

Fan the Flame

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Date: 17 November 2019

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- [0 : 00] Did you do anything to prepare for the Arctic blast we got in the middle of last week? Well, I heard the weather forecast and I lit the pilot light in my gas logs.
- And on Tuesday night and Wednesday night, I fired them up. I enjoyed the warmth. I enjoyed seeing the fire burn.
- Well, I've been thinking about a different kind of fire ever since our men's ministry dinner, supper, whatever it was that Rick cooked. He did a good job, by the way, last Tuesday night.
- Boy Scout brought a great message on the importance of every Christian, making sure we keep the spiritual fire burning brightly in our lives every day.
- He was talking about maintaining a close relationship with Christ in terms of a spiritual fire. Well, that got my attention. It really did.
- [1 : 16] I have thought about the kind of spiritual fire that is really burning in my life right now. And I've thought about what kind of spiritual fire is burning in the lives of our church family.
- It really got my attention. I've thought about it off and on some this week. You know, if we are Christians, when we were saved, here's what happened.
- God did a supernatural work called regeneration or the new birth. He gave us the desire to acknowledge our sin and separation from God, to turn from our sin, change our mind about the way we're living, repent.
- He caused the light to come on. I'm talking about He enabled us to see by faith that Jesus Christ is His Son.
- And He came into this world to die on a cross as our substitute, pay the penalty for our sins. When God saves us, He does this work in us to give us such a desire to turn from our sin, to trust Jesus.
- [2 : 41] He puts His Spirit in us when He does this, to live with us forever. Every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- Now one way to describe this, this work of God when He saves us, is that God's lit a spiritual fire in our soul.
- Now, if you are a Christian, you know what I'm talking about. You may not have ever thought about it exactly this way. But if you're a Christian, you know that whenever it was God saved you, He did a work in your soul, heart, life, however you want to describe it.
- He lit a spiritual fire. Now, nobody in this room is going to pretend that there's always been a burning, bright, warm spiritual fire in our lives.
- So let's just all be honest. If you're a Christian, is the spiritual fire within you right now more like a pilot light?
- [4 : 01] A pilot light in my gas logs. When it's lit, there is fire. But you've got to go over to the fireplace. You've got to look down and see that little bitty flame.

And there may be some Christians in this room. You know that the Spirit of God lives within you. You know you're a follower of Jesus. But for whatever reason, the fire is burning very, very dimly right now.

Or would you say that by the grace of God, the fire in you right now, spiritually speaking, is a roaring blaze?

People who know you, they see the Lord in you. They even feel the warmth of His love when they're around you.

That may be some people's experience right now. And you thank God if it is. Or it could be that right now, you're not really a pilot light, but you're not a blazing fire either.

[5 : 17] You're somewhere in between. Well, this message this morning is designed just like that message on Tuesday night. To cause us all to think about what kind of fire is burning right now.

And to help us do that, I want you to turn to 2 Timothy chapter 1. 2 Timothy chapter 1. And what we're going to do is look at how the Apostle Paul had to encourage Timothy, a dedicated, committed Christian, leader.

But Paul had to encourage him at times to fan the fire, fan the flame that was in him because it wasn't burning bright enough.

2 Timothy chapter 1. Let me say this. I'm interrupting the series on our stewardship of time now.

We're talking about our stewardship in life of our time, talents, and treasures. Last week, we began the part about time. We're going to continue it next week, Lord willing. This week, today, I want us to think about the spiritual fire if it is burning and how brightly it's burning in our lives.

[6 : 39] 2 Timothy 1, beginning in verse 3. Paul is writing to Timothy. This is a letter from Paul to Timothy. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day, and as I remember your tears.

I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure.

He's talking about I'm confident. Not a guess, but I'm confident dwells in you as well. For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Does the fire of Christian faithfulness need to be fanned into a flame in your life right now?

Think about it. Sometimes, in all of our lives as Christians, sometimes the fire is low. Maybe the flicker of a pilot light.

