

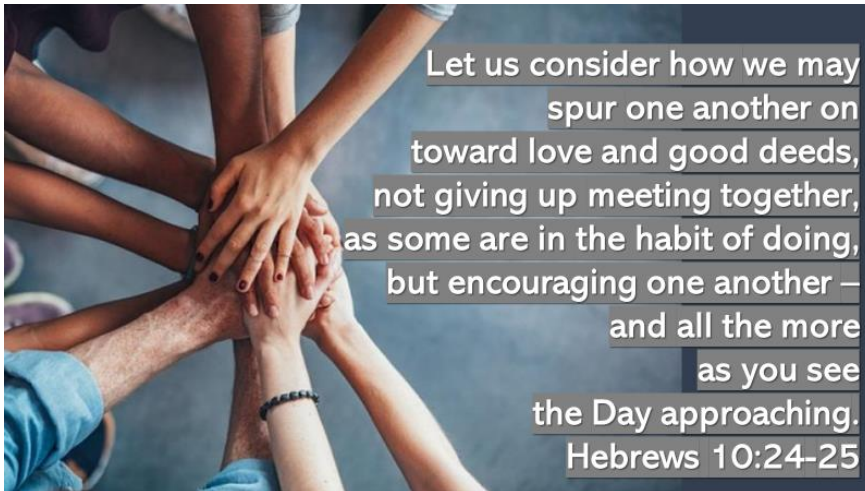
p.42

When John the apostle turned to see Jesus, 1:12-13, he saw him among his churches.

Do you realize what this communicates?

The church is where the believer will uniquely meet Jesus.

With this in mind the writer of Hebrews said in 10:24-25...

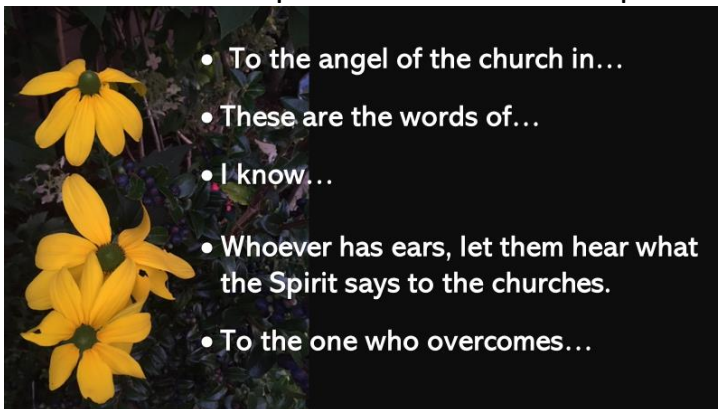


Following Jesus is something we do together.

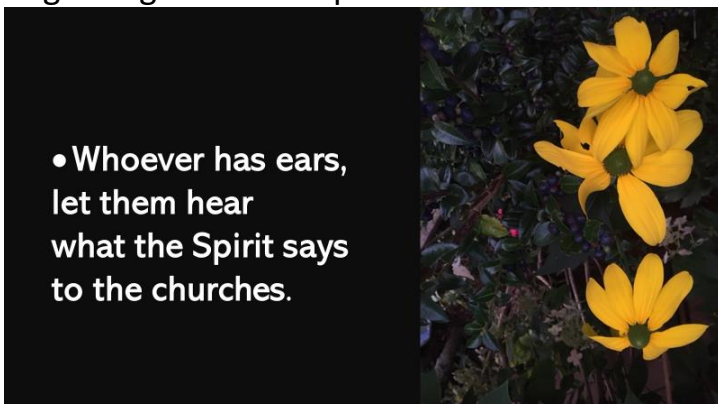
We need each other... I need you to spur me on and you need me to spur you on...we need each other's encouragement...as we wait for the appearing of Jesus.

For the next seven weeks, we will work our way through Revelation 2 and 3...studying the message of Jesus to his churches.

There are several phrases which Jesus repeated in each of these messages.



