

Lost Love?

Revelation 2:1-7

Notes for Preachers

Intro.

Every introduction should fulfill 3 purposes.

1. Capture interest
2. Establish a felt need.
3. Orient the listener to the text.

I created interest by talking about the “Nones.” I established a felt need by suggesting that many of our children and family members are identifying with this group. Many of us would like to do something about this but don’t know what to do. I oriented the listener to the text by averring that Jesus in his message to the Ephesians in Revelation has the remedy for the sickness that has led to a growing number of Americans identifying as “nones.”

What is in black below you probably want to include in your message but also probably will want to substitute your own illustrations for the three personal illustrations that are in my MSS.

Did you know that the fastest growing religious group in America today are the “NONES?” I don’t mean the pious women like Mother Teresa whom we associate with the Roman Catholic Church. I am talking about those folks who when asked to describe their religious affiliation answer by saying “none!”

Pew Research Center estimates that in 2020, about 64% of Americans, including children, identified themselves as Christian down from 90% in the late 1970s. People who are religiously unaffiliated, sometimes called religious “nones,” accounted for 8% in 1998-2000; 13% in 2008-2010 and 30% of the U.S. population in 2020.

If the current trend continues, by 2070 Americans who identify as “Christians” could shrink to about 50% while those who claim to have no religious faith at all climbs near 50%.

If you are not thinking this already, you should be asking what has happened to the Church over the last 50 years? Why particularly are so many young people finding that the local church has lost its appeal?

I don’t need to pretend to be the church quality control expert. Jesus presents himself as that in the letters John sends to the 7 churches of Revelation. These 7 churches represent every church everywhere. In these letters, Jesus offers his clinical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these churches. Then, like any good physician after Jesus completes his examination, he presents his prescription for healing.

So, what does the church need to do to become more culturally relevant today? We will find that out as we examine one by one the messages, he gave to these seven churches of Asia Minor.

We begin with the church of Ephesus which was the most influential located in by far the most important city of Asia Minor.

If you were able to attend the movie “Times of Fire” which appeared at _____ Cinema on _____, you saw pictures like this one of the great amphitheater at Ephesus that seats 24,000. (use picture from movie here)



If you saw the movie “Times of Fire,” you know that this former capitol of the Roman province was a very impressive city! In fact, it was the 4th largest city in the Roman Empire. Only Rome, Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria were larger. Perhaps that is why Paul spent more time in this city than in any other that he visited. He spent a full 2 ½ years here and as a result the new believers who responded to his message impacted the entire region for Christ.

Not surprisingly then, when Jesus offers is clinical assessment of the health of this congregation, He has many good things to say. This was a great church! It was without question one of the best in all of Christendom. But in Jesus’ diagnosis of their condition, he observes that there was one glaring symptom of disease. They had lost their 1st love! The subject of this message is “how do we lose our 1st love.” This is a subject completed message so the main body of the message answers our key question. This is also a key word message, and our key word is “know.” 1. Thus, we will know how we lost our 1st love when we know what caused us to lose it. 2. We will how we lost our 1st love when we know what replaced it. 3. We will know how we lost our 1st love when we know we failed to do to restore it

Turn in your Bibles to Revelation 2:1-7 where we read,
“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

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

Notice that there is a pattern in these verses that is repeated in Jesus' words to all 7 churches. First, we see the character of Christ followed by the commendation of the church. Then Jesus utters his condemnation of the Church followed by his challenge to the church. Finally, he concludes with his covenant with the over comer. What is immediately striking in his diagnosis of the health of this very important church is what Jesus says in the condemnation of this church: *You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen!*

Yikes! How can a church that is doing so many good things have lost its 1st love? To answer this question, we begin where Jesus does as he assesses the health of Ephesus. As I mentioned the pattern in Jesus messages to all 7 churches is that he always begins by describing some characteristic of his that he wants that particular church to consider. For this church at Ephesus Jesus begins: *These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

The seven golden lampstands represent the light that radiated from the 7 churches to their community and the seven stars or angels represent the pastors or church leaders. So why remind the churches and their pastor that Jesus holds them in his right hand and that he walks among them? The answer is that despite all their good works they were losing sight of those two great truths. In fact, this failure to recognize these characteristics of Christ was probably a major factor that contributed to their losing their 1st love.