[8 : 10] Sometimes, the light is just not, the fire is not what we know it ought to be, what it has been in the past, what we want it to be today. And so, even in faithful Christians, sometimes we need to fan the fire, fan the flame.

That was true about Timothy. Paul met Timothy on his second mission trip. It's recorded in Acts chapter 16. We see from the New Testament record in Acts and in some of Paul's letters that they had a very close relationship.

Paul considered him to be like a spiritual son. Paul was Timothy's mentor. And Paul had a lot of confidence in Timothy. He sent Timothy sometimes to be his representative to another church.

He had confidence in Timothy's ability to be a faithful Christian leader. He even gave him the responsibility of leading the church at Ephesus and dealing with some hard issues for a period of time.

Both 1 and 2 Timothy in the New Testament, two letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy. Both were written to this young man when he was still at Ephesus leading the church there.

[9 : 24] Timothy was not nearly as strong a leader as the Apostle Paul was. Paul knew it and he knew him well.

That's no knock on Timothy. It's just who he was. And so sometimes as you read through these letters, sometimes you see Paul having to encourage Timothy.

Sometimes he's having to prod him along. Sometimes he just basically giving him a list of instructions. Sometimes Timothy had to be told, remain faithful, be strong, hang in there, fulfill your responsibilities.

If you have any doubts, read 1 and 2 Timothy. You see this. And now what we're looking at this morning specifically, verse 6, for this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.

Now, if Paul had to say that to Timothy, being the man that he was, mentored, trained, equipped by Paul, how much more do we need to hear that at times?

[10 : 45] And this may be the very time that you need to hear this as well. But, before we go any further, why would Timothy need to hear this?

Why? Why do we let the fire that God lights in us as a Christian, that sometimes blazes brightly, why do we let it go out?

Why does it get dim at times? Well, no doubt there's a lot of reasons and if the fire, the spiritual fire of faithfulness is not, you know, blazing up in your life right now, you think to yourself, why?

What are some reasons? Identify the reasons, that's important before you can find the solution. For some people it may just be the busyness of life. You may not have really thought about it right now, but you're just so pulled in different directions.

So many demands on your time, you never intended for it to be, but when you're confronted with this question this morning about the fire, the spiritual fire of commitment in your life, you know, you have to admit, it is not nearly as glowing as it used to be.

[12 : 03] A lot of different reasons, but there's two in Timothy's life that we see in Scripture and so that's where I want us to focus our attention this morning. Number one, he had some physical problems.

Timothy dealt with physical illnesses at times and Paul instructs him on how to deal with it in 1 Timothy chapter 5. He says, no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

Now Paul's not encouraging him to go out and become an alcoholic. He is saying, use wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. Paul knew Timothy.

He knew that he had stomach problems that evidently caused him not to be able to function or function well at times. And so, here's the solution.

You got a problem? There is a legitimate, helpful way to take care of it. Paul's saying, do it. We don't know why he stopped, but Paul's telling him now, take care of yourself.

[13 : 13] Do what you need to do to be in better physical condition. Now, before we go any further, I want to say something to make this real clear. I know that people have physical illnesses, problems, problems that prevent them from doing a lot of things they would like to do.

There may be times in your life when there is a physical issue going on and you just cannot do what you want to do, what you've committed to do, and it's legitimate.

So, I'm not trying to inflict guilt on someone who has this kind of problem. But some problems, some issues that we deal with, they just make us feel bad.

They may cause some pain. They may make us a little bit weak. But the truth is, we can deal with it.

Truth is, there's a lot of things that happen to us in life, we just gotta learn to suck it up and go. That is, what can be sucked up and gone with? We live today in a very soft world.

[14 : 33] You don't have to tell many people to take care of themselves. They go overboard in taking care of themselves. But in a day gone by, more people, Christians and otherwise, just had the mentality, you do what you can do, even if it is in the midst of difficulty.

One of those men was John Calvin. One of the most influential Christians who has ever lived was John Calvin. Most people in this room, you're familiar with the Protestant Reformation.

