

Return to Your First Love

by Sammy Tippit

Returning to your first love means to return to intimacy with God and to retake your commitment to Christ, making Him your top priority again.

Duration: 34:28

Scripture: Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Personal Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of returning to one's first love for Jesus Christ, highlighting personal testimonies of transformation and the need for intimacy, obedience, and devotion to God. It calls for a renewal of passion and commitment to Christ, urging individuals to prioritize their relationship with Him above all else.

Transcript

It's great to be here with you today, and I'm excited because I believe that God is going to do some great things here at this university. For me, it's always a blessing to come to a university campus. The two greatest things in my life took place when I was in the university.

I want to introduce you to one of those experiences that I had, or the person involved in that, and that is my wife that I met when I was in the university. Some of you are going to meet your future spouse while you are here. I want my wife to stand up right now and you to meet her.

Now her name is Tex, and you heard that correctly, Tex, as in the state of Texas. She grew up in Texas, I grew up in the state of Louisiana. And during her senior year of high school, or last year of high school before going to the university, her father was transferred to Louisiana.

And I met her, and she was running for a political office at the university, and she had advertised as the girl from Texas. And so everyone called her Tex. Now we live in Texas.

But just because I come from the state of Louisiana, they do not call me Louise. Don't worry about that. But it's so good to be here because we met each other, and we fell in love while we were in the university.

And God did a deep work in our lives, and we're here together. We've been married for 38 years now, and I love her today more than I loved her back then. But there was something else that took place when I was in the university.

I met Jesus Christ. You see, I grew up, I was probably like a lot of you. I believed in God, I believed in Jesus, I believed He existed, but He had never done anything in my life to change my life.

I believed all these things, but they made no real difference inside of me. During that time when I was growing up, I had achieved a lot of things. I started off as a young person in America.

I wanted to play professional football because if you're a good football player, you make a lot of money. And also, you have a lot of friends. And so I played football when I was growing up, and I was the most valuable player.

I played basketball. I was the most valuable player in basketball. I was very involved in athletics, and I thought that would give me peace in my life, joy in my life, purpose in my life.

But it gave me no peace, and no joy, and no purpose. One day I was playing in a basketball game, and I was running down the court, and I jumped up to block a shot, and when I jumped, someone tripped me, and I went flying into the bleachers. I woke up with a concussion.

As a result of that, I said, you know, there must be a better way to make friends than this. And so I decided that I would try to be the best student at my school, and I achieved academically. I had scholarships, the opportunity to study in some of the great universities in America.

I had a bright future ahead of me. When I was 16 years old, I studied at the United Nations in New York City, and I was awarded as Most Outstanding New Speaker in North America. And I traveled around the United States and Canada speaking about peace in the world.

But there was one problem. I had no peace in my own heart. My heart was empty, and I didn't know what to do.

Well, I graduated from high school. I went to LSU, Louisiana State University, on a couple of academic scholarships. I had the opportunity to achieve.

I was going to study law after law school. I was going into politics. I had a bright future.

Everyone said, Sammy, you're going to do something with your life. But there was something that nobody knew about. Deep on the inside, there was a vacuum in my heart.

I had fooled everyone else. Everyone thought I was happy. Everyone thought I had purpose.

Everyone thought I was going somewhere with my life. But deep down on the inside, I knew the truth. And I knew that my life was empty.

I knew I had no purpose. I started going to parties and drinking heavily. And the more I drank, the more I tried to fill that emptiness in my heart.

But it could not fill that emptiness in my life. And then one day, I had a girlfriend during this time. And this girl, by the way, went to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night.

Every time the church was open, she was there. But there was only one problem. On Friday and Saturday, she was with me, getting drunk.

And so I said, if that's what a Christian is, I don't need it. So I didn't go to church. But this girl had a father.

And he said, if you don't go to church, you cannot see my daughter. I did not want to go to church, but I did want to see his daughter. So I went to church.

And I sat in the back. And the young people were all back there. And no one was listening.

We were writing notes. The music was not good music like you've had today. I mean, it was a different kind of music.

