

Living as an Overcomer – Tony Evans

Putting God in First Place - Chapter 2

1. Read Revelation 2:1-7.
 - a. Who is speaking to John? (See also Revelation 1:17-18.) Jesus.
 - b. Here in Revelation 2, who is he speaking to? The Church of Ephesus and to us.
 - c. Just as He does with us, Jesus knows everything about them and us. This church has worked hard and has “*persevered and endured hardships in Jesus’ name*”.
 - d. BUT they have forgotten their first love. He is talking about their passion for serving God. They still love Him but they do not put Him first in their lives.
 - i. Having just celebrated Easter and Good Friday, we were reminded what Jesus did for us. The church at Ephesus has forgotten all of it. Without our relationship with God through Jesus we are nothing more than a social club.
 - e. They have headed down the wrong road. They are making it about religion and not relationship.
2. When Jesus speaks to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, He tells them what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. This applies to every Christian today. It is suppose to be all about a relationship.
3. The church at Ephesus had forgotten their first love. We have discussed spiritual gifts a number of times in this class. When you are using you spiritual gift, is it something that you are doing out of obligation or out of love for Jesus? Out of love. 1 Corinthians 16:14 says, “*Do everything in love.*”

“The issue with Ephesus wasn’t that they no longer loved God; it was that they no longer loved Him first. He was no longer their relational and heart’s priority.” (Evans)
4. We should serve out of love for Jesus. Tony Evans said in the video, that in a long time marriage, that love can leave and then they are nothing more than roommates. We can do the same thing in serving Christ. The original zeal that we had for Jesus has left us and then we are serving because we have always served. It is always important to remember what Jesus did for us and why we serve.
5. 1 John 4:19 says that “*We love because He first loved us.*” We should serve “*because He first loved us.*” He was willing to die that horrible death on the cross for us. We held first

place in His heart and He should hold first place in ours. We should always remember that and keep it in the front of our minds.

6. When Jesus was asked which was the most important commandment, “*37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* (Matthew 22) Both of these commands apply to serving Jesus. We should serve because we love Him and because we should love others as ourselves. I praise God constantly for putting others in my path that were willing to love me enough to share Jesus with me. Shouldn’t we want to do the same for others?
7. Have you ever gone to a restaurant and had a waiter that had a bad attitude? He is working at the restaurant for the paycheck. That is the way we can get when we are “working” at the church and not serving our risen Savior.
8. God wants to be number 1 in our lives. Do you set your weekly schedule by putting church in first? Do you set your budget by putting your offering last? Consider Cain and Abel. Genesis 4 tells us that “*Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil*” and “*Abel... brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.*” Cain brought some, Abel brought his best. Abel put God first, Cain did not. Are you coming to church on Sunday to check a box or truly worship God.
9. Proverbs 3:9 says, “*Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce*”. God wants you to put Him first in everything.

“To love is to decide to compassionately pursue the well-being of another. To love God first is to passionately pursue His pleasure, to pursue that which brings Him glory and good. To love God first doesn’t merely mean serving Him or singing about Him. Nor does it merely mean telling Him you love Him in your prayers. Love is always reflected in actions that originate from the heart.” (Evans)
10. Whenever you meet someone new, you have to spend time getting to know them in order to develop a personal relationship with them. I have said numerous times that in order to get to know God, you have to study His Word and spend time in prayer.
11. Consider Jesus’ friends Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). I have heard people say are you a Mary or a Martha. Mary spent her time at Jesus feet while Martha was a doer focused on serving Him. I would tell you that we need to be both. We need to serve and spend time developing our relationship with Jesus.

Tony Evans says that the way to tell if your first love for Jesus is becoming a second love is to determine “if your performance for God has become an end in itself. If your checklist garners more focus than checking in with God, you have lost your first love.”

12. Ask yourself was singing in the cantata or reaching the final day of VBS the end goal or did I grow closer to God through the experience? In the case of the cantata, was the purpose entertaining the congregation or praising God because of who He is in my life? Did I reach children in VBS or at least move them closer to salvation, or did I just entertain the children? In everything I do for God, do I move closer to Him?
13. Is your list of ways that you are serving God equal to your list of ways that you are moving closer to God, such as Sunday School, Bible study, reading God’s Word or praying?
14. Tony Evans has a section entitled, “What Happened to the Fire?” In anything that we do, marriage, our job, friendships, . . . if we do not work at them, they will fade. If we let living life become our first priority, then the relationship will die. Have you ever had a long-time friendship sputter and fade to the point that they no longer cross your mind?
15. When we accepted Christ, we were on fire. We told everyone about Jesus and how He changed our lives. Now we can go weeks without mentioning His name.