I. What Causes Us To Lose Our First Love 2:1

A. ***We forget who holds us in His right hand and that He walks among us.***

So how exactly did the church of Ephesus forget these two great truths about the character of Jesus? We need to look no farther than Paul's message to the church to see the answer to that question.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, his first three chapters are about God the father (chapter one) and about Christ (chapters two and three).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are about all the practical matters that reveal where this church was weak. They had a church unity problem 4:1-16. They had conflict resolution problems. 4:17-32. They were temptations that affected their witness 5:1-21. Their marriages were weak 5:22-33. Their families were in crisis 6:1-4. Their work relationships were poor 6:5-9. Finally, in his conclusion, he challenges them to be strong! It is as if Paul is saying, "I know where you are weak. Your church is weak, your relationships are weak, you have a weak witness, your marriages are weak, and so are your families. Finally, your relationships at work are weak." This theme dominates the book. That well covers it, doesn't? There was nothing about this church that was strong. So how did they get to this point? Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 answers that question. Paul prays,

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

So, for this church that was stuck Paul prays that the eyes of their heart would be open so that they could know God better. And in seeing God, realize that they could hope again because He has riches and incomparably great power available to any in His church who dare to ask for it!

III I shared a story about my daughter experiencing how the hand of God was with her. Share any story you know that demonstrates how the hand of God can guide us.

Our youngest daughter, Michelle, is a missionary in a limited access country. When the Iraq war broke out, the government paid for 3-hour programs that aired at the government expense several times a day for a period of a week or two on the dangers of Christianity. They even identified the locations of Christian churches and said, "Here is where Christians meet to pollute our land." All that accomplished was that the size of these churches doubled. Now people knew where to find them.

During this period, several policemen visited churches to harass Christians. Michelle's normal routine on Sunday morning was to go down to the river, get a ferry, go across the river, get a bus, and take the bus up to the place where her church was. This day was like any other Sunday, so she made it down to the river, got the ferry, got across

the river, got on the bus that she had taken for the last 18 months when she went to church. It always took her to church. This day, however, it didn't. The bus driver was just driving who knows where so finally she went up to him and said, "Is this bus not going to Koca today?" He said, "Not today." Every other Sunday it had always gone to that region. Michelle got a little tickled by this, and then realized that if the bus was not going to Koca, it obviously was taking her someplace that she didn't want to go so she asked the bus driver to let her off. She got off in a part of the city she did not know well, and she started asking for directions. "I need to get back to Koca because that is where I want to go." Finally, she got some directions and got transportation back to the church, but she was 20 minutes late. That is the first Sunday that the police had come to the church. That day they took down the names of every single person there. They were especially looking for foreign missionaries. Michelle was the only foreign Christian worker in that congregation. By the time that Michelle arrived, the police had left 5 minutes before. A few weeks later that incident repeated itself. The police came back a second time and a second time Michelle wasn't there when she expected to arrive, and she missed the police by 5 minutes.

I realize that story wouldn't probably impress an atheist. It is not like the walls of Jericho falling down, or Jesus rising from the dead. There would be a lot of folks that would just look at it and say it's just circumstantial. She got lucky. Or could it be that there is a God in heaven who wants to intervene in your life and in mine and he says, "I have a formula for you to follow. And here is the formula: first you must believe that I am a God who is a great and awesome God that can still do powerful work in your life today." Secondly, "I have given you instructions in my Word. I promise you if you follow my instructions, you will be successful and prosperous." The third step in the formula is that God wants us to pray with expectation knowing that he holds us in his right hand and that if we would only open our eyes, we would see Him walking with us!

How about you, are you stuck today? Like these Ephesian believers, are you struggling in your marriage? Or are your children driving you nuts? Or is there someone at church or work that causes you to lose sleep. Are you losing hope? If so, Paul says you need to see Jesus! He holds you in his right hand. He is walking beside you. If you doubt that, pray that God would enable you to see that he does have hope, riches, and incomparably great power available to you!

