

Keep the Fire Burning

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Over thirty years ago I gave my life to Jesus. I had been an atheist since I was a teenager, without hope, just going through the motions of life. But at the age of 34, the truth of the Gospel pierced my heart and changed me dramatically. I was so happy, beaming like the sun, shining with my newfound love for God. I went to my job full of joy about my new life in Christ. One of the people I worked with was a Christian. She said to me that all new Christians are excited. She said it was a temporary feeling that would wear off and I would not always be that excited. I thought to myself, "That is a terrible thing to say, I will always be on fire with love for Jesus. I don't ever want to lose the joy of being saved." I determined that I never wanted to be a passive Christian. Since then, there have been many ups and downs in my life. I have had glorious mountaintop experiences with God, and I have walked through many valleys, but the fire of love in my heart for the Lord has never been put out. It still burns deep inside me.

Do you remember when you first came to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Are you just as "on fire" for God as you were then? Has the excitement decreased or has it increased? It's God who starts the fire inside of us when we are saved. The initial spark comes from Him – like the lighting of a match. God provides the match and the spark. "By grace" we have been saved. But for the spark to grow into something strong and lasting, it needs fuel. It is up to us to add fuel to the fire to keep it burning bright.

This morning I would like to share with you two principles from the Word of God. They will help us stay focused and motivated so that we can continue to fuel the fire inside of us. Whether you have a little spark, or a roaring fire inside, you need to add fuel to keep it burning and growing. The brighter we burn inside, the greater our lights will shine on the outside. People will see Jesus when they see us. So how can we fuel the fire inside of us and keep it burning longer and stronger? Let's look to the Word of God.

The Word tells us "God is love." (1 John 4:8b) From the beginning of time, the Creator has loved His creation. He commands us to love. **The number one thing that will fuel the fire inside of us is love.**

First Principle: We fuel our fire for God by loving Him above all else.

The number one commandment God gave to Moses is "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2; Deut 5:6) We are commanded to put God first above all else. Above everyone and everything – no exceptions. God reminded the Children of Israel of the importance of this just before they entered the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 says ...4"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!
5"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You

shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

God told His people that they needed to love Him with all their "heart, soul and strength" He told them to put these words in their hearts, to teach them to their children, to talk about them all the time wherever they were. He even went on to tell them to bind them to their hands and foreheads and to write them on their doorposts. They were to keep these words alive and in front of them every day from the time they got up until they lay down, and everywhere they went. He promised them if they put Him first, they would have great success, significance, and victory over their enemies. We are His children and He promises us the same thing.

One thousand four hundred years later, when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, He quoted these same Scriptures. In Mark 12:29-30, Jesus said, "...The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first commandment"

If Jesus said it is our first commandment, then loving God must be our first priority. Loving Him should be the number one motivator for anything we do. Love is the fuel that constantly stokes our fire. What is your love for God based on? Do you love Him because He saved you? Yes of course. Do you love Him for all He does for you? Absolutely. But the main thing your love for God must be anchored in is who He is to you personally. How do you see God? The more you know Him, the deeper you will love Him. God sent the Holy Spirit so we could know Him intimately – Spirit to spirit. The Holy Spirit is your Helper. He lives inside you and is with you always. If you allow Him to, He will teach you about the Father and "tell you things to come." (John 16:13-15) My part and your part is to seek Him.

Psalm 119:2 says, "Blessed are those who keep His commandments, who seek Him with the whole heart." He promises us in Deuteronomy 4:29"...you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul."

The more time we spend with God, the more our love increases and our fire grows stronger.

Pastor Bob and I just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. Our love for each other has grown deeper and stronger as the years go by. Why? Because we spend time together. We have been walking through life together each day. We have gone through very hard times and very good times – together. We continually make an effort to work on our relationship and fuel the fire of our love for one another. It is the same with our relationship with God. Spending time with Him – throughout each and every day fuels the fire in our hearts and helps increase our love for God. We do this through studying His Word, worship, praise, prayer, and listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Each morning when you wake up do you think of the Lord and express your love to

Him? Are you aware of His presence as you go through your day? Do you think of Him as you lay your head on your pillow at night?

We build our love for God by seeking Him. As we seek Him, our love grows and fuels our fire. The fire on the inside of us is displayed on the outside. God uses this fire to build His Kingdom.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Fire on the inside results in shining our lights on the outside and God is glorified.

First Principle is: We fuel our fire for God by loving Him above all else.

What is the second way we fuel our fire?