“What Jesus is saying to the Christians at Ephesus—and subsequently to each one of us who has an ear to hear—is that duty is never to replace devotion if we want to be an overcomer. Rather, devotion is to transform duty into something desirable, done out of a heart of love and generated by a relationship rooted in the priority of intimacy.” (Evans)

16. Ephesians 2:10 says, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*” If we don’t serve God for the right reasons, then our “good works” are just “good things”. Good things are done because in our mind they are the right thing to do. Good works are done because we love God and want to serve Him.
17. In verse 5 of Revelation 2, Jesus tells them to repent and start putting God first or He will come to them and put out their lampstand. Repent means to turn 180 degrees and head the other direction.
18. Evans uses the example of driving the wrong way on the highway. Repenting means exiting the Confession off-ramp, then go over the Grace overpass and head the right way by going up the Restoration on-ramp.

19. The first step is recognizing that you are headed in the wrong direction. Ask yourself, “Is God first in your life?” You can look at your time and money and see what is most important to you. Remember what it was like when you first accepted Jesus. He was first in your life. That was the right direction.
20. The next step is repenting from your sin. Repenting is telling God that you have wronged Him. You were not putting Him first but from now on He will be first in your life. Repenting is not confessing, repenting requires a change in your life.
21. When I was a young man and in love with Terry, I couldn’t imagine loving her more. I was corrected by Pastor Derry. He said that when you put Jesus first in your life, your capacity to love goes up more than you can imagine.
22. Jesus tells the Ephesians to “*Consider how far you have fallen!*” Evans says “Repeat what you did at the start.” The result of repenting is to repeat what you did when you first accepted Jesus.
23. John 14:21 says, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.*” Without a personal relationship with Jesus, this will never happen. We are to serve Him because we love Him and not because we are following a checklist.
24. This verse says that Jesus will disclose Himself to us. The NLT says He will reveal Himself to us. By putting Jesus first then we will see Him in a personal way. When I am doing Bible study in the morning, then I feel a closeness to Him that I do not have on days that I skip my time with Him. He feels distant.
25. Verse 7 of Revelation 2 says, “*To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*” (NKJV) This gift is for the overcomer. The NIV says, “*one who is victorious*” who is the one who puts Jesus first in their life. What is the significance of eating from the tree of life? We will have eternal life. The tree of life was in the Garden of Eden but it now is in heaven.

Evans says that being an overcomer gives us full access to all of Heaven, it is more than just being inside the pearly gates. Terry and I went several times with Ed and Betty to the Wilds. We went on the normal tour that travels along the same road that everyone else travels. It was great but the most memorable visit to the Wilds is when we took Ed and Betty on the behind the scenes tour. We got to see the animals up close. We got to feed the Rhino out of our hands. God is offering us the behind the scene tour of Heaven. It is for the overcomers.

26. Based on this verse, the gift is in the future but in the present we also have the power of God to help us become an overcomer. Three verses come to my mind when I think of Jesus' help in our daily lives.
- a. Hebrews 13:5 – He will never leave us or forsake us. No matter what we do or endure the power of Jesus is at our disposal.
 - b. Matthew 11:28 - “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*” This gives me the thought of the poem, “Footprints”. On our good days, He walks beside us but on our bad days, He carries us.
 - c. Matthew 28:18 – “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” The KJV says “*All power*” so we have Jesus walking beside us in the Holy Spirit, which means we have all power in heaven and on earth at our disposal.

“So this reward comes both in the present as well. As God discloses Himself to you here on earth, you’ll discover what you are to do, where you are to go, what purpose He has for you, what brings you your greatest joy, how to have healthy relationships, and so much more. You’ll discover the wisdom He has available to you when you draw near to Him in a relationship rooted and grounded in pure love.” (Evans)

27. Personally knowing God is not the same as knowing about God. When you know God, it changes you. You see His hand in everything. You recognize that He is in control of everything in this world. Knowing Him is a reward in its self.
28. When you do Bible studies, make sure that you take time to develop a relationship with God. It is good to read through the Bible but you need to make sure that your daily readings are not the goal. Your goal in your reading should be to know God more.
29. John 16:33 is the foundational verse spoken by Jesus about becoming an overcomer. It says, “*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*”