

"Keeping Our Zeal"

Some live the Christian life to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some passionately pursue their faith, while others remain lukewarm. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." How can we keep our passion and zeal for God alive? Stay with us and find out.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's way; we're here to search the Scriptures for the Lord's Way. We love to study the Bible, because we know the real author of the Bible is God. Peter said in 2 Peter 1:20 to 21, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Men didn't dream up the words of the Bible; rather God's spokesmen, the prophets, were moved by the Spirit to speak. They said what God willed for us to know, to believe, and to do. Because the Bible is from God, we can begin to understand the heart of God and His love for us. Thanks for studying with us today. We want to be part of your life each week.

Today we're asking the question, "How can I keep my zeal for Christ and renew my passion for God?" I don't want a bored and dull faith. I don't ever want to forget what the Lord has done for me. The Lord created me, loved me, protected me, provided for me, taught me, disciplined me, and is preparing a home for me in heaven. How could I become apathetic toward the one who has heard my prayers and opened doors for me? David expressed the heart like mine in Psalm 42:1 to 2, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" God is our hope, our joy, and our Savior. And staying close to Him will keep our passion alive.

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, and we'll read from 2 Peter 1:5 to 11 and learn how to keep our zeal strong.

Our reading today comes from the second epistle of Peter, chapter 1, verses 5 thru 11, and discusses the Christian virtues. "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." Oh, these are good things to put into our hearts and into our lives.

Let's pray together. "Oh Father, help us to add to our faith all of these wonderful Christian virtues. Help us to keep fervent in our faith and to remember of how You have forgiven our sins. Help us to do Your will always, and to love You. In Jesus name, Amen."

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? The kind of thirst that demands you find some water to drink? Israel knew what it was like to have little water available. Israel had seasons of rain and seasons of drought and then they endured a lot of months without rain. Their streams would flow in the rainy seasons, but dry up at other times. They could collect water in their cisterns, hoping to have enough water to last until the rains return.

In the seventh century BC, Israel turned its back on God and served vain idols. God said about Israel in Jeremiah 2:13, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." By forsaking God, they abandoned their source of life. Don't imagine that you can replace God. Nothing can. And no one can.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When was the last time you were thirsty for righteousness or even thirsty for God? When did you last feel close to Him? Do you feel worshipping Him or listening to Him is a must? It's easy to forget what you have and to take God for granted. God knows when people ignore Him, forget Him, or forsake Him. Do you suppose God will run to your side, if you've continually ignored Him?

Good relationships demand time and effort. Marriages can grow stale, unless husbands and wives intentionally fill them, their lives with love. You know our love for God can grow dull over time. And if we want to strengthen our relationship, then we must take the time to make it grow. And we must first start paying close attention to what God says. Hebrews 2:1 to 3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" If we neglect to listen to God's word, we'll fail to please Him and risk the salvation of our souls.

Some ignore God until they need Him. They focus their minds on the things of this world while they slowly drift away from God to pursue their own interests. They stop going to worship at church, they stop studying the Scriptures, they stop praying, and they begin talking and acting like people who don't even know God. When some crisis then comes along, they feel God is distant. Well, God's where He's always been, but people frequently forget Him. Now God didn't leave those people; they left God.

If you want God in your heart, take a long look at what the Lord Jesus endured on the cross. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The Lord Jesus loves you beyond measure. And He opened His heart to reach out to you. He bore the cross to die for the sins of the whole world; and those sins include your sins. Romans, verse 8 of chapter 5 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Now He didn't rule you out because you were imperfect. The only people Jesus died for were sinners.

And so, see the crown of thorns on His head, see the nails through His hands and feet, see His back bloodied by the scourge, see His side pierced by the soldier, and see His blood offered for you. He suffered the shame of people mocking Him. And He sacrificed Himself, "and with his stripes we are

healed.” “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Now if the reality of what happened on the cross doesn’t touch your heart like it once did, perhaps it’s because you’ve let other things harden your heart. Worldliness and sin cause people’s hearts to grow cold.

Jesus didn’t die on the cross to proclaim a health and wealth gospel that puts you in the center of the universe. He didn’t die on the cross to help you become a millionaire, lose weight or overcome your fears and anxieties. He sacrificed Himself to redeem your soul from sin and to give you eternal life. His blood washes away your sins and causes you to be born again, so you’ll be created in His image and become like Him. The Lord is interested in your inner man; and one day He’ll judge your soul on whether you’ve lived for your pleasures or lived for Him.

Now in times of great prosperity, people tend to take their minds off God and put them on their personal pleasures. Just as Israel was about to cross the Jordan River and enter into the promised land, Moses warned them in Deuteronomy 8:11 to 14, “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I’m commanding you today; otherwise, when you’ve eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you’ll forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Don’t let your blessings keep you from remembering the One who gave you those blessings. James 1:17 says, that “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” Now apart from God we’d have nothing. God Himself gives us the ability to think, to work, and to make money. You remember, Moses said in Deuteronomy 8:17 and 18, “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.” The world wants you to be proud of all your accomplishments. But the Lord wants you to remember that every blessing you have comes from what God provides.