Could it be that there is a God in heaven who wants to intervene in your life and in mine and He says, "I have a formula for you to follow. And here is the formula: first you must believe that I am a God who is a great and awesome God that can still do powerful work in your life today." Secondly, "I have given you instructions in my Word. I promise you if you follow my instructions, you will be successful and prosperous." The third step in the formula is that God wants us to pray with expectation knowing that He holds us in His right hand and that if we would only open our eyes, we would see Him walking with us!

How about you, are you stuck today? Like these Ephesian believers are you struggling in your marriage? Or are you children driving you nuts? Or is there someone at church or work that causes you to lose sleep. Are you losing hope? If so, Paul says you need to see Jesus! He holds you in his right hand. He is walking beside you. If you

doubt that, pray that God would enable to see that He does have hope, riches, and incomparably great power available to you!

After describing the character of Christ in the second section of His message to the Ephesian church, Jesus commends the Church for what they are doing well. As we go through this list, however, we need to be careful to keep in mind that despite this impressive list of commendations, these Ephesians had lost their 1st love. Thus, it appears that these believers at this great church were deluded into thinking that their deeds were a substitute for their devotion to Jesus.

Add a transitional sentence here to keep your subject before your audience. The subject of this message is “how do we lose our 1st love.” Say something like. “We lose our 1st love when we don’t understand what causes our love to fade. In the second section of our text, we see we also lose our 1st love when we don’t know what we have allowed to replace it.

II. What Replaces Our First Love 2:2, 3, 6

Notice this very impressive list of commendations:

2 I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.

According to what Christ says about them, they were hard working and persevering. I read that and conclude that this was an active church. These believers were likely way more than one hour a week worshipers. They were active in their communities. They in all probability cared for the poor and visited the sick and elderly. For sure, they were persevering! This refers to the fact that the city of Ephesus became a major site of emperor worship. Domitian the emperor at the time demanded that he be called “our master and our god.” John, the author of this book of Revelation, probably refused to bow down to Domitian which is why he was exiled to the criminal island of Patmos. John tells us in Revelation 1:9 that he was suffering because of the testimony of Jesus. Thus, this church faced persecution well.

Furthermore, they were doctrinally sound. They were not duped by some who claimed to be apostles but were not. Neither did they cave into the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans appears to have been a form of antinomianism, which makes the fatal mistake that man can sin because the Law of God is no longer binding. They believed then that you can live anyway you want as long as you had an intellectual "belief" in the Gospel.

I used my personal testimony here. Substitute your personal testimony for mine

I can understand the pull of that false teaching. I especially know how easily we can assume that our good deeds are a substitute for personal faith. I grew up in a Christian home. We went to church every week. As a young man, I didn’t drink, smoke, swear or fool around. I was about as clean cut as a Lutheran boy in Michigan could be. After my

senior year in high school, I even enrolled at Concordia Lutheran Junior College in Ann Arbor, Michigan to prepare to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church.

My roommate that first year at Concordia was a young man by the name of Dieter Wolski. Dieter was an Eagle Scout back in his high school days, a straight "A" student. Dieter was a guy who loved life. What made him unique, however, was the fact that he had a special relationship with Jesus. Every night I saw Dieter on his knees reading Scripture and praying. He even volunteered to lead devotions in our dorm. Also, Dieter would go out to the beach with his guitar and sing gospel songs and talk to people on the beach about his faith in Christ in such a way that strangers gladly listened to him.

Dieter was also a practical joker. Can you guess who usually got the short end of his practical jokes? I knew Dieter well enough to know that he would devise a diabolical prank for my birthday. I decided that I would get the jump on Dieter, so I rigged our room. I went into the bathroom and screwed the shower nozzle off and poured some syrup in there and screwed it back on. Then I took the top of the toilet reservoir off and poured in a can of root beer so when he flushed some brown, icky stuff would come out. Finally, I screwed off the top of the faucet, put in a penny, and screwed that back on so it would spray out laterally when he turned on the faucets.

I moved into the bedroom where we had a toaster. I sprinkled toast crumbs through his sheets to help him think about me at night. I put some shaving cream in the sleeves of his never washed robe which he wore every night. We had drawers you'd reach underneath and pull out and I put butter underneath all those drawers.

There were a few other little things that I did but the coup d'état was that we had closets that had doors that would open outward. At the top of the closet, I put two buckets of water, and I rigged them up so he could open either door and both buckets would come down. Then, I thought it would be a good idea to escape for the weekend, so I went to stay with some of my friends at the University of Michigan.

