

Recapturing Our First Love

By Crawford Loritts

Announcer:

Thank you so much, Stephen, 1908 Biola was founded to accept men and women in mind and character make an impact on the world for the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted people to know the word and then be able to communicate it effectively. And as a symbol of this commitment, we've set aside classes twice a year to emphasize these commitments. The first is our commitment to the word of God. We have literally a Bible conference. We also have the missions conference in the spring that sets aside that other commitment, that is to make sure that everybody hears the word of God.

So we have these two conferences and we're glad you're here. We feel it's so important that we actually make it part of the academic calendar and don't have classes. So you can enjoy these conferences. The Torrey conferences named after Rubner Chatterry, one of the principals in Bisley's early history. Shortly after Limón Stewart and T.S. Horton, founded Biola in 1908 they searched the country to find the top Christian educator they could find. That was R.A. Torrey who at that time was at Moody, and they persuaded him to come to Biola and be part of those early days. Dr. James Gray, dean of Moody and one of the prominent Bible scholars of that day, felt that the call of R.A. Torrey to Biola was, quote, one of the most important events that has occurred for a long time in the history of the church in this country. I have in my files a letter

written in 1919 from Dr. Torrey to the Rabbi by Mukti Mission in India. They found out that he was going to China and so they invited him to come by India. And this was his response to them:

God is greatly blessing us in our work here. And Mr. Alexander, who is with me here in a series of meetings in our own auditorium for six weeks beginning the January 19th, we had large crowds, deep interest and many conversions. And many Christians were built up in the faith. Our auditorium seats forty two hundred people and is right in the heart of the city within one block of the largest department store. Torrey was such an outstanding speaker that one of the conditions of his coming to Biola was that we would build a 4,000 seat auditorium for him to preach in. And that's how the Church of the Open Door came into being. Torrey goes on to write, Although I'm now 63 years old, I never was stronger in my life or able to do more hard work. I usually get to bed about midnight or after and I get up about 6:00 or a little before in the morning. Sometimes I get a little rest in the afternoon, but I don't seem to need more than six hours rest. I'm practically never tired. I do take one day a week, however, for absolute rest, that is to say, rest from ordinary work. I sleep outdoors practically every night in a tent.

Wow, they don't make them like that anymore, do they [audience laughter]? Oh, well. So we've come together for these three days to ask God to speak to us in a very special way through his word, even as he has throughout ninety five years of history and now a chaplain who is also chaplain. When R.A. Torrey was here, our beloved Ron Harper is coming to introduce this speaker.

[Applause]

Hafer:

And "I've never felt stronger" [audience laughter]. You are going to meet next hour the Rev Dr Elise Barrymore. But I just want her to stand let her aura sweep over you for a moment, stand and wave, and welcome her to school. You'll you'll get to hear Terry one more time just before Crawford opens the word to us this morning. But Terry, welcome. Let's give him an official welcome, Terry Heinkel all the way from Chicago, Illinois. He was he was Chrom of Dohm. He was both last time. How many prefer, Terry, were there? Never mind. It's good to have you here, Terry. We're looking forward to this so very much.

The afternoon sessions I need to underscore so that we don't overlook the titles are are fairly self-evident. But I want you to know that women in ministry, women and ministry, although that's what it's about, it isn't for women exclusively. There will be some men that sneak into those meetings and that's just fine. [inaudible name] told me yesterday that he has been hot in preparation for his, as have the others. So this afternoon, the electives will kind of they'll kind of run themselves and then Craig will be on tonight. Before Terry comes and leads us in worship one more time and gets our heart ready for the message. Let me just give a brief introduction to Dr. Crawford. Loritts. The Torrey conference team, reminds me that the bio sketches of speakers

Loritts: Recapturing Our First Love

can get two and three pages long and the people deserve all of those. But our people want to know if these people love God, if they have the ability to open his word and communicate to students. The reason Crawford Loritts is back for his third conference all the way from Atlanta, Georgia, and and points east, west, north and south. The reason is because on his other two occasions, he simply opened the word of God and with clarity and boldness, taught it without apology. And students responded, as did faculty and staff. Crawford Loritts, We love you and we're so delighted that you carved another three days out of your life to be with us. And we welcome you back only after Terry has prepared our hearts with one more worship song you can come at this time, Terry. [pause] Stephen, Hinkel, Stephen, oh! Let's welcome Stephen Hinkel, he looks like, of all things well, that's what happened [inaudible audience comment]. Oh, thanks. All right.