Regarding this fourth phrase –



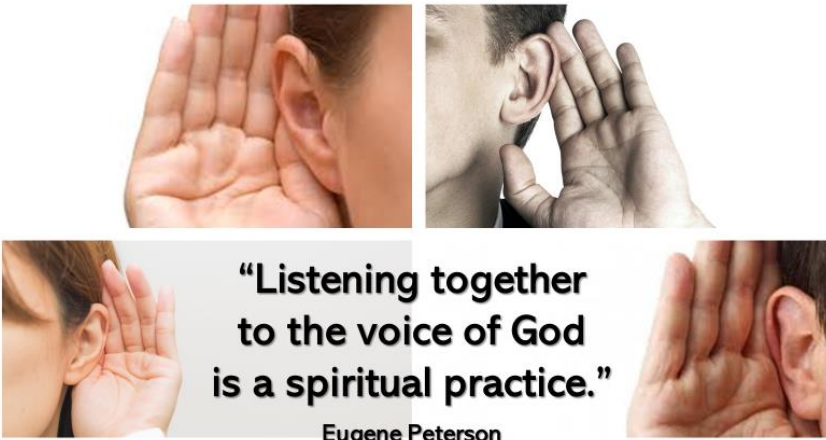
...Eugene Peterson writes:



“The church is the one place in the world where those in relationship with Jesus deliberately come together and uncover their ears so that the sound of God’s voice might be heard.”

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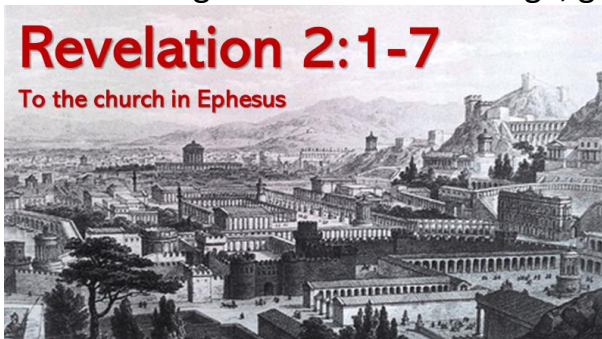
As followers of Jesus, we understand that singing, fellowshiping, praying, giving, and testifying are important and necessary spiritual practices. But these messages to the churches of Asia teach us...



p.48

Jesus said: Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Let’s read together the first message, given to the church in Ephesus.



2:1 – To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

In Revelation every time the word angel is used, it is in reference to a supernatural being, never a human being. DJ, p.52.

The angel of the church in Ephesus... is an angel.

Seven churches, seven angels.

The number seven means completeness.

Every local church has an angel that has been assigned to it.

Angels live for the glory of God.

In the achieving of that Hebrews 1:14 teaches, while unseen, on God's behalf they minister grace to the followers of Jesus.



Things are not as they seem.

2:1b – These are the words of him...

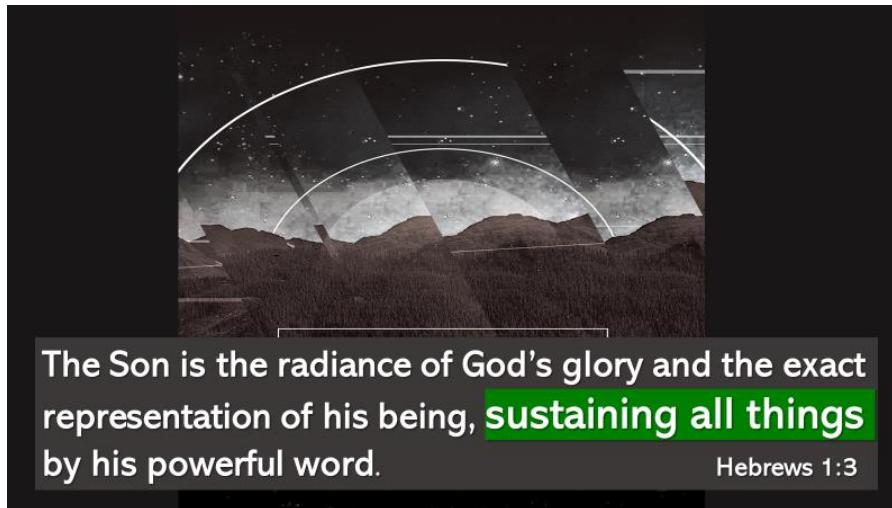
Here is the second phrase that is repeated in each message.

...who holds the seven stars in his right hand ... See 1:12-13.

Jesus reminded the Ephesians ... he holds in his hands the angels who are commissioned to care for his churches.

What does that mean?

Hebrews 1:3 elaborates...



Jesus sustains all things... seen and unseen.

Can you and I even begin to imagine such ability; such power??

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand... and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

When John saw Jesus in Revelation 1:13, he wrote that Jesus was among the lampstands... that is, he was among his churches.

What is important for you and I to take note of... is the word that Jesus added to John's description of him... a word that testified to the astonishing work of the gospel... a word that describes the undeserving privilege that has been extended to us.



Jesus walks... among his churches.

Does that word remind you of anything from the Old Testament?

