

First Love

*'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all
in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God
the Father through him.'*

Colossians 3:17

Peter Walker, 2017

I dedicate this booklet to you, my brother, my sister in the Lord. Thank you for allowing me to share with you some thoughts about our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

Life is lonely! Winds of despair blow through every crevice. God himself describes life this way, when telling us of the 'Savior' to come:

'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.' (Isaiah 9:2)

I think what happens to us – after we have met and rejoiced in seeing and knowing Jesus Christ – is we settle back in to fighting life's hard fight of survival. The ground is cursed, and it takes all of our strength to pay the bills, fix things, fix health, 'fix' each other... Soon the joy of Christ loses its prominent place in our lives, and we relegate it to a back-up plan, our 'spiritual life' (*on the side*), a Sunday morning (*at the end of a long week*), etc. We lose our 'first love'.

Jesus challenged the early church of Ephesus. He first commends them for perseverance, good theology, tenacious contending; but then he says, '*I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.*' (Rev 2:4)

Have you grown somewhat weary? Are you discouraged, and not really energized by Jesus? Has your faith become something on the side of your 'real' life?

Jesus does not condemn you here. He simply reaches out to you, a '*bruised reed, a smoldering wick...*' (Is 42:3)

First Love

Jesus came in order to 'dwell' inside us. (Col 1:27)
Jesus – 'God with us' (Mt 1:23) – came to be *with* us in every aspect of our lives. Jesus came – the '*light of the world*' (Jn 8:12) – to light every shadow of our soul and our mortal existence. This powerful presence and light and warmth, is what Jesus is 'to' you, around you, for and through you. This is not *your* work for him; this is *his* work – his presence – over you.

The first appeal of Christ to us is not that we come to him, but that we let him come to us! '***I stand at the door and knock...***' (Rev 3:20) He has done the searching and the finding (Lk 19:10); he has done the loving and the work. (I Jn 4:19; Jn 19:30) Jesus asks, primarily, that we simply open the door to his light, his love, his company. ***Are you open to Jesus coming to you?***

I have been struck by 2 key issues – or problems, struggles - in the family of believers today. The first issue is, I believe, that we have not known the 'true' Jesus, or we have misunderstood him critically. As a result, ***we feel Jesus as a pressure, not as a joy.*** The second issue is, I believe, that we have misunderstood true – and liberating – repentance. As a result, we avoid 'repentance', and therefore become entangled in sin. We go on to build a life that is shallow, '***straining out gnats and swallowing camels.***' Let's jump in and tackle these issues...

#1 – We feel Jesus as a pressure, not as a joy!

Many of us have *misunderstood* the heart - and therefore the presence - of Jesus. We 'fear' what he is. We think of him as judgment, as pressure, both in our lives and towards others. We do believe in him, but like a 'heavy duty' that lingers, we try to get the 'chore' done, and then move on... *Is this your experience?* You are not condemned for this! This is a *misunderstanding* of who Jesus is, and you can walk free from this. ***Do you want to be free from this?***

What I ask you to do is read this following paragraph as a guide to getting settled, focused, calibrated spiritually. Take this next paragraph slow, as an exercise. Maybe pause after each sentence, to let the prompts go down deep... When you are ready, 'positioned', 'seeing', go on to the following paragraph to take a fresh look at Jesus:

So first, I ask you to let go in your heart and mind right now, the memories you have of your church growing up, maybe even your church right now. I ask you to close your eyes for a minute and let drift away your fears and hurts of your father figure, and your faith-fathers. Still and quiet your heart now before God Almighty, and know only this reality for a moment: ***You are made not in the image of any earthly person, but in the image of God himself.*** You are unique. You are original. You have traits of other individuals in your life, but these are of the flesh and 'count for nothing'. (cf John 6:63a) Step into your 'truest' self for a moment – the unique creation of

God, made in his image. (Gen 1:27) Be still here. (Ps 46:10)

Now, when you feel 'alone' with God, in the light of God, consider Jesus with fresh perspective. Read the following paragraph slowly, intentionally, really 'press in'...