Hinkel:

I wondered if I had a twin brother somewhere, we sang the song, it is only in your will that I am free. How many of you guys desire to walk in freedom? I don't know, maybe you can relate with this.

[musical introduction]

Loritts:

That's incredible, Bill. No, George, no. I don't know. Well, good to see you this morning. I want to get something out of the way. How many of you are sleepy and tired? Tell the truth. All right, look, I'll make a deal with you. If you feel like sleeping, go ahead and go to sleep. OK, I won't take it personally. I've slept on the best of them myself. So, you know, there's some room up here you can lay down here or, you know, if it's uncomfortable, just come down here right in front. Just lay yourself down. But two rules, OK? If you're sleepy, go ahead and sleep. But don't do this pretending as if you're reading or praying. That's lying. Aye, just go to sleep. And secondly, don't do like this. That's distracting, just go to sleep, I'll understand. I'm tired, too. In the last four days, I've been in Wheaton up at the Graham Center, speaking down in Orlando, Florida, at a board meeting and then here. So, you know, I'm normally a morning person. I get up early every morning and say good morning, Lord, let's get on with it. But when I got the wake up call at the hotel this morning, I said, good Lord, morning! [audience laughter] So, you know, I do understand. I just want you to know I'm one of you today.

I bring you greetings from my wife and dear family. And in fact, I on the way from Orlando, I stopped by my house in Atlanta, spent the night keisters, said, good to see you, like to get to know you better and left yesterday morning. Come on to come on out out here. She is indeed the joy of my life. She's absolutely wonderful. She's the mother of our four children, our oldest son, Brian. I think he was here last year. He is he's a piece of work, as you probably have noticed. He's wonderful. He's the father of our grandchildren. And his dear wife is just just a delight. And then there is there's Heather. Heather is almost twenty six. I almost forgot about her. She says she's a she's in love and I want to see this sucker [audience laughter]. Man, can I imagine giving

my daughter to some bug-eyed idiot. But at any rate she's in love and remains our youngest son, Brendan. He's 22 and graduated from Moody's Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Sorry about that. He wouldn't listen to me about coming out here, but he asked me some time ago, said, Dad, how do you know when you're in love? I said, My brother, when you can look at that woman's eyes the way you do my refrigerator then that's the real thing. Until then, you just had a bad pizza, brother, that's OK. And then then there's Holly. Holly is 19 and we're officially empty nesters.

And somebody asked me, I got all the you know, be careful, this psycho babble groupthink stuff. You know, everybody has this malady of the empty nest syndrome. And so you expect to go nuts. Well, someone said, well, Crawford, you know you know, you've always had a child in the house for 30 years, has been someone in the house for 28 years or however long it was. How do you feel now? Are you getting in touch? I said, yeah. Did you cry? Yes. Tears of joy when she left. GO is an acronym. It means Get Out, you know, so I don't mean no harm.

And I love all of y'all here. And I got I got like I said, I've been through the college thing four times now. A lot of money been through this thing with with my kids. But I want to say to y'all, just mess up everything when you come home. You know, you come home for vacation and you put the house in turmoil. You know, my daughter and she came home after, you know, first vacation. Oh, Dad, me and my car sounds funny. So mine sounds funny to, you know, when are you going back home? But I think that that's that's our family.

Is it this dysfunctional idiot, his speaking our we had the privilege of watching our two grandsons this summer are our best brains. Two boys and Brian, of course, two boys. And Quentin is two and a half. He's two at the time. And so Brian and Corey were going away for vacation. It'll take a little time off, celebrate their anniversary. It's been a few days away. And so any excuse to watch the grandkids. So we we had the boys now. Brian warned me as he was leaving. He said, now, dad, you know Q's into saying no now, you know he's into saying no. So he left. Well, Quintin needed a haircut. I mean, he looked like a Rastafarian, so he needed me to get a little lol, you know, things done so and so. Brian, go on. And I was put in Quentins clothes on. I said no cuz we got we got to go. Bye bye. Now we're going to go get get your haircut and as other putting his clothes on set. You ready to go. Bye bye. He looked me square and I said no as a Q Papa doesn't do know.

