



After prayer and meditation, I almost feel disappointed that I don't have more direction to give you. What I hear the Lord saying is to stay the course. It's not a new word, it's a keep going word. And I know this doesn't make for much excitement. Stay the course isn't that cool. We want an anointed acronym, like RRRR, this is the year of the Lion's roar, and the four R's stand for... We want something, anything to break the monotony and hardship of life. We want a new focus, a new doctrine even. But I hear the Lord telling us to stay the course. The course is the same, the intensity we give ourselves to it needs to increase in this season.

We don't need another lover, we need to come back to our first love. We need to be careful not to forget God! In the book of Ezekiel, the biggest indictment the Lord has against His people was that they forgot Him. They were set free only to be consumed with other loves and other pursuits. They forgot Him. They lived in sin and came to the House of the Lord (Ezekiel 23:39)... There was no fear of the Lord. First love and fear of the Lord go together.

I. THE YEAR OF FIRST LOVE

Revelation 2

[4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

- A. We must remember. We must remember love. Repent. And do the works that we did at first... What did you do when you first loved the Lord? What works flowed out of your heart? This year we're going to go back to those things.
- B. No More BS! Don't worry... BS stands for Blame Shifting. This is the year for love to bloom. And love will never mature if we don't take responsibility for ourselves; our hearts, thoughts, will and attention. You control how you spend your time, how you react, and how you steward your talents. You!!! You control the decisions that you make! This is freedom. Freedom and responsibility are really the same thing. It's time to go back to first love, but in maturity.
- C. I'm a big advocate of having real conversation with the Lord, real transparency. But it can't be one sided. We can't pour out all our junk in the name of "realness" and then not actually open our ears to hear. The thing about God is that He is not put off by your stuff. He can take it. But just because He loves as we are doesn't mean He will leave us as we are. He's going to talk back. We need to brace ourselves for the dialogue!

Jeremiah 15

***[15] O LORD, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.
In your forbearance take me not away;
know that for your sake I bear reproach.
[16] Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy***



*and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.
[17] I did not sit in the company of revelers,
nor did I rejoice;
I sat alone, because your hand was upon me,
for you had filled me with indignation.
[18] Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?
Will you be to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail?
[19] Therefore thus says the LORD:
“If you return, I will restore you,
and you shall stand before me.
If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
you shall be as my mouth.
They shall turn to you,
but you shall not turn to them.
[20] And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
declares the LORD.
[21] I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”*

- D. The thing with complaining is it reveals more about us than it does the person, persons or thing we're complaining about. God isn't moved by it. He just calls us to repent and re-enlist. This is the year of re-enlisting! I believe we are going to see more people come back to the Lord. They left hurt and discontent, but they will return with joy, favor and love.

II. THE YEAR OF THE PRODIGAL RETURN

Luke 15

[11] And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. [12] And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. [13] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. [14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. [15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.



[17] “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” [20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ [22] But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

[25] “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. [27] And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ [28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, [29] but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. [30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ [31] And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

- A. There is no lost time with God. We don't have to walk on our knees to the stations of the cross and say 50 hail Mary's. When we repent...when we come back to Him, we are immediately embraced by grace, love and favor. This is one of the most difficult things to comprehend with God. From our estimation, it seems God is just a little bit naïve. I mean...probation is in order not favor. Have you ever been overtaken with favor when you know you shouldn't? It doesn't make you prideful, it's actually humiliating, i.e. humbling. This is the year of prodigal return!
- B. We've got to get all of our older brother issues dealt with now! We need to be at the party thrown by the Father for the sons and daughters that were dead but now alive. Living in first love isn't optional. It's our only protection from offense! The harvest is and apostasy (great falling away from the faith, Matthew 24) go hand in hand.

Matthew 20

[1] “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. [2] After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. [3] And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, [4] and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ [5] So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. [6] And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ [7] They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ [8] And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ [9] And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. [10] Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. [11] And on receiving it they grumbled at



the master of the house, [12] saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' [13] But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? [14] Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. [15] Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' [16] So the last will be first, and the first last."

- C. Those coming in last get the same wage! For those of us who've been at this awhile, this may not seem like great news... but it is!! We just need to remember why we're doing what we're doing. Jesus is the reward.
- D. Let's set our hearts to align with the Father. Let's determine to welcome the prodigals. Let's rejoice because the Father is rejoicing!! Let's side with Him in every way.

III. THINGS YOU DID AT FIRST...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

- A. For a free online reading plan to read through the Bible in a year go to www.oneyearbibleonline.com
- B. This year let's begin to make disciples. Let's open our eyes to the lost and prodigals coming home and without reservation let them into our hearts. Let's bring them into our journey.

1 Corinthians 11

[1] Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

- C. Let's not just read the Word, let's do the word...together.