I didn't know what kind of day Dieter was going to have but I found later that he had taken a humanities test, and he didn't do as well as he thought he was going to do. A little later that day, he had a spat with this fiancée. Ordinarily, they never fought about anything, but they did that day. The only redeeming element of the day for Dieter was that he was able to pick up his new suit and he was anxious to go back to the dorm and put it in the closet. You can guess what happened. Dieter came back to the closet, opened the door, WHOOSH! - both buckets came down over him and his new suit. Dieter got upset. I'm told by my suitemates that he became angry.

About fifteen minutes after he came back, I called the dorm to find out how my plot was developing, and they told me what had happened, and they said for the last fifteen minutes Dieter had been over at his desk on his knees and he was praying. Immediately, I began to feel like a big heel, so I got back in my car and drove back to school. By the time I got there, Dieter had been praying for 45 minutes. I stood in the doorway, and I watched in amazement as he prayed for another 45 minutes. He had his hands folded, his head was bowed, he was kneeling at this desk, and there were tears streaming down his face as he prayed.

I could not imagine what anyone could pray about for an hour and a half in that type of situation. I could pray around the world and back in five minutes and exhaust everything I thought anybody could pray for. I was sure Dieter was praying for a new roommate after what I had done. The only reason that he stopped praying is that he

hyperventilated. So, I called the school nurse who had Dieter breathe into a brown paper bag to regulate his breathing. When the nurse left, I asked Dieter, "Dieter, what were you praying about all that time?" He responded, "George, I was praying about my sins. It was wrong for me to lose my temper and become angry. I was praying that God would forgive me of that. And I was asking God to make me more like Jesus, to live the way he did." That blew me away, because there was not an individual that I knew who lived a godlier life than Dieter Wolski.

I left school that year with the deep desire to be like Dieter. I wished I could have the relationship with God that he had, but of course I couldn't, because we were two different personalities and we approached life differently. So, it just wasn't going to happen. I came home from school that year and met several other people who were like Dieter in at least this one way. When they began to talk about Jesus Christ, there was something about them that I hadn't experienced and didn't know.

Being somewhat of a stubborn individual, as my wife can attest, it took something rather jolting to wake me up. I got a phone call from Dieter's parents in the middle of that summer. They said that Dieter had just been killed in a motorcycle accident and they wanted me to come down to the funeral and be a pallbearer.

Naturally, I struggled with that devastating news. What kind of sense did that make? Dieter did get an "A" in that humanities course; in fact, he got straight "A's" again at Concordia that year. If there was a man who had more potential for God than Dieter, I had never met him. How did it make any sense at all for a 20-year old young man who had dedicated his life to serve God now be dead?

What made matters worse is that I knew that I had to talk to Dieter's fiancée, Pat, at the funeral. And what could I tell her? Dieter was very self-assured, convinced of where he was going, and confident in his relationship with God. By contrast, Pat was rather diffident. Her whole life was Dieter Wolski. What could I tell her? As I came down to the funeral home, the very first person that I saw was Pat. As she turned and saw me, immediately her face seemed to beam. I remember thinking to myself, "What kind of sense does this make? This isn't supposed to happen at a funeral." I walked up to Pat, who was obviously hurting over the suddenness of Dieter's death, but she told me that through her fiancé's death, she realized that the relationship that he had with Jesus Christ was something she could have, too. And she had prayed a prayer and asked Jesus Christ to come into her life. I still didn't quite understand what all that meant.

About five minutes later, I went up to Dieter's mother. I began talking with her, and she told me, in essence, the same thing - that she realized that her son had a special relationship with God that she didn't have and that through his death, she had invited Jesus Christ to come into her life.

That was almost too much for me to handle. After I visited with the two most important women in Dieter's life, the service started. I don't remember a thing that the minister said. All I could think about was the example that Dieter lived before my eyes. I pictured him kneeling at his bedside with his Bible open before him. I envisioned him kneeling by his desk hyperventilating as he confessed his sin of anger. After that service, I was so convicted that I went into a little room by myself and I prayed a prayer that went something like this: "Lord Jesus, I don't know what it is that Dieter had, but I now know that I don't have it. I just pray that you'll give it to me."

