***Session 2*** ***Jesus’ Message to the Church of Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)***

1. EPHESUS: Returning to Our First Love (Rev. 2:1-7)
	1. Jesus’ primary message to this church was to call them to return to their first love (Rev. 2:4).

1“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2“I know your works, your labor…and you have tested those who say they are apostles and…have found them liars; 3and you have persevered…and labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand… 6But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which
I also hate. 7He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”’” (Rev. 2:1-7)

*Revelation 2 and 3, again, is the church after God’s own heart. This is the one time where Jesus gives a definitive statement of issues He wants the Church to embrace which He values and affirms and the issues that He wants His Church to be purified from. It is the only time in the scripture that He Himself lays it out clearly with His own lips. And the fact that it is given in context to the Book of Revelation is in essence saying that though it had a great value to the churches in that day, yet it is in essence saying that in the unfolding of the glory and the pressure in the Book of Revelation one of the Holy Spirit’s objectives is to get the Church to embrace the things that Jesus highlights in chapters 2 and 3 and to see the Church purified from the things that Jesus corrects in these two chapters. These chapters give us tremendous insight into what the Holy Spirt wants us paying attention to, so I don’t read these chapters as a kind of historical review of how it was in the old days. I read these chapters saying this is what the Spirit is really highlighting in the Body of Christ today.*

*Here we are looking at the church of Ephesus, the first church that He identifies. Now, most of us know, as it is very well known, that the message to the church of Ephesus was to return to their first love. That is probably the most well-known of all of the seven churches here. Let’s just read through it to get an overview, then we will highlight several of the phrases here in the next few moments.*

*“To the angel,” which is speaking of the human messenger because the word “angel” means messenger. It can be a heavenly messenger or a human messenger, as it is the same Greek word. “To the messenger,” or to the primary apostolic leader of the church in the city of Ephesus, and, again, Ephesus is in Turkey. As a matter of fact, all seven of these churches are in what is modern Turkey today. Verse 1, “These things says He”—the Lord Jesus—“who holds the seven stars in His hand, He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, ‘O church of Ephesus, I know your works,’”—and that is a positive thing—“‘I see the way you are pouring yourself out. I know your labor. I know that you test those who falsely claim to be apostles and are not.’” In other words, they stood up for truth in a way that was costly to them.*

*Verse 3, “and you have persevered; you have labored for My namesake,” so there are some godly motives. He is saying, “You are doing it for Me. I see that. You have not become weary.” That translates to “You have not quit under the pressure and the long amount of time that has gone by.” This is about forty years after the church was planted, so they are in their fortieth-plus year of a church. He says, in effect, “You have not quit. You have not drawn back. You have not given up. You have not grown weary after forty years!”*

*Verse 4, “Nevertheless, I have this one thing against you, that you have left your first love,” and He is talking about love for Him because they are really involved in serving people and reaching out to people. That is the part He is commending them for.*

*Verse 5, this is a little bit surprising. He says, “Remember from where you have fallen.” The word, “fallen,” is an intense word for a church that has been persevering in ministry and standing up for truth, then “remember from where you have fallen.” I mean, like, “Ouch!” “Repent. Go back and do the first things.” In other words, “Respond to Me in the way you did in those early days forty years ago, when the great revival hit the city of Ephesus, when loving God was the primary focus. If you do not, I am going to come to you quickly,” and He is not talking about the second coming. He means, “I am going to discipline you. I am going to remove your lampstand.”*

*Verse 6, He says, as it were, “Well, let me tell you another thing you do that is good.” He shifts back to an affirmation, “You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. I hate those deeds too as you do.” One of the things the Nicolaitans promoted was immorality. So He said “You hate that, and you have taken a stand.” Now this seems like a pretty awesome church.*

* 1. Jesus affirmed their diligent work for His sake and in standing up for truth, yet required them to repent of neglecting to love Him. He offered a specific blessing to believers who overcame this.

*Verse 7, then He says, “He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying.” Remember in the last session I highlighted that this is the teaching sentence, that it is the one exhortation Jesus gave more than any exhortation in the Bible: “He that has ears let him hear.” It is the most repeated exhortation on the lips of Jesus in terms of something to do. “To the person who overcomes I will give them to eat from the tree of life,” but here is the key phrase, “that is in the midst of the paradise of God.” My theory is that the tree of life is all through the New Jerusalem, the fifteen-hundred-mile city. However, I believe that this is a special blessing spoken to the people who overcome. They are diligent in ministry, so He likes that. They hate the Nicolaitans and what they do, not the people but their deeds of immorality. These guys are pretty intense, but He says “I have a special blessing if you will overcome of this issue of neglecting your first love towards Me.”*

1. the city of Ephesus
	1. Ephesus was the financial center and capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor and its largest city with a population of 250,000 people. A seaport city on the Mediterranean Sea, it was a center for idol worship in Asia, hosting the temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, and held up by 127 marble pillars. It combined religion and sexual immorality. The silversmiths prospered because many throughout Asia purchased their silver and bronze idols of Diana (Acts 19:25).

*Let’s just look a little bit at the context of the church of Ephesus two thousand years ago. It was the financial center and the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor which, again, is modern-day Turkey. It was the largest city of Asia Minor. However, one thing that made it unique was that it was a center for idol worship. It was one of the primary centers in the ancient world, and particularly the center of Asia Minor. They came from everywhere to engage in idol worship, which involved immorality and participating with demons, and there were many things involved in the idol worship. The idol worship combined sexual immorality and idolatry. Those two went together in those ancient rituals.*

* 1. Paul established a church in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19-20), staying there for three years (Acts 20:31; AD 53-55). The great revival in Ephesus impacted all of Asia (Acts 19:26). The people responded so fervently to the gospel that the market for purchasing idols was dramatically reduced. The once-fervent worshipers of Diana had become worshipers of Jesus.