Jesus is gentle. He comes to you as a very, very gentle person. His heart was moved at the lack of wine at your wedding, and he quickly and quietly changed the water to wine so there would be no shame. (Jn 2:1-11) Jesus sees you coming towards him for the very first time, and he speaks to you before you can speak; he 'defines' you, reassures you that you are *not* a 'false' person - that maybe you have felt, or others have said. No, but rather Jesus declares and states that you are 'true'! (Jn 1:47) Jesus heard of your recent, cutting loss, and he stood with you and cried. (Jn 11:35) Jesus looks on the hurting people that you also see, and he cries for them, reaches for them. (Lk 19:42) Jesus is so humble that he implores us to consider his 'works' even if we don't believe him personally; he does not want us to miss the reward that comes with knowing that he is in the Father, and the Father is in him. (John 10:37) Jesus comes looking for you. (Lk 19:10) He '*knocks on your door*' and asks to come dine with you. (Rev 3:20) When you are alone, in a deep place – his '*deep*' calls out to your '*deep*', so that he can drown out your worries with the sound of rushing waters. (Ps 42:7) When you let one tear fall, he bottles it! (Ps 56:8) He suffers with you. (Is 49:16) At a certain point, he cannot and will not even express

the value of your suffering, but simply says your prize awaits you, and this world is *'not worthy of you.'* (Heb 11:34) ***This is the tender-hearted Jesus that has come to you! This is the Jesus that you must now allow rise in your spirit, in your mind, in your home. This is the 'true' Jesus, among many false ones!*** (Gal 1:8-9; 2 Cor 11:4; Mt 24:5)

This can be a painful exercise, to allow a new and true spirit of Jesus to rise up higher in your soul, and break through an old shell, an old perception. But my brother, my sister, you must allow God's Spirit to now become more, and your old understanding to become less. (Jn 3:30) You must allow the true Jesus to rise and define himself in your spirit, in your mind, in your soul. Look on him, and let your old understanding fade away. This is the 'Spirit' realm. This is the power and sphere of 'Revelation'. This is seeing the true Jesus, and where the power, Spirit and truth of the gospel flow.

Remember, Jesus said to those of us who truly believe in him, that there would be waters flowing *'from within us.'* (Jn 7:38) Flowing waters! Jesus also said that he would give us *'living water'*! (Jn 4:10) Jesus said of being 'born of the Spirit' that it would be an invisible, un-provable wind! (Jn 3:8) If you can get your head and even your heart 'around' it, it is too small! Your head and heart need to soar within the truth, the Spirit and the person of Christ! Christ's identity – one with the Father – is impossible to grasp. ***Are you OK with stepping into the impossible?*** This is revelation truth. This is Christ!

#2 – We strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!

(Before going straight to point 2 here, let me recap point 1, drill down a little, and then ‘segue’ into this point 2...)

Above I mentioned that there were 2 things that have caught my attention in the body of believers today. The first point I have teased out above, relating to ‘misunderstanding’ the heart and the very person of Jesus. My friends, to know Jesus is a life-long, living relationship. This relationship – like any other relationship you have – has no ‘floor’ or foundation if the very person is not ‘known’.¹ It is critical to labor over details of Christ the person as we glean them from scripture.² Look carefully at how Jesus *interacts* with people, not just what he says. Look carefully at what moves him, and when. Ask that the Lord will pour out his Spirit on and through you to really see Christ, and feel the true Christ with you.³ This ‘laboring’ to see Christ, will not disappoint you! You will break into expanses and dimensions of vision you did not know existed. You will move into a holy sphere of love, that Paul describes as ‘*surpassing knowledge*’ and where you will experience the ‘*measure of all the fullness of God.*’ This is a sphere and Spirit realm of love that goes ‘*wide and long and high and deep...*’ (Eph 3:14-21)

¹ I Corinthians 11:3

² 1 Timothy 4:16; Philippians 1:9; 3:10-14; Hebrews 4:11

³ Matthew 6:22-23; Colossians 1:27

This pursuit of intimate relationship with Jesus is the very thing that Jesus calls for. Remember when he was asked what the most important commandment was? He lifted it right off the page. It was not a 'to-do' or a 'law', so to speak. It was *'love relationship'* with God - with intentional, passionate pursuit. *Why would this surprise us, if we demand the very same thing from our deepest relationships with each other?:*

'Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.' (Mt 22:37-38)

So moving on to point 2... What do I mean by saying we ***'strain out a gnat and swallow a camel'***? Jesus used this metaphor to point out to the Pharisees that they were making big deals out of little things, and then letting the big, important things slide. (see Mt 23:24)

I think we are doing the same thing in the church today. I think we are making a big deal out of little things like 'successful living', church membership and attendance, being an available volunteer and being a good dad, getting our finances in order, tithing and exercise and positivity... But we neglect the deep, important things of Christ: repentance of our sin, faith in Jesus Christ, and sharing Jesus with others.