One of the most important events, God breaking into history in the history of the world. The two most well-known and leading reformers were Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Calvin lived a very productive life. He wrote many books on the Christian life, on theology, the deep things of God.

He wrote a commentary on just about every book of the Bible. Not all, but just about every book of the Bible. He preached numerous times, most weeks, and multiple times on Sundays.

[15 : 47] He corresponded widely with people. One of his greatest influences was through his written correspondence. He was also very involved as a civic leader in the city of Geneva.

Calvin did more than anyone I've ever known. Accomplished more than anyone I've ever known. I want you to look at how he did all this in the midst of dealing with multiple illnesses.

Look at this. He was plagued with constant headaches which hardly ever left him. The pain was so intense that many nights he could not sleep. He also had some kind of disease of the trachea which, when he spoke too much, caused him to spit blood.

Several attacks of pleurisy prepared the way for consumption of which he finally died. He had acute hemorrhoids, the pain of which was unbearably increased by an internal abscess that would not heal.

He had gallstones and kidney stones in addition to stomach cramps and wicked intestinal influenzas. To top it all off, he had acute arthritis. In one of his letters to a friend, he said, if only my condition were not a constant death struggle.

[17 : 09] Now, what I've just read about Calvin is widely known by people who read him, historians. I read where some people said that Calvin was, he was sometimes hard to deal with.

He was irritable a lot. Wouldn't you? But Calvin was used by God in a tremendous way.

But all that he did, he worked through pain, discomfort, dealing with multiple physical issues.

He left a lasting mark on the Christian church in the midst of all this and in a relatively short life of 54 years.

It's hard to find someone like that today, isn't it? We live in a world where people are soft and they use the least little problem as an excuse to avoid fulfilling their responsibilities, to avoid work, to avoid fulfilling their commitments to friends, to family, in the church.

[18 : 29] Now again, I want to emphasize, some people are truly disabled and unable to live a physically demanding life. And if that's you at times, don't feel guilty.

Don't feel guilty for what you cannot help and it's serious. It prevents you from doing things you really want to do, fun things, as well as things you might not want to do that are more of a responsibility.

But many people are too quick today to give in to physical problems and to refuse to just work through minor pain and discomfort.

What we all need to understand, God calls us to serve Him with the gifts, talents, and abilities that He gives us both in the world and in the church and God's call is not limited to just serving Him on the days when we feel great.

God's call is not limited to just the times when everything's going our way and we have no aches and pains or things like that. God calls us to be faithful, for you to be a faithful husband, father, wife, mother, child, student, worker, worker in this church.

[19 : 54] Even on the days that you don't feel real good, on the days that you'd rather just be sort of taking it easy, sitting back in your easy chair.

God calls us to be faithful to Him, to the responsibilities of life that He has given us and sometimes that means we've got to deal with and work through some pain and discomfort.

You know, sometimes God uses us specifically our weaknesses instead of our strengths. That's what Calvin discovered in his life.

You know, you might think, well, what could Calvin have accomplished if he'd have been well? he may not have accomplished half as much as he did because God used him in those kind of situations the way it did.

That's what the Apostle Paul learned. Calvin, no doubt, took comfort from what Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. See, Paul had some kind of problem called what he called his thorn in his flesh.

[21 : 02] Some people think he may have been poor eyesight. Some people think he may have battled malaria off and on throughout his ministry, throughout his life. Well, Paul understood his weaknesses, that thorn in the flesh, and I want you to look what he did in relation to God about it.

He says, three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

God chose for Paul to have to deal with whatever that thorn was, and God was going to use him in that particular weak situation for greater glory, for greater good.

Paul's life was not one of fun and feel good, but God gave him the grace to work through the pain, the suffering, and be the effective man of God, servant of God, writer of Scripture, missionary evangelist that he was.

I want to emphasize here to today's parents, grandparents, teachers, influencers, influencers of children. Children need to learn that just feeling bad is not an excuse to stay home from school or church or not fulfill your responsibilities.

