

Adventuring with God

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On-Fire Love for Christ Jesus

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.
Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.
Remember the height from which you have fallen!
Repent and do the things you did at first."
Revelation 2:2, 4-5

Do you remember the days when you were first converted?

I do.

My new excitement and fervor overwhelmed every other consideration of life. I was so thankful to have been brought into the family of God that nothing seemed too much to do for Father God or any of His children. The person of Jesus was dear to my heart. I sought Him out at every opportunity and warmly shared what I knew about Him with anyone who would listen. Like the Scripture says in Hebrews 10, in those early years I stood my ground in the face of suffering persecution and insults and stood side by side with my brothers or sisters who were so treated. I sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of my property, because I knew that I **"had better and lasting possessions"** (vv. 32-34).

Looking back, I can't believe the things I stepped out to try in the heat of my love for Christ. With no experience whatsoever I volunteered to be the editor of our small town newsletter. Why? So I could have a platform (my own column) in which to share the Gospel. Nobody could complain if I was the editor, right? (It was a volunteer position with no pay, so the expectations for professionalism were thankfully very low.)

I also volunteered at the grade school where my children attended. Coming in regularly to help enabled me to write letters of complaint when teachers began to introduce topics that I felt were inappropriate, not just for my kids but for all the kids who

attended. The school officials knew who I was, so they were open to hearing what I had to say.

Being in a small town (population 900) gave a lot of visibility to every believer. We were viewed as "the cult" by the mainstream churches in town. We were just too loud and weird to be legit! We came up with all kinds of creative ways to express our joy at being saved and on the way to heaven. At Easter we built and hung a huge banner that stretched across the main intersection of town. It read: "Hallelujah! Jesus is Risen!" At Christmas time we put a float in the annual Christmas parade. Rather unorthodox, it featured a large wooden cross from which red streamers flowed down on each arm to attach to white packages we held in our laps. The verse written over us was **"The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 6:23).

Because we were viewed as a weird expression of Christian faith, the townspeople sent any strange people who showed up in town talking about Jesus to our house (or the house of our group's Bible teacher). We entertained many strangers those early years, some of them probably **"angels unaware"** (Hebrews 13:2). People stayed for a day or two usually but some came to stay in our home for weeks and months at a time. I was often asked to get a bed ready for an unexpected guest at a moment's notice or to add another plate or two to our dinner setting. Over time our dinner guests swelled to a number that could not comfortably get around our old oak table. So my husband, Tony, ordered a special 14-foot picnic table that easily seated up to 12 people. Yes, it looked weird in our formal dining room, but we were the weird Christians, right?

I don't think I would have submitted to this kind of lifestyle for anyone else other than Jesus. Whatever was needed to advance His cause was okay by me. Not that I didn't complain some days, but I was willing to be inconvenienced because I knew how important it was to give people every opportunity to come to know Him.

Where did all that fervor go? Why do I find myself unwilling now to be "a fool for Christ's sake"? (See 1 Corinthians 4:9-10.) Many things have transpired since I first fell in love with Christ Jesus, and together they have brought me to this new low. At some point I began to care about what others thought about my witness – I wanted to be viewed as a rational, sensible representative of Christ. *No need to offend unnecessarily, right?*

Over the years I also became more aware of myself and less focused on my all-powerful God. I turned my attention to my deficiencies and how poorly I could do a job, and this caused me to hesitate before attempting anything for God's kingdom. *I needed to do everything with excellence, right?*

And yes, as my material blessings increased – which is true for most of us in North America – I became more unwilling to let them be confiscated for His use. Guests, especially the needy ones, were messy and unthoughtful about how to treat things. I didn't want to replace our nicer possessions, so I took steps to guard their survival. I am no longer willing to have our chain saw stolen (as ours was in the early days by a stranger who came through) because I don't trust that God will replace what is taken by something far better. *We need to be good stewards of what we've been given, right?*

Lord Jesus, forgive me. I have begun to keep back my time, my possessions, and my reputation to consume them on my own lusts. I repent of my lack of love towards you and I ask you to

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand.

*Than to be a king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway,
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.*

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than world-wide fame,
I'd rather be true to His holy name.

He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom;
He's sweeter than honey from out of the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs,
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.

(Rhea F. Miller, 1922)

restore to me the joy of my salvation. How awesome you are! I should be so in love with you that I freely share all I am and have with everyone else. for your sake.

Recently the Lord led me to a passage in Jeremiah 2 that pierced through my hard heart with power and conviction. Weep with me as we confess that we have no good answers to His question in verse 5 (in italic). " *I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty' declares the Lord. 'What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt. I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water'" (vv. 2-3, 5-7, 11, 13).*

Guilty as charged, Lord. There is no fault in you. All the blame is mine for straying so far from what you have called me to. I have tried many things to try to have you and also enjoy all the benefits of the world. But I see this only leads to a watered down faith that holds no power to touch others or to change me.

I want to do the "first works" again, the works that flow out of a deep love for you and a profound faith in what you can do through me. I'm yours, Lord. Revive me out of my sleep, awaken me to the opportunities before me. Let me be as the maiden in Solomon's Song: "*I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go*" (3:4).