And so we did a few other things to make him a very positive young man. And that little story reminds me sometimes of our attitude. Most of us as Christians, we're not what I would call aggressive prodigals. None of us, you know, we're not waving our fist in the face of God. But achilles heel is that we are cultural Christians. Some of us have grown up in a Christian home, we've been hyper exposed to Christianity, to the processes and all of these things, and we've made our commitments to Christ. But our problem is that we're not aggressive protocols. We're just passive followers. Passive followers. We know the language, we know the words, we know the songs, we know how to act, and we're not doing too many gross things.

But we very sophisticatedly, if you will, tell God sometimes no. About who leads our lives and who directs our lives and what we're going to do with our lives. And so there's this insidious, subtle form of complacency that hovers over Christianity. There's a dastardly professionalism. And it just just a nauseating, habitual approach. We have to doing Christianity. It's lost its edge. And it's touching our lives. Throughout the Bible, when God wants to get our attention, he will often use a shocking, searing language of marriage and at its extremes.

To demonstrate to us what unfaithfulness looks like. You know, a graphic word picture Israel in the old King James going abhorring after the gods spiritual adultery. And just as a marriage falls apart, so also can our walk and relationship, practically speaking with Christ, disintegrate? Marriages begin with feelings of great passion. Your love, you'll do whatever it takes, nothing else matters, that person is a priority and you're passionate about that, then you say I do and you realize that you did.

You know, and life starts happening. You realize that you can't sit around kissy face all day. Somebody's got to go to work around here and you start working and and kids start coming and little stuff starts accumulating, you know, and if you're not careful, you don't mean to do this. But the passion can disintegrate, if you will, unless you're intentional to neglect. You know, you don't

mean to do that. Misplaced priorities. A little bit too much here, a little bit too much there. You don't say I love you as much as you used to. You don't send the flowers like you use anymore. And unless there's a little bit of an adjustment and a wake up call, a realignment of priorities, you can go from passion to neglect to the third level, which is really dangerous. And that's boredom at this juncture. There's been the accumulation of unresolved conflict. The little stuff has become big stuff. And because you've not paid attention to it.

The person becomes the problem and you start getting sophisticated ways of avoiding each other, spending a lot of time on the golf course, spending too much time at work, figuring out ways as to how to not interact with each other, arguments and confusion. And unless there's a major intervention at that juncture, you go by of necessity to the fourth phase and passion, neglect, boredom and then departure.

Either there is a literal divorce. Or just a total erosion in the relationship. That, too, can happen in our walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. Whatever, Jesus is not the focal point of who we are and what we do. We can become so terribly process oriented. And end up. Full of Christian information. But dry and cold. And weak. And spiritually impotent. Jesus had a word. For us. When he told John to pick up his pen and he dictated a series of letters to churches as John was in exile.

The first of the seven latest letters, I really believe is a prophetic word, a prophetic word to the state and stature of evangelical Christianity in our culture today. I really believe this this is a prophetic word, particularly with our zip code on it. Six of the seven letters that Jesus dictated to John follows the same predictable pattern he sets the stage with his first letter. The exception is a letter to the church at Philadelphia. But in six of the seven letters, there is this pattern that this template that that he overlays on that there is commendation, there is condemnation, and then there is correction.

He tells John, pick up your pen, I got something I need to say to this church in Ephesus, Revelation, chapter two, beginning a verse one I'm reading from the new American standard version. Jesus says, John, write this down to the angel of the church in Ephesus, right. The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lamp stands says this. Now, listen to the verse here. I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance and that you cannot endure evil men. And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not. And you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured from my namesake and have not grown weary. This is the commendation. Jesus says give them a standing O. John, I want to I want to commend them. I want you to write this to them.