You see, the 'little' things I mention above are good, but can be done without love for God in our hearts, or purity in our lives. We can 'do' them, despite what's really going on in our hearts and actions. Just the

other day I saw a believer I had met – a church-goer – walking down the street with a new girlfriend he should not have. Day in, day out, I'm meeting with Christian men who are hard at 'work' in their involvement in church, but are also secretly using and indulging in pornography. I do not judge you if you struggle in this area, my brother, my sister. But I do come to you now and implore you to *'agree with God, and be at peace!'* (Job 22:21) God calls us to a life of faith and love of Christ that is on fire in the *'secret places'* of our soul. (Mt 6:4,6,18) God is present, powerful and truthful in our *'secret places'*, not in our public performances.

If you struggle today with a double-life, you are not alone, and you are no worse a person than anyone else. But you are deceived here, if you think it does not matter, or is not noticed, or does not need to change. The good news – *the very great news!* – is that even now you can be touched by the blood of Jesus, covered with a 'new mercy'.⁴ Through repentance of your sin, my brother, my sister, God will break your chains, and break out a new path under your feet. Christ will walk you free. In the next section I want to just drill down a little more on this, not so that you 'feel bad', but so that we truly get it, and get free!⁵

⁴ Lamentations 3:23; 1 John 1:9

⁵ 2 Corinthians 7:10

Repentance:

So points 1 & 2 above, are about the *'true Jesus'*, and our *'true following'*. It is impossible to really 'follow' Jesus, if we have a wrong Jesus.⁶ Point 1 above gets that 'foundation' true, solid, living! (1 Cor 3:11; Jn 1:14) Now, with the true Christ in our eyes, and in our hearts, we face the question of 'following', or really being a 'disciple'.⁷ Point 2 above is a challenge to us in this. Let's get practical on this, and let's get free!

We are all sinners. This is true, and will always be true as long as we live here on earth.⁸ But when we are *'in sin'*, or caught in a sin, this is different to our on-going life 'state' of being sinners. We all know this is true.⁹

Sometimes when we are caught in a sin – like pornography – we hide behind 'sayings' like, *'We are all sinners!'* or, *'No one's perfect!'* etc. etc. But deep in our hearts we know we are hiding.

Is there a 'particular' sin in your life right now?

Not the general ones that make you human, but one that jumps to your mind, that you cannot 'shake', that you hide from others? Pornography? Adultery?

⁶ 1 John 2:22

⁷ John 8:31-32

⁸ Romans 3:23

⁹ Matthew 5:23; Revelation 2:20-23

Something other?

The enemy will jump at you this very moment and try to call you away from this booklet! The enemy will tell you that to read on, to consider the ‘truth’ of your sin, will lead you into a nightmare of exposure, of humiliation, of broken hearts. This is not true! Jesus was so gentle when he met with people in sin. He did not humiliate them. The truth is, he often called them to repentance, but not to ‘confession’.¹⁰ Jesus wants a heart truly turned around. He does not want a heart exposed and humiliated. You must know this! If you have read this far, and are struggling in this area, I hope you are catching a glimpse of ‘freedom light’, because Christ is pouring it out on you now!

Jesus did weave into his ‘gospel’ message, a call to repentance:

‘Repent and believe!’ (Mark 1:15)¹¹

Jesus wants our hearts filled with his light, and walking in the light. I know that you want to be a ‘true’ believer, someone who is free from sin on the inside, and walking in truth on the ‘outside’. Repentance – turning away from your sin – is the path. I know you have ‘belief’ in Jesus, or you would not be reading this booklet. You know he loves you, and is tender, or you would not be this *far* in the booklet! ***So what do***

¹⁰ John 8:1-11; John 5:14 (*I do go on to the call to confession later, & James 5:16*)

¹¹ Repentance was not only the road to ‘prepare’ for Jesus (Mark 1:1-5), but central to Jesus own’ message and that of the apostles after him. (Acts 3:19; 2 Peter 3:9)

you lack? Well, if there is a particular sin in your life that you *do* know of and struggle with, you need to repent. How?

My brother, my sister, repentance is turning and walking away. In the same way coming after Christ is a 'direction', a 'lifestyle', so, too, is repentance a 'direction', a 'lifestyle'. John the Baptist said something really interesting to the Pharisees; he said, ***'Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.***' (Mt 3:8)

Repentance is not saying or even feeling 'sorry'. ***Repentance is fighting against something completely, day in, day out.*** It is a tenacious, loyal stand. Repentance is a 'spirit' issue, that will define your choices, will reshape friendships, will cut across where you go, when you go, what you read, listen to, watch and think. Repentance is 'hating' what is evil, and loving righteousness. (Ps 45:7; Ps 94:16)

Repentance is clearing the house, doing new things, rejecting what it is you want, feel like, or even 'need'.¹²

Where will you get the power for such a change? Well, only in knowing the 'true' Jesus, gazing on him, reading his Word, meeting and fellowshiping with other 'true' believers. (2 Tim 2:22; Heb 10:25) You will be effective in '*turning away*' from sin, if you are effective and practical in '*turning towards*' Christ. Jesus is your 'path', and to go actively towards Christ, to believe in him and sit with him daily, to talk

¹² John 8:1-11; John 5:14; Luke 19:1-10

with him – this empowers your fight ‘against’ the other pathways of darkness.