Some people turn away from God because they’ve faced some kind of a trying circumstance. Rather than pull away from God, we need to draw close to God when we face a struggle or a heartache, come to Him. We should turn to God for the strength, and the help, and the encouragement, and the assurance that we need.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “I’ve been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” And in hard times let’s remember God can do things that men cannot.

We draw close to God by making Him a priority in our lives every single day. We study the Bible because it reveals God’s thinking and His will for our lives. To know God we have to listen to His words. We pray, because we want God to know our hearts. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 teaches us to “pray without ceasing.” God doesn’t want us to quit praying. James 5:13 says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.” If you want to be zealous for God, then make being with God a daily exercise. You build good relationships; they don’t just happen.

To draw close to God, remember what He’s done for you. David said in Psalm 103:1 to 5, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.” God is ever good to you. And consider how

God has answered your prayers, given you the Scriptures that give you hope and comfort, and strengthens you through the years.

To draw close to God, keep your eyes on eternity. Colossians 3:1 to 4 says, "Therefore if you've been raised up with Christ (that is when you were baptized), keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

To draw close to God, focus on the good. Philippians 4 and verse 8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." When we concentrate on the negative, we lose sight of God; but when we concentrate on the positive, we grow more thankful to God.

And if you wish to be close to God, give Him room to grow in your life. You must get the weeds out of your heart and soul. You know, just as weeds can take over a garden, so spiritual weeds can take over your heart. Weeds will rob plants of the space and nourishment that they need to grow and produce. And likewise, the distractions of life can rob us of our time and our energy for God. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 8:14, that "The seed that fell among the thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they're choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they don't mature." Many Christians fail to grow in their faith and in their relationship with God, because they devote themselves to things that push God out of their lives. We must learn not to let the things of this world come between God and us.

Now sin destroys our desire to serve God, because it replaces God and enslaves us. Ephesians 4:27 says, "do not give the devil an opportunity." If you let sin into your life, it'll dominate your heart. The Lord Jesus said in John 8:34, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." Now to overcome sin, you must put it to death. Romans 6 and verse 11 says, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." You can't cut down a weed and expect to kill it; you must uproot it. If you simply cut it down, you'll see it grow back. And sin is like that. You can't just cut back on sin and expect that sin to go away. You must remove it altogether. And unless it's completely stopped, it'll keep growing and crowding out what is good and productive in your life.

You can't grow to be a productive and authentic Christian, if you crowd God out by your whims and desires. You must give Him room in your life to grow. And many people let their jobs, their hobbies, or their recreation come between God and themselves. And none of these things, none of these things is wrong in and of itself; but if you let something, anything, take you away from your God, you could lose your soul. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom (that is the kingdom of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Now all of this matters because it affects our relationship and our zeal for God. When our relationship is strong, our hearts desire to love and serve God is great; but when our relationship is weak, we let other things dominate our lives. If you wish to be zealous for God, then set your heart upon the Lord Jesus and upon the blessings that He has in store for you in eternity!

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father we're thankful that You have loved us so greatly to send Your son to die for our sins. Help us to love You with a great love. Help us to be more than just lukewarm people, but to be passionate and zealous, in our compassion for others, in our love for You, and in our service for Your cause. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen."

Is anything in your life keeping you from being close to God? Some people never pick up a Bible, never utter a prayer, and never go to church. Is it any wonder that they feel far from God? They've shut the Lord out of their lives. And God grieves when people shut Him out. He hasn't quit loving or caring for us, but it tears at God's heart to be abandoned by His people. And if you're letting a sin have a place in your heart, then it's time to put an end to that sin. You can't love sin and still love God. James 4 and verse 4 says, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? And therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

To be rid of sin, you must repent. Now repentance is an act of the heart that says, "I will no longer do what offends God but will please Him." In repentance we put a stop to sin, but we must also be forgiven. Now, the Lord forgives us when by faith and repentance we're willing to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized into Christ. Now in baptism we're crucified with Christ, "in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6 and verse 6). Now baptism is the time that God saves us from sin.

And so, don't let your love for Christ grow cold. And don't grow weary of your faith and lose heart. Renew your faith. Restore your heart. Revive your spirit. And demonstrate your faith and love. You do that by listening to God, loving God, praying to God, growing a desire for God, and telling everyone about His goodness and kindness in Christ Jesus. Get involved today.

We hope today's study about zeal has stirred your heart to have a greater passion and zeal for God. Think about what we've studied. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633.

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Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church home. And there's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be glad to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.