*This is a little history: Paul established the church of Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He went on three missionary journeys in the Book of Acts, and it was on his third one. It was about AD 53, some add or subtract a year from that, but that is close enough. Many scholars would say AD 53, and the reason I am wanting you to know AD 53 is because it is forty years later when the Book of Revelation is written, and I want you to grasp that Jesus is talking here looking back over forty years.*

*In AD 53, Paul went to Ephesus, this prominent city in the Roman Empire, and he stayed there for three years. Ephesus was the only place Paul stayed for three years because unusual manifestations of power were breaking out in Ephesus, in this idol worship center, this center for immorality and this commerce center. When you read the Book of Acts, in other places he stays for three months, two weeks, eighteen months, but never three years. That is a huge statement of how important Paul saw that city because the Spirit was moving in an unusual way.*

*In my opinion it was the city that hosted the greatest revival in the Book of Acts in terms of impacting people. Now we think of Jerusalem as the city with the most powerful revival, and some very unique things happened there, but in terms of the impact on the number of people, it would not be Jerusalem. Then the second vote would be the church of Antioch, but Ephesus surpassed all of them in the magnitude of the revival that came there. The reason I want you to know that is because Jesus’ words here are to a famous revival church that led multitudes to the Lord throughout all of Asia. So His words are striking if you get the context. Well, His words are striking no matter what, but they are more alerting when you see who He is talking to, being it was the mightiest church in the world at that time, the mightiest church in the world.*

10…so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord…11God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul…19Many...brought their books [on magic] together and burned them…the value…totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed…26throughout almost all Asia, Paul has persuaded…many people… (Acts 19:10-26)

*Let’s look briefly at Acts 19 and Acts 20. This is where we are given the story, but I put just a little bit here from Act 19:10, “All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord from Ephesus.” Could you imagine having a revival in a church such that everyone in Asia heard the word of God out of that city and that revival? That is a big statement. Verse 11, “God worked unusual miracles through the hands of Paul,” and you can read the miracles there. They are remarkable in Acts 19. As a matter of fact, it was so powerful and this idol worship center was so disrupted that multitudes brought their magic books, their occult books, their idol worship instruction books, and they had a bonfire, and they totaled up the value of the books that these brand new believers discarded to renounce these occult practices, idol worship—because it is all the same thing—magic, fifty thousand pieces of silver! In today’s market that would be about five million dollars’ worth of books. That is a bonfire. I mean the whole city was disrupted!*

*Verse 20 says—again, I love this phrase! I have used this phrase many times in my intercession over the years—“And the word of the Lord grew mightily” in its influence, but here is the phrase, “the word of the Lord prevailed in Ephesus.” Oh my! Like you can almost say the word of the Lord conquered Ephesus. Ephesus would be like New York City today in terms of New York City being third, fourth, fifth largest city in the world including the whole metro area. It would be like New York City, the Spirit moving in such power that the Spirit could say, “The word of God prevailed over New York City.” Now that is a revival. Then it says, “…almost all of Asia,” almost all of Asia was persuaded. My goodness!*

* 1. Paul left Ephesus in AD 55, establishing Timothy as the primary apostolic leader (I Tim. 1:3).
	In approximately AD 65, John became the primary leader in Ephesus for a season. He was later imprisoned on the island of Patmos, about 60 miles from Ephesus. John wrote Revelation in about AD 90, almost 40 years after Paul first established the church. At that time, the church of Ephesus was the largest and most influential church since the church in Jerusalem was scattered in AD 70.

*So Paul is there AD 53, 54, and 55, for three years, and when he leaves he puts Timothy in as the primary apostolic leader. About ten years later—some will again add a year or two one way or the other; no one is one hundred percent sure—John the apostle moved to Ephesus, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, was with him, and John became the primary apostolic leader. The reason I am pointing that out is because John is there in AD 65; we do not know how long he is there—I mean he travels around some and we do not know that much about his traveling over the next twenty-five to thirty years—but we know that he ends up in prison on the island of Patmos and the first church that Jesus highlights was the apostle John’s. He was the pastor of that church for some years. I mean, this was personal to John. He said, “John, let Me talk about Ephesus,” and John’s heart leaped, “Whoa!” He said, “Well, there is good, John, but there is some negative as well. They do not love Me like they used to,” and John was the apostle known for loving God. This must have broken John’s heart, though they were still reaching out in a very dramatic way.*

* 1. Paul’s final exhortation to Ephesus was that they love Jesus in sincerity (Eph. 6:24).

24Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. (Eph. 6:24)

*It is significant that Paul’s final exhortation when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians—because Ephesus is the city and the Ephesians are of course the people—Ephesians 6, at the very end, Paul says this. It was almost like he was prophetically forecasting their challenge in the future because it was some twenty, thirty years later that Jesus appears to John and talks about Ephesus. It was like Paul was giving an exhortation with a prophetic dimension to it when he said, “Grace be upon everyone who sets their heart to love Jesus with sincerity.”*

*Beloved, this is a very simple principle, but it needs to be highlighted: you set your heart to love Him sincerely and grace will multiply in your life, and what I mean by that is that you will be more inspired. A lot of folks just go along their daily walk and are just hoping that one day they will get overcome by the Spirit and fall down and wake up loving God. Paul says it differently. He said, “You set your heart to love Him, and grace will be multiplied to you.” There is a greater inspiration when you are contending in your heart to love Him sincerely. And we all know that is a decision that we make over and over and over again because the decision to love Him is not automatic. As a matter of fact, it is opposite. Our love diminishes automatically if we do not reset it and reset it.*

*Some would hope that their love would just automatically grow. I remember when I was in my twenties and we all read our revival books and about all of these radical men and women of God. We were twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, and we are going to prayer meetings, we are fasting days and going together contending for revival. We were dreaming of the day—because we would see some different ones across the world—when we would be old, like in our sixties, like “Oh my gosh! We will be like so close to God! We will just like touch Him and He will just be there!” Well, I have found that it is really different. Forty years later many of the people that I remember who were pressing into God, they are far away from pressing in to God. We thought that it would just automatically unfold that way. I know some that have stayed true and have reached for His heart all the way through. I mean they may have a bad week or month, but in the big picture they stayed true. I want to say this again: love does not automatically increase. As a matter of fact it automatically decreases unless you set your heart in a different direction. And that would have surprised me when I was twenty years old if you had told me that. I would have said, “No way! We will get deeper! It will be so amazing!”*

*And the Lord might have said, “It can, but it is not automatic.” And there will be many temptations and setbacks, there will be betrayals, there will be delays, there will be perplexities, and the Lord would say, “There will be many things that will come to trip you up, but if you will set your heart then it can be true. The grace of God will increase in this area of loving God more and more.”*

1. Jesus’ revelation of Himself: He holds, anoints, and protects (Rev. 2:1)
	1. Jesus highlighted His tender care for His leaders and to manifest presence in the Church.