So repent today! Repent now! Stand and say, *‘I am through with this sin! I hate it! In Jesus’ name I now reject it!’*

If it is alcohol, go through the house now and throw it away, and sweat it out this evening, tomorrow, the next day. *You know you can, in the power of Jesus!* Replace the stocks with coffee, tea, cocoa, seltzer water, etc. If it is pornography - delete, delete, delete, and turn away from these screens! *Delete, block, and turn away from every compromising image. Every one! Yes, it is possible in Jesus’ name!* If something catches your eye, don’t look back at it!

First and foremost, make a decision to have a daily time of scripture reading and prayer, even if it is only a 10-minute ‘devotion’ every day. Get this ‘locked in’ to your daily diet, now and until the day you die. It will become your most precious, glowing time of every day. Fill your time now with new, wholesome commitments. Be urgent and intentional about this! Volunteer at church, get to bed earlier listening to worship music, reciting scripture in your head...

Again, it is easier to ‘move away’ from something, if we are ‘moving towards’ something. We need to be moving towards Christ, and all things ‘Christ’.¹³ Paul tells us,

¹³ Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 13:14

‘Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.’ (Phil 4:8)

Now, I noted above that Jesus does not ‘do’ repentance by ‘exposing’ you to others. However, in order to be able to have the support of believers in your struggle, there is a need to share – or ‘confess’ – to at least one other person. If you are going to know the power of ‘agreement’ in prayer with a brother or sister in Christ, to hold hands and pray for Jesus to break chains, restore and heal, there will need to be a measure of ‘sharing’, a person to ‘confess’ to.

There is tremendous power where believers ‘agree together’¹⁴, and I do not want you to miss out on this! There is also a measure of ‘healing’ that comes through ‘confessing’ to another, and I don’t want you to miss out on this!¹⁵ So here are my thoughts for you...

First, repent now! Repent today! And thank God in the name of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus, that you are forgiven and set free! Yes, completely! Then, ask God to show you even one person with whom you can safely share about your sin struggle, and your steps of repentance. Don’t rush this, but don’t delay either. Maybe a person jumps to mind

¹⁴ Matthew 18:19-20

¹⁵ James 5:16

right away, and you are certain they are the one. Praise God! Call them, and invite them for coffee, and let them know the reason straight up – i.e. *that you would like to share with them a struggle, so they can pray with you and help you fight forward*. Put it out there on the phone when you call to invite them for coffee, so that they know what to expect, and you won't be tempted to back out! **Simply by making the invite, you have made most of the confession!**

If a person does not jump to mind right away, continue your repentance path (remember, it is a 'way of life', Mt 3:8), and *continue* to ask God to show you that safe person to meet with. It does not have to be your pastor, nor that person you dread to tell. Just ask Jesus to show you, and in the meantime honor Jesus with a fierce path of true repentance. Pray every hour, every day, that the Lord will bring a Spirit-filled believer to mind, and when he does, make that call!

Have you repented this day? Have you truly seen and understood the foothold of sin in your life, and have you chosen today to turn away from it in Jesus' name?

If so, before we move on to the next and last sections of this booklet, let's mark this moment of repentance in your life! This is why Christ died. We are told that he 'bought us' with his blood (Rev 5:9), and that it was for 'freedom' that Christ has set us free! (Gal 5:1) We are also told that there is '*rejoicing in heaven*' when one person repents! (Lk 15:7) Let's celebrate this freedom! ***Take a few minutes now to pause, to***

sit quietly, and let the forgiveness of Jesus flow through you, really sink in. You have today lifted up *'holy hands in prayer'*¹⁶, maybe for the first time in a long time, because you have turned your face to God's light and repented. ***Sit in this place for a few minutes, and just let your heart receive his Spirit, his healing.***

'I will put a new heart and a new spirit in you.' (Ez 36:26)

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 2:8

Parable of the Sower:

At any given time in our walk with Jesus, I think each of us can find or 'position' ourselves in the '*Parable of the Sower*'. (Mt 13:1-23)

You may want to stop and read the parable before going on.

So here's how the parable goes and what it means, and the question is, '***Where am I in this?***'

The farmer sows the seed – in other words, the message of Jesus is brought to you.