I want to underscore what they do right. And notice basically Jesus commends them for two things. Number one, he commends him for right behavior. He came to commend for right behavior, it's interesting to me he didn't say anything about protracted sin or habitual immorality or any of this place as a squeaky clean place. The verbs you've endured, you have perseverance. You know, you you're hanging in there. You you haven't grown weary. You are stellar. In your behavior. Know another wrong about what you're doing, you're not messing up hip, hip, hooray! He commends him for right behavior. Secondly, he commends him for right beliefs. Noticed that the line, he says, and you put to test those who say that they are Apostles and they are not. The not so subtle inference our assumption is that you have a right standard of truth that you embrace by and through what you evaluate other systems of thought that does not measure up to this truth.

You behave right and you believe, right, this whole heresy going here, there's no there's no law hobbyhorses that's taking you outside of the realm of of historic biblical Christianity. You you hold to the apostles teachings. You're looking at me the same way I did as of when I read this six years ago, so well, what's the problem here in that the nature of basic biblical Christianity? Don't you want to be around people who behave right and who believe, right? Of course you do. Isn't that the essence of what we're all about? You know, don't and don't mess up, you know, you live by the rules, you embrace the stuff, you you live a godly holy life, you don't embrace heresy or stuff that's way out there. You stay within the framework. Isn't that what it's all about?

Yeah. And notice, Jesus doesn't say stop it, he's commending him for. But then he slides into the condemnation. Listen to this tell to your line here. Part of the problem, and I wish we would do this when we teach the introduction to the Bible and teach basic hermeneutics. I get on my colleagues sometimes, make sure you teach your students not just a little historical grammatical, but teach them the emotional context of the text. These are not computers. Put yourself, if you will, my research indicates that the church offices, when that was not a particular one place church, when the 40 200 seat auditorium, the series of house churches dotted around offices. And probably probably elder, an elder placed over each one of those house churches. This letter circulated. And maybe there was, you know, 10, 12, 15 people huddled together in a house church. Now, put yourself there in that house church, the elder stands up to read a message from the mouth of a master himself.

You're on the edge of your seat. And he starts off by Jesus, none other than Jesus saying, wonderful, I'm commending you for right behavior, right belief. And you might turn out like I went to my wife saying, oh, this is really incredible. We're doing OK. But then he reads the next line. Listen to this line. He slides into the condemnation. He says, But I have this against you. None less than Jesus himself says, I got a problem with you. I got a problem with you. You've got right behavior and you've got right beliefs, you're doing the right stuff. Don't stop, but I got a I got a fundamental problem with you. Some lazy preachers have butchered this verse.

Listen carefully to what Jesus says. Here's the problem, he states the problem. But I have this against you now wake up just for this next. Three minutes and go back. Let's listen, listen, listen, listen. He says, you listen to these words. You have left your first love. You listen, listen, have left measure the words your first love. Say it again. The problem is that I have with you. I want you to continue to behave right and believe. But the problem that I have with you and all your right behavior and all your right beliefs, you have left your first love.

Now, let me make a few comments on those very important words, Jesus says the problem that you have is that you have left not lost. You didn't lose it. You left. You left. You left your first love. How many know that there's a significant difference between losing something and leaving something? Yes, there's a big difference between the two. Let me help you out here. About a year and a half, two years ago, I had a real busy day ahead of me. And my wife says most of my days are like that. But I was really excited about the stuff that we're doing. We had this major media campaign that I was a part of and I was meeting with some people are flying at a town meeting at my office. I got up early to get ready for that. And then I was going from there to speak at a major event where I'd be giving the gospel to thousands of men in a stadium.

And I was excited about that. And all the stuff was going on. And, you know, I'd been a little bit busy today before. So I was running a little late and I was putting my stuff together in. And you know how it is when you walk out of the house, you got this gnawing sense that you left something, you know, and I was going through my mental checklist I got. That demonic cell

phone I got, the Palm Pilot, I got the light, my stuff for the meeting, I got my bags, I got the stuff for the trip, I got my plane tickets and I got halfway to the office.