1These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands… (Rev. 2:1)

*Let’s look at Jesus in each of the seven churches. He takes one or two of the attributes He revealed about Himself in chapter 1—remember in session 1 we looked at Jesus identifying a number of attributes about Himself, titles, or characteristics of Him—He strategically takes or highlights a particular characteristic that will meet the challenge of each specific church. In this church that lost its first love, He highlighted Himself from chapter 1 as the One who holds the seven stars in His hands and the One who walks in the midst of the lampstands or the candlesticks. Somebody might ask, “Well, what does that mean?”*

* 1. Jesus clarified that the seven stars represented seven angels or apostolic leaders, one over each of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). He entrusted a message to the leadership team of each church in Revelation 2-3. The “angel of” the church refers to the apostolic leader over each of the churches.
	The word “angel” is *angelos* in Greek. It may refer to a human or angelic messenger (Lk. 1:11; 7:24, 27; 9:52). It was translated *messenger* in reference to John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10. Mk. 1:2).

*Well, I am glad you asked because Jesus explained it. He told John, because John saw the eyes of fire, face like the sun, feet like burnished bronze in a fire, all of these things, then he saw Jesus holding seven stars in His hands and it was like, “What?” Jesus says at the very end of chapter 1, “John, I will tell you: the seven stars are the seven messengers, the leaders. I am going to hold them dearly in my hand, and if they understand that I am holding them—because the temptation to feel alone, the temptation to be feel overwhelmed, the temptation to feel ganged up on by all the pressures that emerge—John, tell them this it is very important to them keeping their first love.”*

*He is talking to the leadership team because whatever happens in the leadership team, not always but typically, becomes the culture of that ministry. It is not always true, but if the majority of the leadership team is one way, typically the culture of that ministry is inclined that way, good or bad. He said, as it were, “Tell those leaders that I will be holding them dear. They are dear to me. I did not send them out on a task and will check in with them later. I am holding them each step of the way, though they will think at times I am not. They will wonder if they are all alone. Tell them that they are not. This will be critical for them renewing their sense of being loved and therefore loving back.”*

20The mystery of the seven stars… and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands…are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:16-20)

*The next thing He said was, “Tell them I walk in the midst of the lampstands.” Jesus went on to say in Revelation 1:20, “The seven stars are the leaders and the lampstands are the churches,” and so John says, in effect, “Ephesus, Jesus is walking in your midst, so dial down, pay attention, you will not see and feel it in the way you wished all of the time. However, if you will be sensitive and you believe God’s narrative for what is happening in the ministry, He is walking up and down the aisles of the Church. He is there.”*

*The enemy comes and says, “You are alone.” Again, He is talking to the leaders, but the truth of it trickles all the way down. The devil says, “You are all alone, and God is not with you,” and the Lord says “No, no, I am holding you dearly, and I am in your midst, so realign your perspective regularly. I am with you. I really am. I am aware. I am involved. My presence is here.”*

*You feel the opposite because you get accusations coming against you and stumbling, temptations, and setbacks. You feel He is not here. How many times have I heard that in the last forty plus years, “He is not involved!” and I say, “Yes, yes, yes, He is! That is a lie! He walks in our midst. I promise you that if you would realign, if you would dial down and realign and recalibrate your perception, I promise you, talk to Him like He is there and the Spirit’s presence will increase in your heart.”*

*Don’t talk to Him like He is not there, “Where are You? Why did You leave me?” No, do it the other way, “Jesus, thank You. You are here. I want to sense You more. I want to see Your hand more clearly.” Then you are searching for the marks of His hands in your midst versus concluding that He is gone. That is a really significant thing here because the common way is to assume that He is not holding us, that we are not dear and He is has abandoned us, and the devil triumphs over people with that lie.*

*And so He is telling the leaders, “I want you to lay hold of the truth, and I want you to impart that truth to the people under you, and this will help you keep your love alive.”*

* 1. ***He who holds the seven stars in His right hand***: He emphasized His tender care and commitment to help the messengers (angels) or apostolic leaders over His churches. Jesus desires to anoint His servants as bright stars that reflect light to equip the church as a lampstand touching the region.
		1. Jesus holds His leaders in His right hand as He supports, directs, delivers and anoints them.
		2. David associated God’s right hand with His kindness in protecting him from those who rose up against him (Ps. 17:7). God’s right hand is also associated with God’s delight (Ps. 16:11), God’s blessing (Ps. 18:35), God’s power (Ps. 20:6), and the place of honor (Heb. 1:3).

7Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who saves those who trust in You from those who rise up against them. (Ps. 17:7)

* 1. ***He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands***: Jesus is deeply involved with His churches, protecting those who walk with Him as Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden. When God’s servants feel inadequate in their ministry or in overcoming temptation, they can confess that Jesus holds them in His right hand and walks with them in partnership to help them.

*What is means is that He is in the midst walking among us.*

14For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy… (Deut. 23:14)

1. AFfirmation: persevering in their labors and in standing for truth
	1. Jesus affirmed their faithfulness to minister diligently to others and their perseverance to stand for truth even under pressure for the four decades since the church was founded in AD 53-55.

2I know your works, your labor, your patience [perseverance], and that you cannot bear those who are evil. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3and you have persevered…and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary…6This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans… (Rev. 2:2-3, 6)

*His remarkable affirmation. This is so impressive! If a church walked in verses 2, 3, and 6, these affirmations today would be considered by just about everyone as the most amazing church in the land. I want you to catch this because in catching this we see that Jesus values these things and that is why He affirmed them. And so the end-time Church must embrace these things that Jesus is affirming. They do not deny these things in [pursuit of] their devotion to the Lord. They do not neglect them. They have them in right order; that is the issue.*

*He says in verse 2, “I know your works. I know your labor.”*

*You know, a lot of times we labor hard, and we do not see much breakthrough or advancement many times in our labors. I mean, you are reaching out to that little group, and a few of them get touched, a few backslide, a few of them ignore you, and a few press on. And you say, “Man, that was a lot of work! It does not seem like much happened.”*

*Many people have that kind of a story, and the Lord would say, “No, do not buy that. I see your work. I value your work.” As a matter of fact, we have a verse, Hebrews 6:10, where the Lord says, in essence, “I remember all of the love you have shown towards My name when you minister to people. You give them a cup of cold water; I see that you are doing that because you love Me. You love them, but I see your devotion to Me.” So do not buy into “your life and time is wasted when you are laboring in this.”*