And I didn't like it. And so I wasn't paying attention. I was writing notes.

And then this young man stood. And he began to speak about Jesus Christ. He began to tell what Jesus had done in his life.

When he was just a little baby, his mother gave him away. He was passed from one family to another family. He did not have a good family like I had.

He did not have purpose like ours. He did not have a future like I had. He did not have an educational opportunity like I had.

But he had something that I did not have. He had peace in his heart. He had joy in his life.

He had a purpose and a direction for his life. And he said it came from Jesus Christ. And he said, if you want to know Jesus, he said, I want to invite you to come to the front of the platform and I want to pray with you.

And my heart was beating. I was afraid. What would my friends think if I went to the front of that platform? I wondered, what would my girlfriend think? What would she do? And then the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart so deeply.

And he said, what is important is what God thinks. And that day, as Carla talked about making a decision, I made a choice. It was the greatest decision I've ever made.

I made a decision to open my heart and my life to Jesus Christ. Not just to believe with him in my mind. Not just to believe in him with my emotions.

But with my heart to choose Christ as my Lord, as my Savior. To follow him to be what he wanted me to be. And to do what he wanted me to do.

And to go where he wanted me to go. And so that day, I went down to the front and I knelt down and I prayed. And I asked Christ to come into my life.

I did not have some vision. I did not see any handwriting on the wall. I just simply in faith said, Jesus, I need you.

Come into my heart. Change my life. And when I got up off of my knees and I walked out of that building, I was a different person.

I've never been the same since that day. You can ask my friends back then. Sammy Tippett, what happened to him? And they would tell you.

He walked into that church one day, one person, and when he walked out, he was a completely different person. Christ changed my life. I had some friends.

I wanted them to know Christ. And I began to tell them what Jesus had done for me. We were all at the university.

And one of them said to me, he laughed and he said, Sammy, we're going down to the beach and we're going to get drunk this weekend. And there's a lot of girls and why don't you forget about Jesus and just come with us to the beach. And I looked at him and I said, man, I cannot forget about Jesus.

He is the Son of God. He has changed my life. How could I forget about Jesus? He went down to the beach that weekend and he got drunk.

The next Monday morning, I received a phone call and it was my friend. And he said, Sammy, can you come to my house? And I went to his house. And he said, Sammy, I got drunk this weekend.

But all I could think about was what you said about Jesus. And he began to weep. And he said, I need Jesus in my heart.

I need Jesus in my life. And I said, Fred, I don't know how to tell you what to do because I'm so new myself. But you can do what I did.

And we knelt in his home and we prayed together. And Fred gave his heart to Jesus. And then another friend, Don and Charlie, they gave their hearts to Christ.

And we started meeting together early in the morning, six o'clock, near our state capitol building. And we'd go with our Bibles and we would read the Bible and we would memorize Scripture and we would pray as university students. And oh, God was doing a work in our hearts.

Our hearts were on fire with the love of Jesus Christ. Oh, God was doing something wonderful within us. One morning, we were at the state capitol and Fred said to me, he said, Sammy, I've been praying.

And I believe that God wants us to go across the river and preach the gospel. I looked at him. I was shocked.

You see, the city where we lived was on one side of the Mississippi River but on the other side of the Mississippi River was where all of the nightclubs, striptease joints, where people did dope and did drugs. And I knew what he was saying. And I said, Fred, I don't think God wants us to go over there and preach.

He said, you pray about it. Well, I made the mistake. I prayed about it.

And God spoke to my heart. And He spoke to three friends' hearts. And He told us to go over there and preach the gospel.

And I'll never forget, we drove across the bridge going across that river. And when we came down, we pulled into the parking lot of this nightclub. The parking lot was filled with cars.

The nightclub was filled with people. And I looked at my friends, Fred and Don and Charlie, and I said, I think we need to pray one more time about this. And so we had a prayer meeting in the car.

Finally had enough courage to get out. We went into the nightclub. The band was playing.

They were singing. Everybody was drinking. And I looked at my friends and I said, we need to pray one more time about this.

And so we went into the bathroom. We locked the door. And we had a prayer meeting in the bathroom.