It be one thirty eight and twenty nine. Halfway to the office there at the light, I go, Oh, man. I left my wallet on the dresser. I didn't lose it. I know exactly where it was in my wallet, why she would tell you that in some areas I'm obsessive compulsive, I, I put my wallet at the same place every single night, my keys, my money clip in my wallet, in between the radio and the telephone, on the right side of the dresser on her side of the bed. Now, leaving your wallet on her side of the bed is a little dangerous. I need to change that pattern. But I left it there. Now, now, listen to me and listen to me. Nothing on my agenda that day was was godless, immoral or evil. It was all to advance the kingdom of God. But in my enthusiasm about right stuff, I had forgotten something essential. Let me say that again, in my enthusiasm about right stuff, I had forgotten something essential. Jesus says in your enthusiasm to live a right life and to believe the right stuff, there has been a transference. You have left your core identity. The text says you have left your first love. That word first is not to be taken as a sequential term for first do this, then this, then this, then this, then this, it is the essence expression for first.

I've been married now for thirty two years to the greatest woman in the world. I love my wife. I love her more today than I've ever loved before. I travel a great deal. There's a lot of stuff that I do want to tell you something. I want to tell you that I've learned the hard way. My wife has veto rights over my schedule. If Karen called this afternoon and said, honey, I need you, there's an

emergency here. I'd say to Dr. Cook in Iran, you know, I'm sorry, can our ministry reimburse you for the expenses? I'm sorry I'm out of here. I'm out of here. You see? What we flexure, what's valuable to you is not necessarily the amount of time that you get this stuff, you've got to be careful of some of these things that some of us guys say in these seminars, you know, these truisms that are not necessarily true.

One of them is this. I can tell what's most important to you by looking at your calendar. And I say bull feathers. That's not necessarily true. You know, if you if you get married, you'll discover you can't sit around the kitchen table and kissy face all day. Somebody's got to get out here, make some money. Now, you could do that, you have a homeless ministry, but you could do that. Knowing my wife, she said, baby, kiss me when you bring the check home, then we have a nice long kiss. So it's not necessarily the amount of time, but listen, listen, listen. It's who and what determines how you use your time.

Geez, I don't I don't I don't want you to stop behaving right and believing right. But I want you to remember why you behave, right? And why you believe, right? Legalism right here is a descriptive definition of legalism. Legalism. Is doing right stuff for the wrong reason. You're not holy because you don't do this and you don't do that, and you believe the you know, I believe this is the word of God. I believe it's a, you know, authoritative, infallible, inspired verbal plenary inspiration. I go down the doctrinal list that does not make you a passionate follower of Christ. Just because you get up every morning and have your devotions. And go for your presence, that

doesn't make you a passionate follower of Christ. Just because you've never broken any of the rules here in Biola, that doesn't make you a passionate follower of Christ. Makes sure it makes you a conformist and you ought to do those things.

But Jesus says there's been a subtle shift, you have left your first love. He uses a Greek term of God. Now we've trivialize the definition of that word in our desire to understand agape. We use this little 10 cent observation. Oh, that's God's unconditional love. Yeah, but it's much deeper than that. Trying to define a gappy is akin to trying to define holiness, and it defies our categories. It is not just God's unconditional love. It is this pursuit love. It is his love that when you die, when you are going in the wrong way. I don't have time to go through all of this today, but sometimes it's Chapter 19 and if you have access to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, read its article on emphasis. Emphasis was a cesspool. Paul stayed longer, deficits that he stayed in any other place when he started that church. This was not some little summer missionary project that he was on.

He came in, they were living and raising all kinds of hell, and I use that expression intentionally full of idolatry, temple prostitutes, homosexuality all over the place, the personification of evil. These people were walking out of these idolatrous, immoral temples and there Paul was in the Agora preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel penetrated and pierced their their immoral realities. They got deliverance from their sin. They didn't know anything about penology. The only thing that they knew was that Jesus Christ.

Unchain them from their immorality and change them from their sin, gave them freedom, gave them eternal life. This is powerful with choosing to send a signal. Look at you. Now, you're all sophisticated, you don't do those things anymore. You got your nice little rolls. And yet you love the process more than you do the person. And that's the indictment on this evangelical enterprise that we're living in today and I want to plead with you don't become like many of our evangelical leaders today. We're into spiritual image management. Keep your heart ablaze with a savior. And remember that the process is not the destination. We follow Jesus and we live right, and we we believe right, because Jesus is at the center of all that we do and say. You have left. Your first. You forgot. All right and clean, all correct. But passionless. There is commendation. There's condemnation. Now, this correction.