*This was a great affirmation, and they were probably saying, “Hey, we really like this!” He went on, “I see your patience.” Often the word, patience, in the New Testament context usually means perseverance, not every time but almost every time. It means that you will not quit. I have said for many years that the number one temptation in the earth is to quit. I do not mean to leave the kingdom, but to quit—I am talking about among believers—to quit pressing in for a deeper encounter with the Lord. I know a lot of people who do it for two or three years, but I do not know that many who do it for forty or fifty years. There are many, many obstacles, and the number one temptation in the whole Body of Christ is to quit pressing in and to settle down into business as usual. I mean, still love Jesus in that general way but just draw back and just kind of take care of our own situation, thinking, “You know what? I tried hard, I did the ministry part for ten or fifteen years, and I sought the Lord hard for five or ten years, but it did not happen the way I thought it should,” and so they just kind of slow down and settle in to just maintaining their life with a few friends and making sure things go okay.*

*Again, I have been a pastor over forty years, and I have seen so many press in for five or ten years and then draw back, so when I look at this “perseverance,” I say, “Lord, this is big! This is not a small thing.” I mean, I look at this church and think, “Wow!”*

*Then He goes on and says, “Another thing about you that I like: you cannot bear those who are evil.” Here He means false teachers right here. He does not just mean the sinner in society because He is going to specify this in just a moment. He says “What I mean is you are testing these guys that claim to be apostles but when you put them to the test on their doctrine, to their lifestyle, and to their practices it is easy to see that they are not true apostles.” Well, these guys were intense because they would make it known, like “Wow!” They would test them and show them to be false.*

*And, as in the New Testament, today it is no different. There are many ministries that create a persona that they are a “prophet” or they are an “apostle,” and they have a public persona. However, they are not preaching the whole counsel of God. I do not mean every single truth in the Bible, but the major emphases of scripture. There are five or ten (made-up number here) really positive major emphases in scripture, but there are five or ten negatives things, depending on how you categorize them. However, it is critical, as Paul said in Acts 20 to the Ephesians actually, to “teach the whole counsel of God.” That is, teach the five or ten big, positive subjects but do not shy back from the five or ten negative ones. Again, depending on how you categorize them, you can make that number bigger or smaller. However, there are a lot of folks who present themselves in their persona and ministry as apostles and prophets, but they will not embrace the difficult things, and they will not take on the challenging things. And their lifestyle bears it out.*

*Now, it is not our business to go figure out everybody’s lifestyle, but here Jesus meant among their own leadership team. It did not say that in Ephesus they got on Google to find out everybody in Antioch who was fake, like, “Let’s expose the people in Antioch!” It meant, in their own sphere, ministries were emerging that looked pretty good, but they drew back on the whole counsel of God. Again, Paul said that in Acts 20 to the elders of Ephesus, some forty years earlier, but their lifestyles here did not bear it up, not just their godliness in their personal life, but the whole way of their lifestyle, the way they lived and the way they handled money, the way they handled criticism, the way they handled enemies, many, many things. He said, “Do not let them in your leadership team,” as it were. That is what He meant by “you expose them as false.” He did not mean you put it in the newsletter and told everybody in the world who is bad, but that in your own sphere you did not get tricked by them nor did you promote them. And He said “I honor you for that.” That is a challenge, having been in leadership for some years I know you have to pay attention to do that right.*

*He says in verse 3, “You persevere,” and then He says it again, “You have labored for My namesake.” That is, “I see godly motives.” I mean, we always have a little bit of mixed motives here and there, but in the overall godly motives. “You did it for Me.” Jesus is so generous! I mean He really is generous when He evaluates us because He might say “Well done!” and you might respond “Well, Lord, what about this and that?” He would say “No, I forgave that.”*

*“Really? Are we good?”*

*“Yeah, yeah, we are good.”*

*“Wow, what a leader! I really like You!”*

*He said, “You have not become weary.” Again, that means you did not quit. It is so easy to quit! The miracle of not quitting. Three to five years is not so miraculous. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, that is miraculous. This here is the forty-year mark, forty-plus; again, we could be off a year or two.*

* 1. ***You labored and have not become weary*** (2:3): They were diligent in ministering to many others. Jesus remembers all our efforts in serving others because of our love for Him (Heb. 6:10).
	2. ***You cannot bear those who are evil***: They would not tolerate false apostles who lied about their calling and promoted false doctrines. They tested and then exposed false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), requiring them to uphold biblical standards and lifestyles. Paul prophesied to the Ephesians elders, warning them of false teachers who would rise up in their midst after he left (Acts 20:29-30).
	3. ***You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans***: The common view among the early church fathers was that this was a reference to followers of Nicolas, a deacon in Jerusalem who fell into error (Acts 6:5).
	In the second century, Irenaeus taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This same distortion of “liberty in grace” is common today.

*He goes on in verse 6, “And you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans.” I have a little bit here about the Nicolaitans. One of the primary issues of the Nicolaitans was that they did not teach any restraint of fleshly indulgence. And their big area was immorality, but not limited to immorality. Fleshly indulgence was okay. It was all okay. It was all under the grace of God. And it does not take a lot of discernment to see that emphasis is really growing strong in the Body of Christ in the western world, equating the grace of God with affirming fleshly indulgence. Whereas the grace of God forgives us of our sin freely, but then it helps us to overcome it. That is different than the grace of God endorsing our sin and our indulgence. He forgives us and gives us a new beginning every day and power to overcome. That is the grace of God, but these Nicolaitans were teaching the grace of God as “You know what? You can do this…you can do this…” in saying “Hey, that is what the grace of God is about!”*

4Certain men have crept in unnoticed…who turn the grace of God into lewdness. (Jude 4)

* 1. Another view of the Nicolaitans is that it is a transliteration of two Greek words: *nico* (to rule)
	and *laos* (the people), thus, *“one who rules the laity.”* This view refers to church systems that inappropriately exalt leaders with an authoritarian spirit over the people that they serve.
1. Correction for compromise: neglect in cultivating love for Jesus
	1. Jesus corrected them for neglecting their devotion to loving Him that initially was so prominent in the great revival of Acts 19. Service and doctrinal purity are very important, but they can never replace taking time to cultivate our love for and communion with Jesus. It takes time to cultivate deep and consistent love for Jesus. It requires developing a heart focus that connects with Him.

4Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev. 2:4)

*Now He comes to the heart of His message, and He corrects them in verse 4. He has said, as it were, “I have told you these marvelous things”—again the things He affirmed in them, we would think any church that had that list of characteristics was an awesome church. I don’t think that very many of us would pick out the fact that they had a really big blind spot. I don’t think we would even notice it. I mean, man, they are reaching out, they are standing for truth, they are not promoting compromising leadership. I mean, this is remarkable! And they won’t quit, and they stay strong. It is like “Wow! I would like to join that church!”*

*Many of you have leadership callings. Some of you are in leadership, and you are going to have a greater sphere of leadership in the future, and a number of you are being trained and are going to be in leadership. These seven churches are the standard for what the Spirit wants leaders to embrace and say, so that is why these two chapters are so critical for the end-time Church. This is not like “Well, I am really not into the Book of Revelation.” No, you really want to be in these two chapters because the Spirit is really going to highlight this.*

*Verse 4, “Nevertheless you have left your first love.” Now the problem with us is that we drift slowly from our first love. It is not very often that somebody goes from Monday to Friday, and they just give up. Sometimes there is a big event, and they are so discouraged that they just give up, but that is rare. Mostly it is a slow, “frog in the kettle” analogy thing. It is slow. It is a slow drift, and their heart is less connected. They are less engaged in the conversation with the Lord than they were. And it takes months and months and months before they are even aware of it at all. It is a slow drift.*

*Now I want to say, because I have seen people exaggerate one way or the other, that the service and the doctrinal purity that they held by exposing the false apostles, the standards of purity by hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, the dedicated service—these are very important. And so we are not choosing sitting at the feet of Jesus over these. We are just putting it in order and in proper sequence. That is all, because some people really get into “I just want to get into loving God” and loving God to them only means sitting at the feet of Jesus. Loving God is more than that, but I tell you the fountainhead of the grace of God flows through us when we make time with Him, and then our hands and our thoughts and our emotions are inspired out of that context.*

*Doctrinal purity and dedicated outreach can never, ever take the place of cultivating the communion. Again, it is not one or the other. However, when we lose that intentional dimension of our life where we are intentional about using time to interact with His heart, when we lose that over months and months, then it begins to affect the way that we are thinking and the way we are interpreting our ministry. It affects our motives, and it affects the way that we interpret people who are against us. We are not nearly as patient and gracious when we do not have that fountainhead falling in our heart from that connection with the Lord. And it takes time. It just takes time to cultivate that. There is no substitute for it.*

* 1. ***I have this against you***: Jesus loves His people enough to speak “redemptive rebukes” to them. Jesus corrected their neglect to cultivate love for Him in the midst of ministry labors. They saw increasing their ministry as more important than increasing their love for Jesus.

*He says, “I have this against you,” and you say, “What?” He is against them, but a couple moments later, in chapter 3, to the Laodiceans, I mean He was really rough on the Laodiceans, really strong, and we are going to get there as that is church seven. He says to them, “I want you to know you are not hot nor cold and I would spit you out of My mouth!” In other words, “You make My stomach sick! It hurts Me.” He does not mean “You are repulsive to Me,” but, “It hurts Me. I have a reaction when I see that kind of lifestyle among My church.” Yet He would say, “But do not think that I am repulsed by you,” in the sense that some people say, “He is going to spit you out of His mouth!” He says, “I love you. That is why I am rebuking you. I am rebuking you in a redemptive way because I have a future for you and I want you to enter into it. I desire to impart this to you.” So when He is saying this to the church at Ephesus, He is saying “I am fighting for your greatness.”*

19As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

*Now here is a question. Jesus said “As many as I love, I rebuke. Therefore, be zealous and repent.” When was the last time you felt the rebuke of the Lord for not cultivating your first love? You might say “Today! As a matter of fact, during the worship service.”*

*Another guy might say, “I do not know. We do not really talk that way, the Lord and I.”*

*I would say if He really loves you, and He does, so,* ***since*** *He really loves you, He is going to talk to you about this subject. He is going to talk to you in a corrective way, but in a redemptive way. He is fighting for our greatness.*

*They saw an increase of ministry. The numbers getting bigger and bigger were more important than an increase of the love. Their ministry sphere was increasing, but their heart connect was decreasing, and that did not bother them.*

* 1. The command to love God with all of our heart is the first and great commandment (Mt. 22:38). God’s primary assignment in our life is to grow in love for Him. Ministry that does not flow from a foundation of intimacy with Jesus will always lead to being wounded, bitter, bored, and burned out.

*We know this: that Jesus said that the first commandment is the first and the great commandment. That is radical, and at face value it is the absolute first priority to God for your life and your ministry. I like to say when I talk to different leaders, “I can tell you the absolute main thing the Holy Spirit is speaking to your church!”*

*They say as they get their recorder out, “Prophesy!”*

*“He wants you to focus on loving Him”*

*“Oh, we know that!”*

*“No, no, this is like really real.” This is not a game. When I stand before the Lord, He is not going to talk to me about the size of my conferences. He is going to talk to me about size of my heart response. I promise you that is what He is going to talk to me about. He is not going to talk to me about how many people I impacted, but how I responded to Him. And not just in dutiful obedience, although I believe in dutiful obedience; it is not the best way to do it, but I will do it anyway. I am talking about a heart response of affectionate obedience. That is what He is after.*

*God’s primary assignment for your life—when I talk to people, I say “Hey, what is God’s calling on your life?” and almost always they will talk about their ministry assignment. I respond and say, “That is part of God’s calling, but that is not the main calling. God’s calling on your life is to grow in the first commandment; that is the first one. When you stand before Him in the age to come, that is the number one thing He cares about. That is your number one calling. I do not just mean issue. It is your primary calling.”*

*And so when somebody says—I mean, you do not have to say this as they will probably roll their eyes, and you do not have to tell everybody every time—but when somebody asks you, “What is your calling?” you might whisper to yourself, “I know it is the first commandment.” I mean, you do not want to be holier than thou in every conversation like, “Here she goes again! Ol’ Mary of Bethany.com” We need more of them! It is hard to raise up a million more. However, in your heart think of it that way, seriously, because when leaders talk to me and ask, “What is the real primary focus of your ministry here?” I typically say it. I do say it is the first commandment. I just cannot stand not saying it, but I do not want to be holier than thou.*