Before they sinned and were driven out of the Garden, Adam and Eve used to walk with God... in the cool of the day.

They walked together... in order to.... fellowship together.

Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross this beautiful gift of fellowship with God is restored.

John wrote in his first epistle, 1:3...



The context of Revelation 2 impresses upon us that what is being described is the experience of Jesus with his churches.

When we gather together, Jesus is present with us... in order to fellowship with us... **to affirm, to correct, to motivate.**

Fellowship incorporates these three.

How incredible that God affirms; corrects, and motivates his churches.

His affirmation

2:2a – I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.



Following Jesus is not a 100-meter dash; it is an ultra-marathon...realized over a lifetime.

Jesus identified two ways in which he had seen the Ephesian church working hard and persevering.

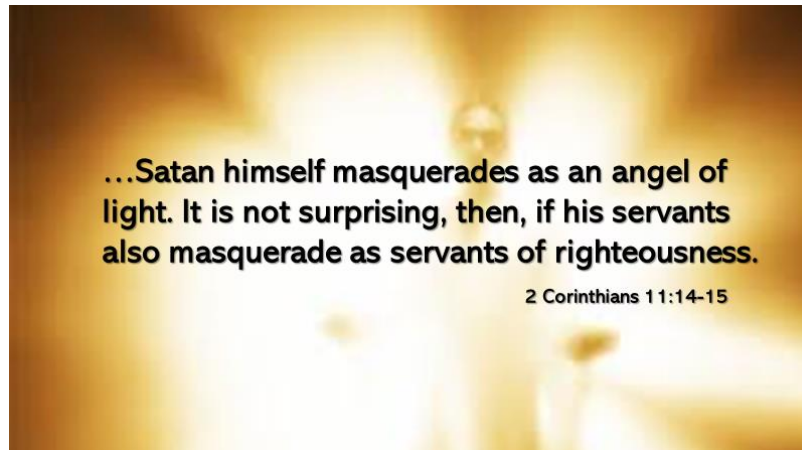
First way. **2:2b – I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.**

We need to be clear – that the wicked people being referred to... were people who pretended to be, not only followers of Jesus, but apostles, sent by God.

Jesus was the friend of sinners.

But these people being described had tried to infiltrate the church in order to derail and ruin it.

Years earlier the church at Corinth had been warned of such people.



The believers in Ephesus, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, had learned to be discerning.

They had done the hard work, which John described in his first epistle, 4:1-3 of "testing the spirits to see if they were from God."

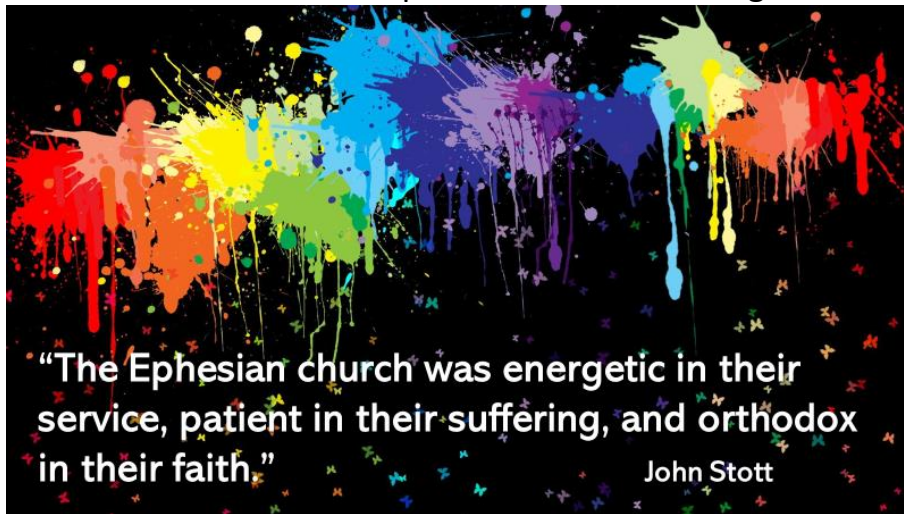
Second way. **2:3 – You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.**



The word 'endured' and the phrase 'not grown weary' was an acknowledgement by Jesus... that they had stood their ground.

In spite of intense pressure to compromise their allegiance to Jesus Christ, they had not done so.

John Stott described the Ephesian church as being...



DJ, p.56

On paper this church was amazing.

In the face of sustained opposition, they had remained faithful to Jesus,

And yet, according to Jesus, there was a **fatal flaw** within them...

...a **critical defect** that would have negated their service and faith....