[22 : 30] If I make somebody mad, so be it. don't allow your child to be weak because you are weak and you teach them to be weak and just give in to any minor ache or pain or not feel good or somebody hurt their feelings and things along this matter.

don't allow your child to use such excuses to be lazy and or irresponsible which a lot of people will both children and adults.

The best way to teach your children this is by example, by you being this way. When I was growing up, my mother at times had extreme migraine headaches.

But I can probably count on one hand the number of times she actually went into bed, went to bed, got the room real dark and only came out to go to the bathroom to throw up.

She battled those headaches for years. Got up every morning and went to J.P. Stevens Clemson's textile plant and worked all day, every day.

[23 : 50] Came home and worked. That was the model, example, she set for me. And I can remember one time as a kid saying something to her about, I don't feel good, mama.

I don't want to go to school today. And I can remember it very well. She told me there's a lot of days I don't feel like going to work. There's a lot of days you're not going to feel like doing a lot of things but you just got to do it.

My mother was a fine Christian woman, hard worker and she was sympathetic occasionally when you really needed sympathy, seriously.

but she saw through the scams, the whining, the being weak. She just basically told you suck it up and go bud and that's what you need to do as a parent, as a grandparent, as a teacher.

Oh, I know you'll get into it today because of these weak parents that don't support you as you're trying to help their children. Our hats ought to go off to every teacher in this building right now because of all the junk they have to put up with from parents who don't truly know their child and love their child and be willing to do whatever it takes for their child to be their best, Christian or not.

[25 : 23] But we as Christians, we need to set the bar high on what we are. We don't just give in to little weaknesses, but we truly seek to be faithful to the Lord, feel like it or not, and not let the fire grow out just because we're lazy, don't feel good, have a little ache and pain here or there.

Paul told Timothy to deal with his treatable physical problems and not let it keep him from being faithful to God's call on his life. That wasn't Timothy's only problem. He was timid, shy, whatever you want to call it.

So we're going to look at this under the category of personality, psychological, emotional issues. And again, let me say, I know there are psychological serious issues, mental illnesses.

We're not talking about that in this point. Timothy was shy or timid. Look in 2 Timothy 1, 7. For God, he's telling him, fan the flame.

For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self control. Paul says things throughout this letter to encourage Timothy, assert yourself, boy.

[26 : 36] Be a man. Be a leader. Stand up. Speak up. Confront some people. Don't just let everything go. There's false teachers who are going to destroy the church. They're going to destroy the gospel among these people if you let them.

And Paul was having to tell him, you be assertive. Don't let that happen. Paul even pointed this out to the church at Corinth and asked them to take care of Timothy.

I want you to look at this. I want you to think about what this is saying. Paul is writing to a church and he says, when Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you.

Maybe they were just mean people. Or maybe Timothy was so shy that he was easily intimidated.

For he is doing the work of the Lord as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace that he may return to me for I am expecting him with the brothers.

[27 : 41] Timothy was not a natural born leader. That's why Paul had to go to bat for him, encourage him, prod him like he did. Evidently, Timothy did not like being out front.

Taking on the responsibility as a church leader to confront and correct people and issues. But God called him to do that as a church leader.

And Paul had mentored him and prepared him and sent him to this particular church or group of churches in Ephesus to do this. The point needs to be made here that God calls us to step out of our comfort zones at times.

I'm talking about in terms of our personality. He calls us to not give in to some personality or psychological, emotional weaknesses that we would cause us to naturally want to sort of stand back.

not do what we're supposed to do. You know, the most well-known and respected and influential preacher of the 19th century was Charles Spurgeon. He accomplished a lot like Calvin through his preaching, his writing, starting in school, orphanage, lots of things.

[29 : 00] You know, he battled depression throughout his ministry. He was sometimes so depressed. He was bedridden and unable to preach.

There were times, periods where he just couldn't get up and go for two out of the four Sundays of a month. He described the effect of depression that it had on him like this.

My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for. I want you to understand what I'm saying here.