Well, what are we supposed to do? Verse five. He says, remember, they're far from where you have fallen. And repent. And do the deed you did at first, alternative rendering do the first deeds. Jesus says, not here. Here's what I want you to three things. Three things right here in this opening clause, he said three things I want you to. I want you to remember. I want you to repent. And I want you to redo.

Let me make a few comments and we'll be through. That word, remember, is a very interesting word in the Greek text area. It's a double entendre. It's a double entendre in me. It is both. It is both passive and active and it's inference. It means both to recall as well as to rehearse.

Interesting word. It's almost as if Jesus said, oh, stop, stop, stop the meaning, stop it. Stop it, stop it. Hold up, hold up, hold on over. Pull over. I want you to look in the rearview mirror of your mind. Go, go, go, all the way back, all the way back. Oh, not all the way back before you took your first course, an introduction to doctrine and go go back. Way back. Way, way back. Way back, back, back, back, back. For you do all this stuff.

We had two national paradigms working for you. OK, go back, go back, go back, go back. I want to remember what it felt like we used to lay awake at night wondering what's going to happen to me if I should die. I want you to remember the dirt and the grind that you felt. I want you to remember the tears rolling down your cheeks when you saw clear how come it's taking me so long to get better. And for those of us who came to Christ in Christian homes. I want you to think about what you could have been. What do you think about it? I want you to recall. Andre Crouch, an old song, used to sing Take Me Back, Take Me Back, Dear Lord. When I first receive you. The word also means to rehearse. I want you to take that memory and make it active. Get rid of this entitlement mindset.

Don't ever get so cute that the call to the cross is abandoned in your Christianity. Don't ever lose sight of your personal conversion. History and I'll talk a little bit more about this tomorrow

morning. History begins at Calvary. Don't forget where you came from. Parenthetically, the very nature of Pauline theology on sanctification is all about the cross keep the cross current in your line. There's no victory apart from the cross. Your personal history and your personal salvation is key practically and transferrable to your victory over sin today. Don't get so sophisticated in your analysis that you're beyond talking about Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so don't go there.

That is a false intellectualizing. Jesusita, I want you to rehearse this. Stories told of Dwight Lamouidi, I don't know if this is. Apocryphal or factual, you know, some of these stories get thrown around, but like it's all shared the way I heard it. The story is told that up in Northampton near the end of his life, he had just a passion for shaping future generations of Christian leaders. And so these young budding preachers and evangelists would gather round Moody.

Inevitably, they would all ask the same question eventually. Mr. Moody, what was the secret of your enormous success as an evangelist? As is the case today. You know. I had the privilege of serving with Bill Bright for all these years in organization and. People have tried to analyze crusade and figure out what's the key and what's the inside? What is a marketing hook and how that you position yourself in evangelicalism and who did you know and what strategies did you follow? What consultants did you listen to that outline? Then when you meet Bill, you kind of. We just believe God. And Moody would say the same thing, I hate to disappoint you, but before I came to Christ, I worked toward the cross. After I came to Christ, I work from the cross.

There's no secret it's the cross. Remember? Then he says, repent. Did you know that the same root word for remember is the root word for repent? Metanoia with change.

Change your mind about how you do Christianity. Context is king, and that I really believe the context defines how Jesus is using the word repent. I want you you got all the right stuff there, but it's out of whack. It's out of whack. Those of you who play baseball, my daddy played in the old Negro Leagues, I love the game itself. Sometimes when a hitter is not driving the ball, it's not that he's not making contact. Was just said he's not positioning himself right either. He's leaning forward. He's not down and back. His hands are getting you know, he's sliding a little bit. He's not stable. Jeez, you got all the right stuff here. But I want you to change your mind about how you do Christianity. Yeah, I want you to behave, I believe, right, but put me back in the center of the equation, repent. Repent. And then he said.