We prayed in there. And then after we prayed in there, we came out. And I looked at my friends, and I said, guys, we need to pray one more time about this.

So finally we went and prayed in a little place in the corner. And I had enough courage, and I had a brand new Bible. And I walked up to the bartender.

And I said, sir, we're a group of young people from across the river, and we would like to hold a worship service here tonight. He looked at me like, man, you have had one too many to drink. He said, you can't do that.

He said, you'll have to talk to the owner of the bar. And I said, where is he? And he told us in a room. And so we went to this room, and there was this little man sitting behind the desk, and he was counting all the money.

And there were two great big men about the size of Gary there, standing right next to him. And so I looked at that man, and I looked at those two big men, and my friends, Fred and Don and Charlie said to me, Sammy, we'll stay outside and pray for you while you talk to them. I told him, I said, sir, we want to hold a worship service here tonight.

He said, a worship service? I said, yes, sir, we want to tell people about Jesus. He looked at me. He looked down at my Bible.

He looked back up at me. He looked down at my Bible. He said, all right, when the band breaks, you've got it.

I said, are you sure? He said, yes, you've got it. So I walked out, and there was Don and Fred and Charlie praying, Oh, God, be with Sammy. And I said, hey, guys, we can do it.

We can do it. And they said, oh, great. And then we said, what are we going to do? We were all brand new Christians.

We said, well, let's do what they do at church. One was going to read the Scripture. One was going to sing a special music.

One was going to give a testimony. And I was going to preach. And so we decided that's the way we would do it.

Well, we went up there. I was going to be the emcee. And I said, ladies and gentlemen, we're a group of young people.

Excuse me here just one moment. I've got it, Gary. Is my water there? Thank you.

I said, ladies and gentlemen, we're a group of young people from across the river. And we would like to share with you some things tonight. And everybody was drinking and everybody was talking.

Nobody was listening to us. And I said, we'd like to tell you what Jesus Christ has done for us. And when I mentioned the name of Jesus, all of a sudden everyone put down their drinks.

They looked up. And I realized they were listening, so I forgot about the other guys and I just started preaching. And everyone was listening and they were so attentive that I became courageous.

And I had seen Billy Graham on television one time, and so I got so courageous, I said, if you want to know Jesus, I want you to get up out of your seat and come to where I am at the front of the platform. And you know what happened? Nothing. No one came.

And so we broke out and started talking to people about Jesus. One man told Charlie, he said, you know, I'm an alcoholic. I don't know why I come to places like this.

He said, I don't even know why I came here tonight, except that maybe God wanted me to talk to you. God touched his heart. I was talking to a man, I looked up, the lead guitarist in the band was playing and he was singing, and he looked down at me, and tears were running down his face.

God touched people's lives. About two weeks later, my pastor stood up and said, I don't know who they were. He said, but they were a group of young people who went across the river and preached in a nightclub.

And the next day, there was a man in our church who was a deacon. And one of the men who was in that nightclub worked with that deacon, and he came to that deacon at work, and he said, you're a Christian, aren't you? And he said, yes I am, why do you ask? He said, because I heard these young people talking about Jesus. And he said, I need what they have.

And that deacon led that man to faith in Jesus Christ. And that man's life was changed. When I heard my pastor say that, I couldn't stand it.

I got up and I walked out of that church, and I got on my knees, and I said, oh God, never let me lose this love that's burning in my heart for You. Oh God, let this fire of Your love always burn so brightly in my heart. Now I wish I could say to You that love has always burned so brightly.

But the truth is, it has not. There have been times when my heart has been on fire with the love of Christ. And there have been times when that fire has gone down.

And I've needed to return to my first love. To return to the freshness of my love for Jesus Christ. I want to read to you from the Bible in Revelation chapter 2. Listen to the Word of God.

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write. These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance.

I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men and you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Now listen to this.

But I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love. Repent therefore and return to your first love.

The church at Ephesus was a good church. It was a Bible believing church. It had suffered much.

It had gone through persecution. It had tried people who said that they were apostles but were not truly apostles and followers of Christ. This was a good church.

