and the Ministry of Paul: A Visual Guide*, Archaeology and the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2025), 158.
- [9] Grant Richison, *Verse by Verse through the Book of Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2006).
- [10] John MacArthur, *Because the Time Is near: John Macarthur Explains the Book of Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 50–51.
- [11] Simon Vibert, *The Diamond Marriage: Have Ultimate Purpose in Your Marriage* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 13.
- [12] Simon Ponsonby, *The Pursuit of the Holy: A Divine Invitation* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010).
- [13] Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Revelation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., n.d.), 238.
- [14] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants (New Testament)* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 3:93.
- [15] Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 167.
- [16] Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 176–177.