You are in one of 4 states, so to speak, when the message of Jesus comes to you. You are either:

1. ***A Path***: Here the word of God just lands on you, and is lifted away by the enemy. Zero impact. (vs.19)
2. ***Rocky Ground***: You receive the word with joy, but quickly fall away when your world challenges your faith – i.e. *your friends, thoughts, morals, money...* (vs.20-21)
3. ***Thorns***: You 'hear' the word (i.e. 'feel' it, believe it), but the worries of life and worries about 'money' choke the word in you, and you bear no 'faith fruit.' (vs.22)
4. ***Good Soil***: You hear, you understand, you produce fruit exponentially. (vs.23)

Things to note:

1. All of these 4 people are '*hearing*' the message

- of Jesus.
2. Three out of the 4 are 'believers'.
 3. Only 1 out of the 3 'believers' is 'alive', is 'bearing fruit'.

Are you bearing fruit?

Do you want more? Do you want to be where the truth of Christ is actually 'bearing fruit', fighting and winning battles and souls, flowing in peace and beauty?

You can move into that place, today! Read on...

First Love:

When Jesus spoke to the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-5), he commended them for their good works. He commended them for their perseverance, theology and even suffering for his name. *This church was made up of committed believers!*

Jesus did not take issue with their *morals*, as he did with other churches¹⁷. And even though Jesus does take up one issue with them here – a critical issue – he does *not* withhold ‘honor where honor is due’. Jesus starts by seeing and acknowledging their hard work. Jesus commends them.

But then he goes on to take issue with one, key thing. He says,

‘Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.’ (vs.4)

Jesus takes issue with their hearts having grown cold. Their hearts were once a-glow, and true. Note, Jesus is saying that they once *did* have this love, but have forsaken it. Jesus goes on...

Jesus tells them that in order to return to the love they once had – that ‘first love’, that child-like love, that pure, first glimpse – they needed to actually ‘repent’. Their only ‘sin’, so to speak, was distance. When he calls them to repent, he is not calling them to renounce a specific sin, but to ‘turn back’, to ‘come

¹⁷ Revelation 2-3

back'. Jesus goes on...

Not only does Jesus call us to repent and return to our first state of love for him, but he says that if we do not return, if we do not soften our hearts and let the fire rekindle here, he will actually *'remove our lampstand'*, i.e. our shut out our 'church status', our reputation for him, our witness. (vs.5)

My friends, if it is more of Christ that you want, well, it is more of you that he wants! Your heart is dry and wants to be 'good soil', a fruit-bearing believer. Jesus calls you back! He calls you to let go of the little things – *the appearances, the commitments, the 'good works', the water-tight theology, the suffering for his name* – and to fall back into the love you had at first!

At first, you were not well-read on Christian books, or strict about Christian music, movies and the market place. At first you were not hard on yourself and judgmental about others in the church. At first you were delighted about Jesus, about forgiveness, about new beginnings! At first you moved freely through the marketplace because you felt you now had a hope to bring the lost – and the lost were found there! At first your new and truest life objective was to be close to the Spirit of God, to 'feel' his presence, and let his new truth blow through your heart, your home, your past, and out into your future. At first the picture and power of the cross, of the resurrection, of the covering of your sin and shame – were everything!

If you go back to your 'First Love', instead of forward

in your planning, you will glow again, and be the radical, free, peaceful believer you long to be.

Get your daily bible reading back in its delightful place – 10 minutes on that chair under that lamp with a good cup of coffee! Get some good worship music lined up for times in the kitchen, quiet nights when you can't sleep, and for the car. Let go of your fear to be relevant. Let go of your fear to be 'smooth' and even a 'good testimony'. These weren't 'first love' values, and they need to be recalibrated.

Let yourself reboot. Go on 'prayer walks', just whispering to the Lord. Talk about Jesus with your kids while on the go – in a living, loving way.¹⁸ Pray before you drive, regardless of who is in the car! Pray and give thanks – with people – for something good that happened, or for answered prayer.¹⁹ Read the bible to the family at night, and pray to close out the day – not heavy, not long-winded, just read and pray!²⁰

Enjoy good things that you have! Just have the humility to receive and delight in good things. You can do this by making the 'good thing' a gift to you by God. How? Well, thank him for it!²¹

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:7

¹⁹ Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Luke 17:18

²⁰ Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:15-16

²¹ James 1:17; 1 Timothy 4:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:31

'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' (Colossians 3:17)

I hope you have enjoyed this booklet. For more resources, please visit my websites below:

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

www.sharingyourfaith.weebly.com

'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' Numbers 6:24-26