A Bible believing church. But God said, I have one thing against you. You have left your first love.

And you see, that's what happened to me. I left my first love. And God said repent.

Now that word repent means to change. It means you're walking this way, you stop, you turn around, and you begin to go that way. That's what it means to repent.

And you see, I had left my first love and I needed to change. God needed to do a work in my heart, in my life. Now let me ask you a question.

What does it mean to return to your first love? What does it mean to come back to your first love? First of all, let me ask you this question. Who is your first love? What do you love more than anything else? You see, I love sports. I love academics.

I love influence. I love friends. And all that love was ahead of Jesus Christ.

But that day in the university when Christ came into my heart, He became the love of my life. And I can say to you today, my wife and I have been married for 38 years. I love her more than any human being on this earth.

But listen to me closely. I can honestly say to you that I love Jesus more than I love my wife. He is first.

You see, when Christ came into my life, no one ever did for me what Jesus did for me. Jesus died for me. Jesus gave His life for me.

And I said that day, I'll give my heart to you. Christ came in and He became the first love of my life. But it's very easy, listen to me closely, it's very easy for you to lose that first love.

To get away from that original heart, passion, and love for Jesus Christ. It's very easy for that to happen to you. And that happened to me.

People said, Sammy, you don't need to be on fire for God. You don't need to have a passion for Christ. You don't need to love Jesus in this way.

So what happened? Little by little, I made compromises. And I let things go in my commitment that I should not have let go in my commitment to Christ. And consequently what happened was I lost my first love.

So let me ask you, what is your first love? Do you love Jesus? Have you been born again? Do you know Christ is living in you? If you have, then what does it mean to come back to your first love? The first thing it means is this, to return to intimacy with God. You see, when I came to know Christ, we had a place, I had a time where my friends and I every morning we would meet together and we would pray together. And oh, I loved Him.

And oh, I worshiped Him. And oh, how my heart was aflame with His love because when you love someone, you want to spend time with that person. My wife is here with me.

We've been married for 38 years now. And I want to say something to you. When I saw her walk down that aisle and we were married that day, oh, how I loved her.

But I can tell you that I love my wife today more than I loved her 38 years ago. And do you know why? Because we've spent time together. We've walked on the mountaintops together.

We've walked in the valleys together. And because we've spent time with one another, our love has deepened. Our love has grown for Jesus Christ.

And when you love someone, for one another, when you love someone, you want to spend time with them. And when you love God, you want to spend time with Him. You want to walk with Him.

You'll go with Him on the mountains. You'll go with Him in the valleys. You'll go with Him through the difficult times.

To love Him is to spend time with Him. Let me ask you a question. How much time do you spend alone with God? Let me ask you a question.

You say you love God? How much time last week did you have, just you and God, nobody else, just you and Him, talking to each other? You sharing your heart with Him? Him speaking to you from His Word? How much time did you spend with Him? Always say, if I were to ask you, how many of you love Jesus? Probably most of you would say, oh, I love Jesus, Sammy. I love Jesus. But if I were to ask you, how many of you spent more than five minutes where it was just you and God, just you and God alone in prayer? Probably very few of you would be able to lift your hands.

If you really love God, you want to spend time with Him. But there's a second thing that it means when it means to return to your first love. It means to return to a new walk of obedience with Christ.

You know what? I know who it is in this convocation who loves Jesus and who really, really loves Him and who does not really love Him. You say, Sammy, how do you know that? You've never met me before. You don't know me.

I know who it is. I know which guy. I know which boy.

I know which girl. I know in the balcony down in the lower level who loves Jesus and who does not. You say, what do you mean? How do you know that? Jesus told me.

You say, when did He tell you? Two thousand years ago. You say, Sammy, what are you talking about? Listen to this. Jesus said, He who has my commandments and keeps them, He it is who loves me.

And He repeated that. He who has my commandments and keeps them, He it is who loves me. Everything else is just religious talk.

Some of you say, oh, I love Jesus. Some of you say, oh man, I really love God. But the truth is you don't obey Him.