I had gone to church my whole life. I was even studying for the ministry at the time. I knew Greek. But I discovered there is a world of difference between knowing the Greek New Testament and knowing JESUS personally.

That clearly is what Jesus is saying to the church at Ephesus. You can perform all the deeds in the world but if you do not know Jesus personally you have nothing!

So, let me ask you “is your faith anything like Dieter’s.” Do people look at you and say, “I don’t know what you have but I want it.” That clearly was the secret of the spread of Christianity through this church when Plant planted the church. Notice what we learn about this church when it was 1st formed. Acts 19:8-20

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So, Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. 17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

We read this and it is easy to see that Paul was a man on fire for Jesus and his faith was contagious. Dieter was no apostle Paul, but his faith was equally contagious. Because of his example, his mother, fiancé, and roommate all came to Christ at his funeral.

Isn’t that the way it should be? So, what would happen with those who check the box “none” when asked their religious affiliation if they encounter someone like Paul or Dieter? We know that the primary objection of the NONES about Christianity is that we are narrow-minded hypocrites. Sure, we may be attempting to do religious works, but the inconsistency of our lives negates any efforts at humanitarianism or godly living.

So, how do we engage the NONES? Is there anything we can do to stop the large number of our Christian youth from giving up on their faith and joining the secular hordes who have no time in their lives for the Christian church?

Jesus answers this final question as he offers his cure to the sickness that that was threatening to extinguish the effectiveness and witness of this once great church.

Add a transitional sentence here to keep your subject before your audience. The subject of this message is “how do we lose our 1st love.” Say something like. “We lose our 1st love when we don’t understand what causes our love to fade and when we don’t know what we have allowed to replace it. Finally, we lose our 1st love when we don’t know what we need to do to renew it.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

III. How to Renew Our First Love 2:5

In Jesus prescription for how the Ephesians could be cured from their lackluster Christianity, Jesus begins by advising that they remember how far they have fallen.

A. Remember

I shared how my conversion experience transformed me here. Substitute your conversion story for mine.

By saying this Jesus clearly desires the Ephesians to ask themselves what they were like when they first believed. Do you remember what you were like? I do! Right after I prayed that prayer at Dieter’s funeral service, I learned that I would be a resident director at Concordia the next year. Since the school had already ended, the administration didn’t follow their normal procedure of allowing any returning student to sign up for the dorm they wanted. Instead, they allowed me to hand pick from returning students those I wanted to have in my dorm. Fresh off my experience of knowing Christ personally as I went through the list of students, I thought to myself “this one needs Christ and this one needs Christ.” So, I picked the pre-ministerial students who I thought would most likely be impacted by my newfound faith in Jesus.

As the new school year started, I instituted a new approach to daily devotions. In the past, dorm devotions lasted about 10 minutes every day and most students dreaded attending. This was not a conscious plan on my part, but our devotions lasted about an hour and a half. Honestly, I did not think about how much time we spent and neither did anyone else because no one ever complained about the time. I was so passionate about my newly discovered faith and the power of prayer that my classmates regularly said to me “George, what happened to you!” Within a month, my new roommate confessed a new relationship with Christ. A couple days later, one of my suitemates came to Christ. By the end of the year, every guy in my dorm confessed a new relationship with Christ.

In addition, I was in charge of the school wide evangelistic outreach that year. We spent a day going to the neighborhoods around Concordia to share our love of Jesus and invite strangers to receive Christ. Only later did I learn the hesitancy most have to doing “cold turkey” evangelism. In retrospect, I should not have naively assumed that it was normal that nearly 2/3 of the student body joined us to do what many would never consider doing today. Equally amazing is the fact that I learned after the event that many of those who went out to share their faith became true believers in the process of telling

others about Jesus. I attribute that to a revival that broke out on campus following the death of Dieter. Crazy huh?

Those were exciting days for me. Some faculty did not like what they heard about what I was doing. The very idea that anyone at Concordia needed to experience Jesus personally was a foreign thought to them. Thus, they complained that I was a dangerous leader on campus. Fortunately, the president of the school Dr. Paul Zimmerman had already assured me that he applauded my efforts to teach young men the value of getting on their knees and praying for the power of God. Equally, he knew that his Lutheran theology led to the necessity of believing every adult needs to confirm the faith that Lutherans believe children receive at infant baptism. Martin Luther taught that without that personal encounter no adult can expect to enter heaven.