*I want to say this, and you know this as it is self-evident, but if you are younger you are not as convinced of this as if you are older: ministry that does not flow out of this foundation of intimacy—I want to say from forty plus years of ministry—always ends up in burn-out, bitterness, depression and disappointment or boredom, two or three of those always. Now when I was in my twenties, if someone would have told me that, I would have said, “Oh, that sounds awesome!” and I would have written it down and preached it. However, years later I want to say it always ends up in two or three of those things I laid out there plus a few more—spiritual boredom, disappointment, bitterness, a wounded heart—because the only way I can overcome bitterness, wounding, all of these things, and just disappointment is by connecting with the narrative that the Genesis 1 God loves me deeply and has a plan for me. So, when that guy treats me badly, and things do not go right, I have a bigger narrative so I can make it. I can make it if I have the bigger narrative.*

*It is not enough to sing it and to hear it preached a few times. It has to be the narrative of our heart or we end up getting stuck in woundedness, bitterness, pain, and all of those things that are very, very human. I do not look at those and say, “Augh, how horrible!” It is very human to get stuck in those things. It is supernatural to have a narrative to stay out of those things. It still might nip at you and pull you down here or there, but if you have the biblical narrative, “He loves me and I love Him; that is why I am successful,” that biblical narrative will pull you out. Even if things are dragging you down for a short season, you can get out of that tailspin. But not if you do not have the first-commandment narrative. “God loves me; I love God; therefore, I am successful. My money is not as good as I want, things are not working in my ministry, people are really mad at me and other things are not working, but I love God, God loves me, so I am already successful.” That narrative will get you out of the tailspin. I promise you it will. Not that it will be just super easy every time, but you will end up walking out of that tailspin. Without it I have never seen a person go for years without getting bit by these negative emotions.*

1. exhortation to respond (with a warning): remember, repent, and act
	1. Jesus called them to respond in three ways in restoring their love—to remember, repent, and act.

5Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. (Rev. 2:5)

*He tells them how to respond: verse 5, He says, “Remember from where you have fallen.” That is number one: remember. Repent! That is number two. Number three, do the things; act. Three things: remember, repent, and act. Then He says, “Now, if you do not,”—He is talking to the corporate church now—“I am going to come to you.” He is talking about this massive revival church, the most powerful and influential church on the earth at that time. “I will come to you, and I will remove your lampstand.” Just to make it simple, the lampstand meant the calling on the corporate revival church to be influential in a large sphere of influence across the known world of that day. God gives some ministries an unusual scope and breadth of influence. However, here is the problem when a church gets big and it looks dynamic and powerful, or whatever the terms are that people use: multitudes of ministries want to imitate them because it is working. It is working, and God is with them and so is His favor. What happens is that multitudes of ministries want to do what they are doing, as they are assuming that they are doing it right, but the Lord says, in effect, “Ephesus, you are not doing it right, but these thousands of ministries think that you are, and they are imitating you and your blind spots. I love you, but as a worldwide revival center of that known world, I am going to lift that from you so you do not propagate the error that if you work hard but you do not cultivate love for God, you are still great.” He says, as it were, “I want to change that story because you are propagating the wrong story because the people being influenced do not have enough discernment to see you do not have it. They think you are amazing. They come to all of your seminars, all your conferences, to go home to be like you. I do not want them to be like you. There is a false message.”*

*So, this “removing the lampstand” is an unusual warning. I do not know, but maybe there are a thousand churches in the earth where that would even be applicable, maybe ten thousand. I do not know. However, the majority of the churches in the earth do not have millions of people saying, “I want to be like that!”*

*And so He is saying, “Ephesus, I love you and I love the churches that think you are doing amazing. But you are actually going to promote your blind spot to them, and they are going to have confidence because they are so convinced that you are right on because you are so big.”*

*There are so many megachurches today, and I know pastors are saying, “Wow! Look at that church! Five, ten, thirty, forty thousand, the buildings, the millions, oh my goodness! the technology. I want to be… I want to be…”*

*I say, “Wait, wait, wait! How do you know you want to be? Is it the gold and the glitter? How do you even know what they are doing?”*

*“I do not know. It is big, the buildings are amazing, and there are crowds, and wow! and their numbers. Fify thousand people got saved!”*

*“How do you know they got saved?”*

*“Well, I do not know. They are big, and they have big buildings, and they are famous. They are all over the internet!”*

*Maybe that is good and maybe that is not good. And we do not have to know about other people’s ministries, but my point is He told Ephesus, “If you do not get this thing straight, I am going to take the grace off you to be a global influencer to other ministries.” That is what He means by your “lampstand.” That is not an individual thing where He is going to take your lampstand away. It is a corporate, city-wide, world-impacting, number-one-church-in-the-earth warning here. I have had different people ask me what that is.*

* 1. ***Remember***: They were to recall how they used to love and spend time with Jesus. We are to recall His goodness and our past devotion for Him. They left their first love, but not their hatred for evil. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Spirit will help us to return to the freshness of our first love.

*He says, “Remember.” One of the ways that we restore our first love is by remembering. And it takes time to remember. It really does. What do we remember? Several things. Number one, we remember how the Lord loves us. I tell you, if you do not consciously remember how He loves you, the devil—the accuser—will fill you with the narrative that God has abandoned you. We must say what God says. We must say it with our mouths. We do not have to tell everybody, but it needs to come out of our lips: the truth about God. We have to remember the truth, the true narrative of His goodness and how He loves us.*

*Again, if you are running fast, the devil is going to give you his narrative that God has forsaken you, He is about to wipe you out, you have been forgotten, you are alone, and you have no future. Because that storyline has worked so successfully, he does not even have to change it. He is the accuser.*

*Don’t just remember how God feels about you. You remember the early days—for some of you these are the days right now—you remember the first time He called you to extravagant devotion. He is telling them to pause, to remember those early days when you were first captured. He says, “Remember how fresh your heart was. I want to restore that back to you.”*

*For some people, maybe that was a year ago, some people ten years ago, some people twenty-five years ago. That season when they were first captured, when abandonment to Jesus was the only thing that made sense regardless of who said what, who came against you, what promises were delayed. You were so captured to be His that whether your ministry got big or little, or the money came or went, you said, “Well, you know I want those things, but they are not the thing I am most concerned with.”*

*Jesus said, “Tell them to recall how we started, back in the great Ephesian revival in Acts 19, when they were burning five million dollars’ worth of their books because of their devotion to Jesus. Get back to that and remember!”*

*Remember the first time you heard the call to extravagant devotion, and you answered, and it made sense to you. The Holy Spirit says, “I want to give that sense back to you. I really do.”*

*I have learned over the years I can have it and lose it, but I can get it back. We can get it back, but we have to be intentional about it. He will not make you remember. He says* ***you*** *have to remember. A lot of folks just skip that step, the remember step. They just say, “Well, You have my address. I went to that Friday night meeting on the love of God; it ought to have hit me by now.”*

*He would say, “No, I want you to make this personal. It is not a conference. It is not a book or just a teaching. This is a personal conversation you need to have.”*

* 1. ***Repent***: They were to repent of this negligence by changing their life vision, priorities, and lifestyle choices (the way they spent time and money) to pursue loving Jesus as the primary dream of their heart. By calling them to repent of this neglect, He was identifying it as sin, not just weakness.

