

# Renewing Your First Love

- Ron Stullenbarger -

Out of God's great desire to be truly loved by His people, we have been given the gift of free will to choose who and what we will give our affections. God, knowing full well that not all would choose to love Him, still created us out of His longing for a close relationship with us. You see, so great is our heavenly Father's desire for a relationship with us that He suffers as He watches His children choose to love people, ideas, and possessions that will never fully love us in return. So great is His love for us that He responds to our sin with grace and mercy every single time. And so vast is His affection for us that He sent His only Son so that we might be restored to a close relationship with our heavenly Father once again. But still, we often choose to love things other than God. Still we seek out satisfaction and love from creation rather than the Creator. Still we choose to place our hope and affections in the world instead of in God. If we are to live the life God intends for us, the only fulfilling life possible, we need a renewal of our first love.

Thousands of years ago, the church in Ephesus was much like we are today. Revelation 2:4 says in reference to the church in Ephesus, *"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."* (ESV) The Ephesians were still working and waiting for God. They hadn't abandoned their faith, just their first love. But Scripture makes it clear that when it comes down to it in the end, what will be most important is the way in which we have loved God. When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus replied, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"* (Luke 10:27). Loving God is our first priority. Our love for God is the foundation on which all of life is to be lived. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 says, *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."* This life is all about the posture of our heart.

Reflect for a minute on just how incredible the love of our God is. Scripture makes it clear that He isn't after our service first, but our love. He only desires us to work with Him if it is done out of our love for Him. God is after our heart. More than anything else in the world, He wants to love you and be loved by you. Of course He wants you to co-labor with Him and obey His commandments, but only out of love for Him.

Too often we size up our relationship with God based on how often we've gone to church, how many mission trips we've been on, how many people we've won to Jesus, how many committees we've served on, or how much of our finances we've given to God. And too often we do all of that trying to win over a God who already loves us more than we could ever ask or imagine. God is the father in the prodigal son story running out to meet you and celebrate you regardless of anything you've ever done or will do. He's the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. He's the God who leaves His throne to die for the very people who shouted, *"Crucify him, crucify him!"* And He's the God who waits patiently every day to show you the depth of His love, that nothing you could ever do will change the way He loves you.

Nothing could be more important than living your life on the foundation of God's greatest commandment: to love Him.