And if you really love Him, you will do what He said do. You will go where He said go. You will be what He said for you to be.

You'll say, God, I'll obey you. I'll do whatever you want. Jesus said that.

I didn't say it. He said, He who has my commandments, He is the one who loves me. So do you love Jesus? You say, oh yes, Sammy, I really love Jesus.

Well, let me ask you, what are you doing with your life? Are you obeying Him? Are you following Him? Are you committed to do His will? If you love Him, you will follow Him. You see, I lost my first love after about two years of following Christ. Christ was in my heart.

I was still a Christian. But I got away from Him. And I had to return to my first love.

My wife and I were married. And when we got married, we went into the ministry. And by the way, I was going into the ministry.

I was someone who was trying to serve God. But I lost that intimacy with God. Because I was not obeying Him.

I lost that fire of that love in my heart. And I'll never forget, I met a man, my wife and I met this guy, his name was Leo. He was red-headed.

And he was on fire for Christ. He told everybody about Jesus. I'll never forget, we went to a restaurant one day.

And we sat down, we were drinking coffee. And he said, excuse me, Sam, I'll be right back. He left.

About 30 minutes later, he came back. Had a big smile on his face. And he said, praise God, Sammy.

Three of the cooks just gave their hearts to Jesus. He had been in the kitchen preaching to the cooks. Oh, he loved Jesus.

Oh, his heart was aflame with the love of God. And I'll never forget, we were together one day, out on a beach. And I said to him, I said, Leo, I said, I see that love for Jesus in your heart.

And it used to be in my heart. I see the fire of God burning so brightly in your heart. And it used to burn in my heart.

But I've lost that fire, I've lost that love. And we prayed on that beach and something happened. That night, two things took place.

First of all, I confessed my sin. There were a lot of things that I said, oh, that's just a weakness in my life. And God said, no, it's not a weakness, it's sin.

And I confessed my sins. And God cleansed me of my sin. But there was a second thing that happened.

That night I took my wife and I placed my wife in a coffin, in a casket, in a grave. And I put her in that casket in the grave. Then I took my automobile and I put my automobile in that casket in the grave.

And then I took my furniture and all of my clothes and I placed them in that casket in the grave. I took all of my money and all of my material possessions and I placed them in that casket in the grave. Then I took my desire to be a well-known preacher.

I took my ambition to be another Billy Graham. And I placed in that casket in the grave. And then Sammy Tippett crawled in and Sammy Tippett died.

You say, wait a minute, Sammy. Did you really do that? No, I did not do it physically. Yes, I did do it spiritually.

The Apostle Paul said, I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. Let me ask you, had he been physically crucified? No.

What was he saying? He was saying, I have been crucified. My old man, myself, my will. And it's no longer me, but it's Christ.

It's no longer what I want, but it's what Christ wants. It's no longer what I can do, but what Christ has already done. Not I, but Christ.

And that night, when I died, God filled me with Himself. And God gave me that passion and that love and that fire burning so deeply within me. And He renewed that love in my heart.

And oh, I want to tell you today, I have but one desire. One desire in life. To love Him and to love people.

Jesus said, if you will do those two things, you will fulfill all the commandments of the law. To love Him and to love your neighbor as yourself. So let me ask you a question.

At this first convocation, let me ask you this. Who is your first love? Has there ever been truly a time that you've given your heart to Christ? I didn't ask you what church you went to. I didn't ask you what your background was.

I asked you if you were to die and stand before a holy God. Would He say, welcome my child, I know you, we have a relationship. Come into my kingdom.

Or would He say, depart from me, for I never knew you. Which would it be for you? Have you ever given your heart to Christ? I mean truly given your heart to Christ. More than an intellectual belief.

More than an emotional desire. Have you ever truly given your life to Christ? And if you have, let me ask you a second question. Has there ever been a time when you loved Jesus more than you love Him today? Has there ever been a time when your heart was burning with the fire of the love of God more than it burns today? If so, you need to return to your first love.

I want this to be a very holy moment. I want you to bow your head and close your eyes. Every person in this auditorium, if you would, just bow your head and close your eyes.