So, apparently, I was dangerous for Jesus. That could be a bad thing, but I will take be contagious enough that those who knew me wanted to learn to pray like me and have the kind of faith that drew others to believe in Jesus.

So, what were you like when you first believed? According to Acts 19:10 these Ephesians were so passionate about their faith *that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord*. Can you guess how many people that represents? Conservative estimates are that 2 and ½ million people lived in the province of Asia when Paul planted this church. Isn't that amazing! Were you like that when you first believed? If so, Jesus says "ask yourself what has changed? Are still as passionate? Are you in anyway dangerous for Jesus?"

Jesus second prescription for the Ephesian Church is "repent!"

B. Repent

The Greek word translated as repent means to change your mind. It is doing an about face. I think of this word, and I picture some street evangelist on a busy corner calling to passersby that they need to repent and turn to Jesus. Who am I to judge how God can use anyone who is making their best effort to serve Him, but I have noticed over the years that most folks either ignore these street preachers and some are obviously annoyed by them. That leads me to ask, "does the Bible shows us any more effective way to motivate ourselves or others to repent?"

In Isaiah 6, the prophet records his encounter with the living God. He says he was in the Temple, and he saw the Lord high and lifted up. John tells us he actually saw Jesus (John 12:41). He also saw a choir of angels singing praises to Jesus and he cried out woe is me "I am a man of unclean lips." But after his confession, one of the angels came to him with a burning coal and touched his lips and said, "your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:7).

I would not read the list of all these names. I might put them in an outline I make available or summarize this list in my own words.

After his expression of repentance, Isaiah records the most developed list of the names of God in the entire Bible. 460 times he reminds his readers that God is "Yahweh." This is the name that reminds us that God is with us. He refers to God as "Our God" (36x). He calls Him "The God of Israel" (12x), "My God" (10x), "Immanuel" 8:8, "God is with us" 8:10, "God is with you" 45:14, "The Lord Almighty" (62x), "The Mighty One of Israel" 1:24, 10:34 (2x), "Mighty God" 9:6; 10:21 (2x), "The Almighty" 13:6, "Our

Mighty One” (3x), the Mighty One of Jacob 60:16, “The Holy One of Israel” (27x), “Their Holy One” (2x), your Holy One, “The Holy God” 5:16, “The Holy One” 40:25, “Your Redeemer” (13x) “Your Savior” (8x) “God is my salvation” 12:2, “God makes salvation” 26:1, “The Sovereign Lord” (18x), “The King” (4x), “Their Maker” (6x) his Maker, 11; 51:13, your Maker; 54:5, “Their Creator” (3x), “The One who made it” 22:11, “The One who planned it” 22:11, “The Righteous One” 24:16; 45:21, “Upright One” 26:7, “God of justice” 30:18, “Wonderful Counselor” 9:6, “Our Father” 63:16, 16; 64:8, “Everlasting Father” 9:6, “The Rock” 17:10; 26:4, 30:29; 44:8, “The Most High” 14:14; 57:15 (“the high and lofty One”), “The God of truth” 65:16, 16, “Prince of Peace” 9:6, “The Light of Israel” 10:17, “The living God” 37:4, “The everlasting God” 40:28, “His Holy Spirit” 63:10, 11.

Do you get the picture? Isaiah had an amazing encounter with the living Jesus which prompted him to repent. Then what he saw in the Temple motivated him to keep talking about Jesus until he had recorded the most complete picture of the character of God that we find in all of Scripture. That’s what Biblical repentance does! When we repent of our sins and experience forgiveness, we can’t stop talking about Jesus. So, if we don’t consistently repent what does that mean? I think it means that we are not seeing Jesus. Who among us would dare to say that we no longer sin? But if we are sinners how frequently does our spouse, our family, or people at church hear us say that? If you want to wake up your family or your friends that are tempted to register their religious affiliation as “none,” let them how a verse of Scripture or a time of prayer led you to acknowledge some sin in your life. Ask them to pray for you and then subsequently inform them how God gave you victory over your struggle. We don’t need to convince anyone who knows us they we are a hypocrite. We all are! But what would happen if the world around us knew that as hypocrites God is changing us day by day.