*The second thing you need to do is repent. I mean, verse 5 is so graphic. He says, “Remember from where you have fallen!” Like fallen? And then He says, “Repent!” Jesus is putting not loving God in the category of sin.*

*I loved it when Francis Chan came to the Onething conference and said, “You know if I give a great message”—this is not a quote, but I have heard him say this a couple of times, so I might be mixing them up but—he said, “If I give a great message, if I go do an outreach, I show you a video of my testimony of everything, you guys say ‘He is amazing!’ If I tell you I am not loving God as the first thing, you say ‘Oh, you are so humble.’” Francis said “It is sinful! Nobody calls that sinful.”*

*Well, Jesus does. He says, “You have fallen.” This is the mightiest church with the biggest outreach, with perseverance, refusing to quit, and He said, “I really like you, but this is sin. You have fallen.”*

*Francis is one of the only guys I have ever heard on a big platform say, “If I got up and confessed that I was in some big immorality yesterday or last week, you would not want me to preach. I appreciate that, but if I got up and told you that I have not loved God from my heart for the last number of months, you would say ‘Aw, come on, give us your sermon; you are so humble.’” He said, “That would not scandalize you because we do not see how valuable this is.”*

*Jesus called it the first and great commandment. And Jesus here says, “You have fallen when you have drifted from this.” Fallen is a strong word. It does not mean that “I am finished with you,” but He says, “Take this seriously.” I believe that before the Lord returns this truth is going to be taken seriously.*

* 1. ***Act***: They were to *do the works* or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was fresh and strong. Mary “chose” the good part. *We must choose it*. It was sustained throughout her life.

*“Do the works that you did in the early days.” The early days, of course, they were born in a revival so everybody was going hard for God. You know, maybe your early days you did not get going really strong till a little while later, but this was the greatest revival in the book of Acts 19 forty years earlier. You know the guys were twenty; now they are sixty. It is forty years later. He says, “Go back and do that!” He is talking to some of the elders here. He is talking to the messengers, the apostolic leaders. “You guys were young when the revival hit. Go back to that!” is what He is saying to them.*

42One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)

*We know the passage so well, but I tell you we cannot say too often what Jesus said to Mary of Bethany in Luke 10:42. I remember when I first read this years ago, it seemed so exaggerated, “the one thing that is needed.” Like, “Really? Come on, Jesus, I mean You are the smartest man that ever walked the earth; You know that it is not the only thing needed; Come on! Come On!”*

*And the answer would be “You get this right, and you set the trajectory for all the other things to be right. You get this wrong, you set the trajectory for everything else to get off.” You know, you get on the highway and you go on I-70, and you mean to go west to California, but you think, “Was it east or west?” You go east, and you end up really far away in New York. The trajectory is very opposite. He says, “This one thing, you have to get this thing established. Then all of the other very necessary, biblical things will be inspired and flavored and colored by this reality.”*

*Then He makes the next point: Mary chose it. Beloved, nobody can choose this for you, and the other thing that I have learned is you do not choose it once. You do not choose it every day. I am not saying that you get up every day and say, “I choose this.” I mean, that is cool to do, but I am being a little bit more specific. There will be several times a year where I have to stop here, as the human leader of IHOPKC—and you would think it would be automatic—here I am in the prayer room, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and there are three or four times almost every year. It is not like I am counting it, but I stop and say, “Wait a second, wait a second, WAIT! Mike! Mike! The primary conversation and primary prayer discussion in your heart is no longer about growing in the love of God.” The Lord wants the thing I talk most about to be this, not the only thing. He wants me to talk to Him about many things, but I stop and say, “Wait a second! It is not the main thing anymore. It is in the top ten, but it is not the main thing.”*

*The Lord says “Stop! Recalibrate. Make it number one again of what you talk to Me about your life.”*

*So how much last week, last month did you talk to God remembering how He loves you, thanking Him, asking Him for inspiration and for grace to return it back to Him by the Spirit.? You may say “Oh, I have not really talked about that much lately.”*

*My point is not, “Oh, aren’t you terrible?” My point is, this is a good message for you today then. You really want to make that, not the only thing you talk to Him about, but the thing you talk to Him about more than any other one subject.*

*“Well, the truth is I talk to Him about power in my life, my future spouse, and my money.”*

*Those are important subjects, actually. I am just having fun with that, but He says “Those are good, I want you to talk to Me about those, but do not make them number one. And when they are the number one thing you talk to Me about, stop, repent, and choose again.”*

*A couple of times a year I think, “How could it be possible that I keep drifting where that subject goes down the list?” but by the grace of God He helps me get it back. But one thing I do, for which I thank the grace of God that it dawns on me to do, I ask Him many, many times “Holy Spirit, show me when I drift. Show me. I do not have enough discernment to see it.” And then just one day I am sitting there, and it becomes clear. And I go “Augh! Thank You! I got it again! This is like number four hundred and eighty-five in the last forty years. Okay, I drifted again. Okay, got it! I got it!” I cannot see it myself, so therefore I ask Him. That is one of my regular prayer requests.*

*On my Fellowship acronym for prayer—the ten letters of FELLOWSHIP with ten different prayers—it is the “O.” Make me a man of* ***O****ne thing; make me a man like David and Mary of Bethany. This is the primary thing. I say, “Lord, I cannot remember to do that! And I cannot inspire myself to do it, but if You will remind me and inspire me, I will say yes!” and He says “You keep asking Me and I will keep reminding you.”*

* + 1. Cultivating a responsive heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately. Love does not automatically grow. Rather, it automatically diminishes unless we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart.
		2. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.

