

# CORNERSTONE

# DISCIPLESHIP

## GROUPS

RELIGIONSHIP OR RELATIONSHIP? YOU PICK  
PART 1 | PASTOR JONATHAN BURNS  
SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 2026

### Overview

*Part 1 — Pick One*

**Core Scriptures:** Revelation 2:1–7; Romans 13:11–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

#### Overview

Pastor Jonathan opened this message with an unusual instruction: be totally selfish. Resist the reflex to think about who else needs to hear it, and let it land on you. That instruction is the posture this guide asks your group to take. The message draws a line between *relationship* — a living, ongoing connection with Jesus — and what Pastor Jonathan called *religionship*, the quiet substitution of activity for intimacy. The church at Ephesus in Revelation 2 is the case study. Jesus praised their doctrine, their discernment, and their endurance under real persecution, and then told them it was not enough, because they had abandoned their first love. This is Part 1 of a two-part message, and it ends on a question the group should carry into the week: not just, do you know him — but does he know you?

### Main Takeaways

1. **Participation is not a substitute for relationship.** Serving, attending, and volunteering are genuinely valuable, but they can quietly replace the thing they were meant to flow from.

1. **Ephesus is a warning, not a history lesson.** Sound doctrine, spiritual gifts, and a track record of endurance do not insulate a believer or a church from drifting.
2. **The drift is a heart issue, not a behavior issue.** Jesus did not tell Ephesus to do more. He told them to remember, repent, and return — a reorientation, not an upgraded routine.
3. **The times demand more, not less.** Romans 13 and 1 Thessalonians 5 both press believers to be awake, sober, and active — participants in what God is doing rather than spectators.
4. **Everything else flows from knowing him and being known by him.** Witness, discernment, boldness, and courage are downstream of cultivated relationship. Without it, a believer becomes hard to distinguish from the world around them.

## Discussion Questions

### Opening Question

When you first heard the word *religionship*, what was your gut reaction, and did anything specific about your own life come to mind before you had time to talk yourself out of it?

### Naming the Drift

Pastor Jonathan described religionship as what happens when the things we do for the Lord take the place of our relationship with him. Can you name a season when that was true of you — or a place where you can see it starting now?

He also asked the congregation to stop thinking about who else needed the message. How hard was that for you, and what do you think your answer reveals?

### The Warning at Ephesus

Jesus told the Ephesian church he knew their works, their perseverance, their doctrinal precision, and their willingness to suffer for his name — and still said he held something against them. What does it tell you about God's priorities that none of that was sufficient with the first love gone? Consider the picture Pastor Jonathan drew of a husband who praises his wife publicly but never speaks to her at home. Where does that image land for you?

### **Comfort, Cost, and Cooling**

In this region, being known as a believer costs almost nothing socially. What effect do you think that comfort has on the depth of a person's walk with the Lord — and have you felt it in your own?

Pastor Jonathan also traced the life cycle of churches and organizations: founding, enthusiasm, growth, maturity, decline. Do you think a church that has endured for decades faces a real risk of drift, and what actually guards against it — for a congregation and for one person?

### **Remember, Repent, Return**

Take yourself back to when you first came to know the Lord. What did that relationship look like? What were “the works you did at first” that Jesus points the Ephesians back to, and what changed?

Pastor Jonathan was candid about his own prayer life: most of the time he doesn't know what to pray, and most of the time he is simply saying thank you. Does that picture of simple, unpolished fellowship feel accessible to you or insufficient — and what does your honest answer say about how you understand your relationship with God?

## **Practical Application**

These are not a new religious routine. They are ways to take an honest look at where your heart is currently pointed and make small adjustments.

1. **Do an honest audit.** Set aside ten or fifteen minutes this week to sit quietly and ask what percentage of your spiritual energy goes toward doing things *for* God versus simply being *with* him. There is no score to record here — the goal is self-awareness you can't unsee.
2. **Remember your first love.** Think back, or write it down: what did your relationship with the Lord look like when it was most alive? What were you doing, feeling, saying to him and about him? Use it as a reference point, not a source of guilt.
3. **Simplify your prayer.** If prayer has become a performance or a task, try what Pastor Jonathan described — say thank you throughout the day and acknowledge him in the small moments. Length and eloquence are not the objective. Consistent, genuine contact is.

4. **Ask someone the hard question.** Pick one person — a spouse, a close friend, someone in this group — and ask them whether you seem like someone in an active, living relationship with Jesus or someone going through the motions. Be prepared to actually receive the answer.

5. **Bring your honest state before God.** If your love has cooled, Revelation 2 does not prescribe shame. It prescribes remembering, repenting, and returning. Go to God exactly as you are this week and tell him the truth about where you are. He already knows, and the turning back is itself the beginning of restoration.

## Closing

Close by praying together along the lines of what Pastor Jonathan prayed over the congregation: that God would ignite a genuine desire to know him more deeply, reveal any place where activity has replaced intimacy, grant each person discernment, courage, and boldness for the times, and fill each one with a love that does not originate in the natural man but in the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jonathan said he wants to finish at the top of his game — that if the Lord came back next week, he would have no regrets about where he was. Sit with that honestly before you leave. This is Part 1 of two. Come back next week ready to keep going, and spend the interim on the question underneath all of it:

*Not just, do you know him — but does he know you?*

## News & Events

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### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- September 2 & 20 - Communion
- September 13 - Intro to Cornerstone Life
- September 27 - Guest Speaker, Jeremiah Johnson
- October 3 - Ladies Event
- October 24 - Harvest Party
- October 29-31 - Men's Advance
- November 7-8 - Guest Speaker, Chad Gonzales