Jesus final prescription for the Ephesian Church is “redo!”

C. *Redo the deeds you did at first.* “Do the things you did at first.”
v. 5

Thankfully, we do not have to wonder what this charge meant for the Ephesians. Their original passion for Jesus was so infectious that as we noted 2 ½ million Greeks and Jews heard the good news of Jesus because of the witness of this one church. Like Isaiah after he saw Jesus, they just couldn’t stop speaking about how spectacular Jesus is. That is what happens we love someone! I should never need to tell anyone that I love my wife. They will know by what they hear me say about her.

Conclusion:

As Jesus concludes his message to this great congregation he says,

*If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

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

Please notice how high the stakes are for this 1st century church. If they don't repent of their lost love, Jesus says he will remove "their lampstand." The lampstand symbolizes the light that went from this church to the province of Asia. We are talking about impacting more Jews and Greeks as well as those who would identify themselves religiously as "none." Sadly, we know that if they did repent it didn't last because their lampstand was removed. Today, if you visit Ephesus you will see ruins of churches that used to exist in the Area but those few Christians who currently live in Turkey have little impact and influence compared to those who started the churches there.

Furthermore, Jesus promises if they do repent, he will give the "right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." V. 7. There is no way to sugarcoat this last statement. Jesus is clearly warning them that their eternal destiny is dependent on how they respond to his message to them. You say how can that be? Won't all Christians go to heaven? Yes, that is true but not all people who call themselves Christians are true Christians.

In John 3 a pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus in the evening. Nicodemus called Jesus a teacher sent by God and told him no one could the miracles he did unless God was with him. So, Nicodemus believed in God. He believed Jesus was sent by God. He believed Jesus was a miracle worker whose power to do miracles was from God. Yet Jesus says to Nicodemus that unless you are born from above you will never enter the kingdom of God. Thus, we can conclude religious people do not all go to heaven. Christians can do all the good works listed in Jesus' commendation to this church and never eat from the tree of life!

The first message I preached after my encounter with Jesus in the funeral chapel in Detroit Michigan was entitled, "How to Lead a Christian to Christ!" Before I received Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior, I went to church every Sunday, I led bible studies, I was in seminary studying to be a pastor. I knew Greek! But I now know that despite all of that I was a modern Nicodemus. Jesus in that Chapel gently informed me that unless I was born from above, I would never see the kingdom of God.

Could it be today that you have not lost your first love because you never, had it? Maybe you have never known anyone like Dieter Wolski, so you have not had any reason to wonder if there is more to Christianity than you have experienced. But if you are honest with yourself, you know you are not passionate about your relationship with Jesus. Would you like to be? If you would, follow along with me silently as we pray this together.

"O God, I acknowledge I have sinned against you. I am sorry for my sins. I am willing to turn from my sins. I openly receive and acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Savior. I confess Him as Lord. From this moment on I want to live for Him and serve Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father, you know that there are many of us here this morning who certainly need to do business with you. There are some of us who may have prayed a prayer like this one that I just read some time ago. But at least recently there haven't been any significant changes that have been taking place. We've lost the power of the reality that should be ours through Christ Jesus. Father, we pray that this morning might be a day of decision for us, that you'll help us to see what you have in store for us if we'll only turn to you

again and acknowledge you as Lord and give our lives to you. And Father, for those of us who perhaps have never prayed this prayer, and maybe are yet uncomfortable in praying it, we pray that you will help us to understand those questions that we still have. We pray, Father, that as we seek to know more about you and more about this experience that you'll help us to understand that which is true.

And Father, for those of us here who have prayed this prayer this morning, we pray that we might know, even now, that because of Jesus Christ and His Word, that Jesus is indeed in our life. Father, help us to grow. Establish us, mold us after the image of your Son, and we pray that you'll create in us that life that truly is in accordance with your Word and Your Will.

Thank you, Father, for this day. Thank you for the privilege of knowing you through your Son, Jesus, and we pray that through the remainder of this day and through the weeks and months to follow that you'll continue to help us to have the assurance of that life that is eternal through you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.