*Sustaining a fresh walk with God for decades, beloved, that is the definition of radical. I hear people say, “I want to be radical!” and I ask “What do you mean?” “I want to go on that trip! I want to be the most radical!” They are thinking of three weeks, three months, three something, and that is good, but that is more adventuresome than radical. It is still cool; I am not putting that down.*

*Then I say, “I will tell you what radical is: you go twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years and line up with this over and over in the face of delays, setbacks, disappointments, good people being against you, but you keep signing up; that is radical. That is what radical is in my opinion.”*

* 1. ***I will remove your lampstand***: God’s grace shone as a bright light from Ephesus into all of Asia. Being a “lampstand ministry” speaks of a ministry with far-reaching influence to other ministries. To have their “lampstand removed” was to lose the grace to influence others in a significant way.
	Jesus would remove their lampstand so that their error would not be imparted to other ministry who assumed the “mega-church in Ephesus” had a good foundation and was doing things rightly.
	2. ***I will come to you quickly***: This is a reference to Jesus’ coming to discipline them, to correct them, *not* a reference to His second coming. This church no longer existed after the fourth century.
1. Promise for overcomers: one promise
	1. Jesus will reward overcomers by allowing them to give to eat from the tree of life “in the midst” of Paradise. Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden.

7He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes
I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Rev. 2:7)

*Promise for the Overcomers. Now I am not sure of this, but I believe I am on to something, so I am not going to be dogmatic, but I am not going to be sheepish either. He says this, “To the person who overcomes,” verse 7, “I will give to them to eat from the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God.” I think the phrase, in the midst, is the key phrase. He is not telling the church at Ephesus to become born again, because everybody that is born again eats from the tree of life. He is not saying that “If you do not return your first love, I am kicking you out of heaven and you will never eat from the tree of life.” He is saying, “By returning to your first love, if you overcome this area, this promise will be yours. If you do not overcome this area, you are still saved, you are still in the kingdom, you are still persevering and serving people, you are hating the deed of the Nicolaitans, you are still not bearing false teachers, you are still doing good in many ways, but this promise is specifically for born-again believers who overcome this issue of losing their first love.” It is more than the general “everybody dies and eats from the tree of life in heaven” because if it is for everybody then they do not really have to overcome this, and so Jesus would be talking in circles here, but He is not. He is saying something very specific, but I do not think we catch it.*

*My theory—and again I am not dogmatic about it but I want to lay this in front of you—because He is talking to people who hate evil, who persevere in ministry, who refuse to give up, and He is saying “There is something I will give you if you overcome yet this thing. I will not give it to you,” is the implication, “if you do not.” And so He is not talking about kicking them out of heaven if they do not return to their first love or whole Body of Christ would be in trouble. I am sure that is not what He is saying. So I think, “Lord what are You saying here? What is the unique specific promise that You give to people who overcome this issue?”*

* 1. ***In the midst of Paradise***: All believers will eat of the tree of life which grows “throughout” the vast New Jerusalem. Here Jesus may be suggesting a special blessing in eating from the trees *“in the midst”* of the New Jerusalem–a blessing offered to those who *overcome* their negligence to cultivate love for Jesus. Is there a unique quality of glory associated with some of the trees in the New Jerusalem? Are there trees “in the midst” of Paradise that are in closer proximity to Jesus’ throne?

*He says “It is the tree of life* ***in the midst****.” All believers will eat of the tree of life, and here is my thought, that the tree of life—now I cannot prove this, this is my assumption—the tree of life grows throughout the entire New Jerusalem. I do not mean every square inch, but the tree of life I am assuming can be found as the river winds throughout the whole city, fifteen hundred miles in every direction. I do not believe the tree of life is in one location and everybody has to go there every day to eat. I just have a feeling that it is all around. A fifteen-hundred-mile city—that is here to the east coast or west coast you pick the one you want! That is fifteen hundred miles. That is a big city! There is not one little tree there. I mean, it is all over the city.*

*So, this is just an idea—I think I am on to something, but I do not have it really clear—that Jesus may be suggesting a special blessing to those that eat of the trees in the midst of the New Jerusalem. And maybe Jesus’ throne is in the midst. Maybe this is within proximity of His throne. I do not know for sure, but I know that it is only offered to those who overcome negligence in loving God. So I said, “Lord, I do not know for sure what it is, but I am going for it, and I am sure I will not be disappointed.”*

*Is there a unique quality of glory associated with the trees? I mean all through the New Jerusalem, but on some that are in the midst of the New Jerusalem, in the center of it? I do not know. “Lord, why did You point that out?” Are there trees in the midst that are closer in proximity to His throne? I do not know.*

9…God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden [of Eden]… (Gen. 2:9)

2In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits…14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life… (Rev. 22:2, 14)

*Revelation 22:2 tells us, “In the middle of its street,” so here are the big, golden streets, and “in the middle are trees, and on each side of the river.” So the trees are going down the golden streets, and I think the golden streets go through all fifteen hundred miles, with the trees down the middle, and the trees are also on both sides of the river that is flowing. So it is on the street and on both sides of the river. Okay, so there are three places where the trees are: on that golden boulevard that goes through all the city and on each side of the river. There are twelve types of fruit, so there is diversity of location, and there is diversity of fruit. Huh! Tell me more! Right now I do not have more, but I think He is saying, “Just come on! You may not get it all in this age, but you will get the promise if you persevere and overcome in this area!”*

*I am saying, “I am going for it!” I am not sure exactly what the promise looks like, but I do know that the promise was made specifically to diligent believers who do ministry and who overcome the negligence of loving of God first.*

* 1. Jesus called believers to repent of neglecting Him while acknowledging that they persevered in their labor for His sake, refused to bear with false apostles, and hated the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans.

*Amen and amen and amen! Let’s stand.*

*Lord, I want more. I want more. I want more.*

*I can confidently say that ninety-nine percent of you in this room agree with that, so I am not even going to ask you to raise your hand. Of course, or you would not be here. “Lord, I want more.” We have to choose it, then we have to remember, repent, and do the deeds we did at first. That is the Mary-of-Bethany lifestyle. Let’s just pray:*

*Father, here we are. Lord, I am stirred, I do not get it all, but I want more. Business as usual is not okay with me. Big ministry is not okay with me. I want to do it, but power, miracles, big crowds, that is not enough for me. I love all of that, but I want more. I want something else.*

*Beloved, this is a time in our lives where we can shift so that this is the primary dream of our heart, not the only dream, but the primary dream. The thing we talk to the Lord about more than miracles, or money or relationships or favor or healing, we talk to Him more about this subject than other subjects. “Oh, I love You, Jesus! Show us Your heart! Inspire my heart! Help me, Lord. I cannot do this without help, Holy Spirit.”*

*The Holy Spirit says “Ask Me more. Ask Me more often.”*