Every head bowed, every eye closed. Father, we come to you in the name of Jesus. God, we pray for a revival, a renewal of our first love today.

God, we pray your fire would burn in our hearts. You would renew that love and that passion for you. Oh, God, make us that people who follow you.

God, I pray for those who have never met Christ, truly met Him. I pray in the name of Jesus that you would work in their lives. Thank you, Father, for what you're going to do.

We believe you for a mighty work. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, no one looking around. I want to ask two questions this morning.

Every head bowed, every eye closed. I wonder how many of you would say, Sammy, if I were to die right now, there's no doubt in my heart I would go to heaven. Not because I'm a good person, not because I go to church, but because one day Christ came into my heart.

He changed my life. He forgave my sins. I know, I know, I know that Christ is in me.

But, Sammy, I must be honest with you. I don't love Him like I used to love Him. I don't obey Him like I used to obey Him.

I don't spend time with Him like I used to spend time with Him. And I need to return to my first love. I wonder how many of you would say, and just be honest, how many of you would say, Sammy, pray for me.

I need to return to my first love. I know Christ is in my heart, but I need to return to my first love. Would you just lift your hand all over this auditorium and I'm going to pray for you.

All right? Just lift it up high where I can see it. All over this auditorium, amen. In the balcony, the lower level, the back, the sides, the front.

Just lift it up where I can see it. All over, amen. I'm going to pray for you in just a moment.

Just lift your hand. Any others in the balcony, lift your hands up and I'm going to pray for you. In the lower level, more.

Amen. All over, all over. Down here.

Any others? Just lift them up and I'm going to pray for you. Any more in the balcony? Just lift it up right now. All right? All right.

Anyone else before I pray? Say, Sammy, I want to return to my first love. I know He's in my heart. I'm going to heaven.

But, Sammy, I need to return to my obedience to Him, to my time alone with Him. Anyone else before I pray? All right. All right.

Father, I thank You for these who've lifted their hands. And I pray in the name of Jesus that Your Holy Spirit would work in their lives. God, I pray they would return to their first love.

God, I pray they would come back to that fresh encounter with Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for what You're going to do. Thank You, Father.

What You're going to do in their hearts. Revive them. Renew them.

Oh, God, help them to come back to that first love. I pray in Jesus' name. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, no one looking around, I want to ask one last question.

I wonder how many of you would say, Sammy, pray for me just like you pray for these others? I believe in God. I believe in Jesus just like you did. But if I were to die, I do not have the assurance I'd go to heaven.

I've never truly given my heart to Christ, allowed Him to come and live on the inside of me and save me and change me. Sammy, would you pray for me just like you pray for those others? Because I do not know

that I would go to heaven if I were to die. And I want to have that assurance.

Would you just lift up your hand? I see some of you already. Just lift it up. Any others? Just lift it up.

I'm going to pray for you. All right. All right.

All over this auditorium, up in the balcony, the lower level. Just lift up your hand if you don't have that assurance. All right.

All right. All over in the back. In the back.

In the center. On the sides. Down front of you.

Just lift it up. All right. Others, just lift it up high where I can see it.

I'm going to pray for you. All right. All right.

Oh, Father, I pray for these who've lifted their hands. I pray that today a miracle, the miracle of miracles, would take place. The miracle of salvation.

The miracle of forgiveness. The miracle of a changed life. God, they believe in You.

They believe in Your Son, Jesus. But today I pray that Christ would come into their hearts and forgive their sins and change their lives and make them new on the inside. I pray that when they leave here they would leave different people.

Thank You for what You're going to do. Thank You, Father. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, in the spirit of reverence, I want us all to stand to our feet.

No walking. No talking. Just everyone stand to your feet right now.

You would right now. Just stand to your feet. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed.

Remain with your heads bowed and your eyes closed. I'm going to ask those of you who lifted your hands. I'm going to ask you to come right now.

Just leave your seat. I'm going to ask those of you who lifted your hands for one of those two reasons. To return to your first love or to give your heart to Christ for the first time.

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