

"Keeping My Zeal"

Some Christians live their lives to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some passionately pursue their faith, while others are 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? Well, stay with us and we'll find out.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way; we're here to search the Scriptures for the Lord's will. 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 a 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?" Well, I don't want a bored and dull faith. I don't 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 one who has heard my prayers and opened doors for me? David expressed my heart in Psalm 42, verses 1 to 2, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O 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. Staying close to Him will keep our passion alive.

Now, you can receive the information on this program free for asking. If you'd like a printed copy or CD of our study and you live in the United States, 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 you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, we have materials free online, and you can find them at www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song; we'll read from 2 Peter 1, verses 5 to 11, and learn how to keep our zeal strong.

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 5 to 11. "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." That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You have given us the way to be able to respond to You out of love. Help us to give all diligence. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? The kind of thirst that demands you find some water? Well, Israel knew what it was to have little water available. Israel had seasons of rain and seasons that didn't have

much rain. Their streams would flow in the rainy seasons and 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 B.C., Israel turned its back on God and followed after the vain idols of nations surrounding them. God said about Israel in Jeremiah 2 and verse 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 also had forsaken the source of life. Now, don't imagine something else can take the place of God. Nothing and no one can.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When was the last time that you were thirsty for righteousness or for God? When did you last feel that being close to Him, worshiping Him, or listening to Him, was an immediate demand? It's easy to forget what you have and take God for granted. And God knows when people ignore Him, and forget Him, and forsake Him. Do you imagine that God will run to your side when you have neglected Him for many years?

You see, good relationships demand time and effort. Just like a marriage or any relationship, it can grow stale; and so our love for God can grow dull over time. Now, if we want to strengthen our relationship, then we must take the time to make it grow and develop. We must first start paying close attention to what God says. Hebrews 2, verses 1 to 3 says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have 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 so great a salvation?" If we neglect to listen to God's Word, we'll fail to please Him and we risk the salvation of our souls.

Some people 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 the world. When some disaster then comes along, they feel God is distant. Well, God doesn't forget His people, but His people frequently forget Him.

If you really want to have God in your heart, take a long look at what the Lord endured on the cross. The Lord Jesus said in John 12, verse 32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The Lord Jesus loves you beyond measure. He opened His heart to reach out to everyone. He bore the cross to die for the sins not just of the whole world but also for you. Romans 5 and verse 8 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. You see, the only people Jesus died for were sinners.

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. He sacrificed Himself, "and with his stripes we are healed." "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah chapter 53, verse 6). If the reality of what happened on the cross doesn't touch you like it once did, perhaps it's because you've let other things cause your heart to harden. 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 sin 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 will judge your soul on whether you gave of yourself as a humble servant.

Now, in times of great prosperity, people tend to take their minds off God and put them on their own personal pleasures. You know, just as Israel was about to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land, you remember Moses warned them in Deuteronomy 8, verses 11 to 14; he said, "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 you've built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

My friend, don't let your blessings keep you from remembering the One who gave you those blessings. James 1, verse 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." You see, apart from God we would have nothing. God is the One who gives us the ability to think, to work, and to make money. Moses said in Deuteronomy 8, verses 17 to 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 of your accomplishments. The Lord wants you to remember that every blessing that you have comes from what God provides in you and for you.

Some people turn away from God because they've faced some trying experience or circumstance. Well, rather than pull away from God, we need to draw close to God when we face a struggle or a heartache. We should turn to God for strength, for help, for encouragement, and for assurance.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." In hard times let's remember that 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. First Thessalonians 5, verse 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.

And so to draw close to God, remember what He has done for you. David said in Psalm 103, verses 1 to 5, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that's 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." Oh, God is ever good to you. Consider how God has answered your prayers, given you the Scriptures that give us hope and comfort, and strengthened you through the years.

If you want to draw close to God, keep your eyes on eternity. Colossians 3, verses 1 to 4 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, 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 the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 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, 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's any excellence, 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.

Now, if you wish to be close to God, you've got to give Him room 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 rob plants of the space and the nourishment that they need to grow and produce. Likewise, distractions of life can rob us of our time and our energy for God. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 8 and verse 14 that, "The seed that fell among the thorns, well this stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not 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.

Sin destroys our desire to serve God, because it replaces God and enslaves us. Ephesians 4 and verse 27 says, "do not give the devil an opportunity." Now, if you let sin into your life, it will dominate your heart. The Lord Jesus said in John 8, verse 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. Many people let their jobs, and their hobbies, or their recreation come between God and themselves. Well, none of these things is wrong in and of themselves; but if you let something, anything, take you away from your God, you can lose your soul. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Now, all this matters because it affects our relationship and our zeal for God. When our relationship is strong, then our hearts want to serve God; but when our relationship is weak, we let other things dominate our lives. And if you wish to be zealous for God, then set your heart upon the Lord Jesus and upon all the blessings He has in store for you in eternity! Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You are so close to us. Help us to remain close to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

Is there anything in your life that's 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 people grieve God when they 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. If you're letting sin have a place in your heart, then it's time to put an end to that sin. You can't love sin and love God at the same time. Now, James 4 and verse 4 says, "do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Now, to be rid of sin, you must repent. 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. The Lord forgives us when by faith and repentance we're willing to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be

baptized. 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). Baptism is that time that God saves us from sin.

Don't let your love for Christ grow cold. Don't grow weary of your faith and lose heart. Renew your faith. Restore your heart. Revive your spirit. Demonstrate your faith and love. Listen to God, love God, pray to God, grow a desire for God, and tell everyone about His goodness and kindness in Christ Jesus. Get involved.

We hope that today's study about zeal has stirred your heart to have a greater zeal. We hope you'll think about what we've studied. Now, if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an email to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, go to our website: www.searchtv.org to download free materials.

Well, we encourage you to find a church of Christ and get involved in it. They love you and they support our ministry, for which we're grateful. Now, if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you'll be glad you worshiped with them. 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.