...a **malaise of soul** that was draining the life out of them.

What was the issue?

His correction

2:4 – You have forsaken your first love.

Being a follower of Jesus, at its very core, is about loving God with all of our heart, soul and mind, and loving our brothers and sisters.

The word forsaken, “aphiemi” means to depart from, to give up. The tense of the word would suggest it had happened over time. They didn’t just decide to not love Jesus as they once had. They had slowly drifted away from him.

The last week of his life, Jesus warned his disciples...



Because of the increase of wickedness,
the love of most will grow cold, but the
one who stands firm to the end will be
saved. Matthew 24:12-13

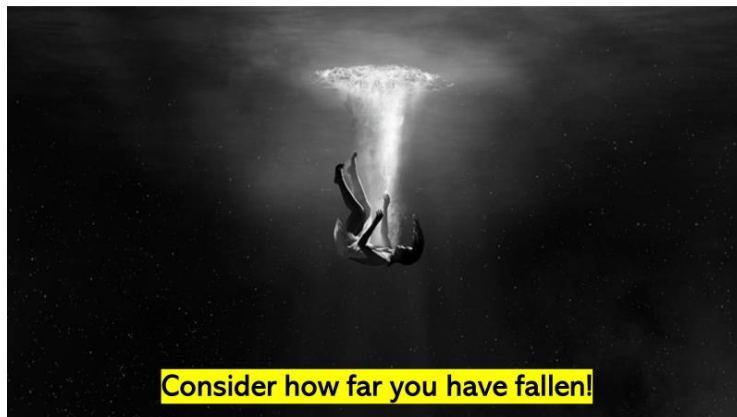
Jesus wanted his people to know that regardless of the culture in which they live, it will require great intentionality to keep their life centered in the life and love of God.

Over a period of time, for the Ephesian church, the intensity of life, the tribulation they faced, the repeated disappointments of discovering Christian leaders who were not who they claimed to be, had eroded their gospel motivation, replacing love with duty.

This assessment from Jesus of his church in Ephesus required a response. He gave them a prescription.



Remember.



This was no small matter.

The motivation for why a church does what it does...is of crucial importance.

To move away from first love is disastrous!

I believe Jesus' word to his church....**2:5 – Remember how far you have fallen!** Is always spoken with great tenderness and love.

He pleads as a Lover.

Remember when God first awakened you.

Remember when your eyes were opened to see him and his beauty.

Remember when you understood who Jesus is.

Remember the joy that filled your heart when you grasped that you were no longer an orphan, but a child of his; that you were no longer an enemy of God, but his beloved.

Remember when you used to eagerly read his Word and would listen in awe to what the Spirit would say to you through the Scripture.

Remember how you would sing with enthusiasm to the Lord as “joy unspeakable” filled your soul.

Remember when the first day of the week was the best day of the week... because this was the day you would gather with the church in the presence of God and there was nothing sweeter.

Greg Morse, Have You Left Your First Love, desiringod.org

First love makes time... for the beloved.

First love is attentive, it is eager, it seeks to please, it is extravagant. DJ, p.58

What is the Spirit saying to us?

If our hearts have become cold, if we have fallen far from our first love, the prescription for the Ephesian church is ours as well.

Repent.

2:5b – If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

In effect Jesus said... unless you repent, I will close your doors.

This impresses upon the reader how serious the matter was.

Don't wallow in guilt.

If the Spirit convicts ... then the only appropriate response is to agree with him...and to turn back towards Jesus.

To confess coldness of heart for what it is,,, sin... and to appropriate Jesus' life blood that was shed in order to forgive sin.

2:5c – ...do the things you did at first.

This is a command to re-order the priorities of life... to make Jesus first in everything.

It is a call to again practice the habits of grace.

Remember the story of the prodigal son?



When he showed himself on the horizon, the father ran to meet him.

His Motivation

Jesus motivated his church by reminding them of things unseen.

2:7b – To the one who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Jesus encourages his church to live with the end in view – to overcome.

What is Jesus referring to?

The tree of life points us back to the garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, Genesis 3:22-24, ... lest they eat from this tree and live forever.

At the return of Jesus, the sword of the cherubim will finally be laid down and the way to the tree of life will be open.

And the people of God will experientially realize, in the words of Darryl Johnson, that the tree of life is Jesus himself.

At the end of Revelation, God doesn't promise to make... all **new** things.

He promises to make... all things new.

- What was broken and ruined will be restored.
- What was dead will live again.
- What was taken away will be given back.

Let the one who has ears, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.