Do again. The stuff you used to do. I don't think that this is too heavy. Remember when I was doing research for this message? At first, it baffled me what did he mean by that? And I went to the book of Ephesians to try to get some clue and, you know, then the lights came on. I think the emotional inference is the intent of the line here. I think you say, you know, remember remember when you. You know, all this stuff. Remember how you used to lay awake at night? We thank me for who I am. Remember how you used to tell me how much you love me? You remember the. A couple of years ago, I had a speaking engagement. Not too far from my hometown. I was

born in Newark, New Jersey, spent the first 12 years of my life there, and then my family moved to Plainfield, New Jersey, but I had not been back to Plainfield in years and years.

My parents retired to Roanoke, Virginia. I went off to college and they retired Roanoke, Virginia. And my uncle that passed away. So wasn't a lot of family reasons to come back to Plainfield. So for whatever reason, I never hadn't gotten back that much. But I was speaking in that area and I decided at some time during the day to drive up there. So I went to Plainfield, New Jersey. I went to the little church where I gave my life to Christ, I was 13 and a half years old. Second Sunday in January, nineteen sixty four and fifty three don't count and. I knocked on the door, secretary came to the door and I told her who I was and I she said past is not is that I just want to see that altar. And as I stood there, the tears began to trickle down my cheeks. Then I drove from there past where we used to live. But the kicker was I drove up to Green Brook Park.

See, from the time I was about 13 and a half years old to about 17, I used to almost every day have a daily appointment with God in that park. I would go there to a little clearing. And you may not believe this, but there is a private side to my personality, and as a teenager, I was you know, I was a little bit on the private side and I would go to that park and pray and I would ask God to use me one day. To lead people to Christ, to help me understand is word. And as I stood there. The Lord reminded me: Whatever I've done in your life, Crawford, it ain't been because your education or exposure or the people or the contacts or your leveraging up relationships and

all of that stuff. It's been because of a love relationship with me. And if you ever walk away from that, I'll take my hand off of you. If you ever walk away from that. I'll take my hand off of you.

Don't be deceived, education is terribly important, don't get me wrong, I believe it. I'm chairman of the board of a college I believe in. I believe in education. I believe the process it's terribly important. That ain't your surrogate God. There's an old song. I don't even know why I'm quoting this, because you probably never heard it, but. There's an old song. There's a line in the song that says. You don't send me flowers anymore. Some months ago, I had been my wife and I, we have a date night once a week. Actually, it's more than that now when I'm in town and we're empty nesters, she's forgotten how to cook. I keep threatening to sell the microwave, refrigerator, stove, everything else. I mean, if she was, she'd shoot me. But anyway, we have a date night. Well, I've been traveling so much in the schedule that that we had missed it for like two weeks.

And so she called the office one afternoon and she said, honey, we were talking a number of other things. Near the end of the conversation, she said, when are we going to hang out? And, you know, I said, well, honey, I've got to go to Minneapolis, and when I when I come back after this trip, you know, we'll we'll do that. And she wasn't complaining. I just hung up and I got to feeling bad about that. I thought to myself, that was lame, you know, and. And I told my sister, this is Scottie, I'm leaving early today. So, yes, just rearrange the stuff. I'm leaving early, so stopped by the florist, got us some flowers and we hung out. Don't stop hanging out with Jesus. Jesus puts it all in perspective. Remember, repent. And we do. Let's pray together.

Father, we love you. We thank you for who you are. We thank you for the blessings of knowing you. God, sometimes we get so preoccupied with doing Christianity, we forget the great savior that we live for. Forgive us. Forgive us for the subtle shift of our allegiance from the person of Christ. To our plans and processes and our objectives and where we want to be and what we want to do. Oh, God, keep us tied to your heart. Lord, I pray that you'll revisit us and touch our souls, touch our hearts and our minds. Not just with some empty sentimentality, but with the reality of the resurrected savior. With the reality of the power of God that's present in us and the overwhelming love of Jesus Christ that engulfs us.

Thank you, God, for who you are. Thank you for being patient with us. We love you, Lord Jesus. And may our lives be the arena for your activity in this broken and fallen world. In Jesus name. Amen.