Let’s go back to the number one commandment from God. In Matthew 22:36-38, a lawyer asked Jesus a question. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus quoted the Scripture we started with in Deuteronomy and said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” **Then Jesus continued and added something.** Verses 39-40 “And the second is like it: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (40) on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The second way we fuel our fire for God is by loving others. We are commanded to love our neighbors. It is the fulfillment of all the Law in the Old Testament. “...love is the fulfillment of the Law.” (Romans 13:8-10)

1 John 4:9, 4:19-21 says, “In this the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten Son in to the world, that we might live through Him. (Verses 19-21) We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says “I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God who he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

When you spend time with your family, friends, and brothers and sister in Christ are your thoughts toward loving them? Each day when you leave your apartment do you look at the people around you and think of how much God loves them? When we go out into the world it is sometimes difficult to keep the fire of love burning for those we encounter every day. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we can do it. We can even love our enemies because God promises us He will be with us. You do not have to love others on your own. When Jesus sent His disciples out into the world He told them in

Matthew 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and **lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” Jesus is with you, the Holy Spirit is in you and you can do all things through Christ, including loving other people.

When love is your primary motivation, the fire keeps burning. Each time you display the love of God to someone, or make a decision based on love, you add more fuel to the fire. Determine in your heart that you will continue to fuel the fires of love in your heart for God and for others. It will cause you to shine for Him. It will also bring you great joy.

In John 15:10-12, Jesus tells us, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. Just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

God command us to love because He knows that love brings joy. Love is also an outward witness to others that you are a Christian.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Even at the most difficult times, especially at the most difficult times, we keep our fires burning by displaying God’s love. There will be a price to pay. We have to make a decision to crucify our own desire to do things our way, and yield to God’s will and do things His way. God is sovereign. He is in absolute control. He makes “all things work together for good to those who love God” Romans 8:28. Love and obedience work hand in hand (Philippians 3:17-21; Hebrews 12:3; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

When you refuse to obey God, by choosing to hold on to anger, unforgiveness, sin, or anything in your life that is not pleasing to God, it is like throwing water on the fire inside of you. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 tells us not to “quench the Spirit.” We must take care not to let our own worldly desires put out the fire in our hearts. We are to walk in the spirit and not give in to the flesh (Romans 8:1). It will take making some sacrifices. Galatians 5:24 says, “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with endurance the race set out for us. (2) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus showed us the ultimate display of love when he went to the cross (John 19:1-6;

15-18). Crucifixion was the ultimate act of sacrifice fueled by love for God and love for others.

Even though Jesus faced a horrific death, He had the joy of knowing that because of His love and obedience to the Father, that salvation would be possible. His joy was knowing what would happen for all of us. We would be together with Him for eternity.

The anticipation of who and what awaits us should bring great joy to our hearts. We are going to see Jesus face to face. We know with certainty that ultimately we will reap our eternal rewards. There is joy and peace available to you today; and, you have an eternal joy that is awaiting you. The promise of the joy set before us gives us the faith and strength to persevere and keep fueling the fire of love burning in our hearts.

Passion is not externally developed it come from inside. The initial spark inside came from God. You are saved by grace. But for the spark to grow into something strong and lasting, it needs fuel. How much will you feed your fire? It takes faith; discipline and courage but the rewards far exceed the costs.

Let us lay aside every weight and sin (Hebrews 12:1-2) and run the race with zeal, excitement and fire. Others will be drawn to you when they see your light shining brightly. Share the Good News with others so that they can catch fire too! The more your fire grows, the stronger it gets, and the harder it is to put it out.

God told His children in Leviticus, in detail, how they were to worship and serve Him. One of the ways was through burnt offerings. Leviticus 6:12-13 says, "And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. {13} A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out."

Priests were commanded to keep the fires burning perpetually. Eternal flames. We have a choice. Will we be like a match - one spark that burns for a moment and goes out? Will we be a bonfire that burns huge and hot for a while, but eventually over time, without fuel, dies out? Or, will we be an eternal flame that is constantly fueled by love, burning perpetually; and, taking us into eternity? The choice is for each of us to make. We are the ones who fuel the fires inside of us. Let us determine today that we will not be passive Christians who let their fire die. Make a decision today that you will be a child of God who is on fire and brightly shining for Jesus. All it takes is fueling the fire of love for God and others.

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Open up every corner of your heart to God. Do not hold back anything. Love Him extravagantly! As you love God, you will find that He will pour His love through you to

others. The joy and rewards are great both in this life and through eternity.

1 Peter 1:6-9 says, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelations of Jesus Christ, who having not seen you love, Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.”

One day you will stand before God and hear “well done good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23). You are a winner and champion in Christ both in this life, and for eternity.

I started out this message by talking about the initial spark that God puts in our hearts. Perhaps you have never known God. Perhaps you have put off accepting this spark of divine love. The one and only true God is reaching out to you. He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross so that you could receive His love. His Holy Spirit is tugging on your heart this morning to put your life in His loving hands. He so loved the world that He sent His son Jesus.... (John 3:16).

Almighty God Himself shed His blood for you so you can be saved, so that you can be accepted, loved and have a personal relationship with Him, Creator of the ends of the universe. That begins the day you become a Christian. That relationship means you can spend every day with Him, in His presence today and throughout eternity- being loved by Him.