Depression can be real. It can be devastating. This man that God used in a great way who did not want, he wasn't looking for an excuse not to do what he was called to do.

There were times he was overwhelmed with depression and he could not function. And what compounded his depression sometimes, some of his biographers say, is he felt guilty for it.

[30 : 06] He battled real, what would be called today, clinical depression. That if he had been in our day, he'd have been treated with medication and other ways for that.

That's one of the reasons why I'm pointing it out. He had some real problems. And it knocked him down at times. But by the grace of God, he never gave into it.

He never gave up. He was knocked down at times, but by the grace of God, he didn't stay down. He came back time after time after time.

It was a battle, don't misunderstand. A battle throughout his life. But he wouldn't give up. He refused to give up. Don't ever count yourself out because of your limitations.

God uses imperfect people. God uses all kinds of people to accomplish his purpose in this world and in our church. And I want to, again, stress this to parents.

[31 : 15] Don't let your children use excuses like, I'm too shy. I get nervous in front of people. Or I just want to stay at home all the time.

Don't let your children retreat into a world of unreality by playing video games all the time or spending hours a day on social media.

Such unreality will not help them. But it will certainly hurt them. It will damage them. Your child, your grandchild, your, the children you have influence over, they need to learn to develop healthy social skills and where possible develop a healthy, active body.

And they cannot do that inside all the time with their face buried in an iPhone, an iPad, a computer, or some other electronic gadget. And I want to say this and make people even more mad.

If you're a parent, you are in or supposed to be in control. And you can take things.

[32 : 35] You pay for it, it's yours. It ain't theirs. We got too many weak kids today because we have too many weak parents. You don't have, if you were a parent, your goal was not to be their buddy.

Sometimes you're going to be in their eyes so mean, you're like the devil himself. I don't mind the fact that I sprouted horns a lot with my boys. When they needed it.

There are some hills worth spilling blood on. I spill too much blood on too many unnecessary hills. But there are some that it's worth the fight for your child's spiritual, emotional, physical well-being.

So I want to encourage you, do what it takes. Don't bail them out every time they get in trouble. Be the parent.

Be the one in charge. Whatever it is, however you can have the influence that you can have. Some Christians allow the spiritual fire of Christian faithfulness to die down because of their unwillingness to get out of their comfort zone.

[33 : 56] And they use personality, emotional, psychological issues as excuses not to be faithful. What does your spiritual fire look like right now?

Is it a pilot light? Or is it a roaring fire? Or where is it in between? One more question. Will you ask God to help you to fan your fire of Christian faithfulness into a flame right now?

Paul pointed out the key to fanning the flame into a real fire in verse 7. He says, For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Timothy had God-given power.

The word spirit there, look on the screen there. It's a little s. It may be a general reference to what God does in us to strengthen us, our spirit.

I think it's more likely Paul's talking about the Holy Spirit there and that it should be translated with a capital S that for God gave us his spirit who indwells us as Christians and his spirit is not a spirit of fear but he is a spirit of power and love and self-control and will work that in and through us.

[35 : 11] The truth is whatever our gifts are, God supplies us with the power and ability to use them. Look at this verse. One of my favorite verses in all the Bible, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

If you're a Christian, there is a fire within you. Whether it be bright or not, there is a fire in you. That's the spirit of God working in you and he is the one who gives you the desire to be pleasing to God, to do God's will and gives you the ability to do it.

When we use our gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will not be crippled by fear. Paul says we'll serve God with power, love and control.

I want to wind this up by something Tommy Lee, professor at Southwestern Seminary when I was there years ago. He does a good job of describing what it means for Christians to fan the fire of Christian faithfulness to a flame.

Look at it. Because Timothy had genuine faith, Paul urged him to set it ablaze. The expression fan into flame describes the act of rekindling the embers of a dying fire.

[36 : 20] The command does not imply that Timothy had let his spiritual flame go out. It's an appeal for a continual, vigorous use of his spiritual gifts. Rekindling his gifts would involve fervent prayer, obedience to God's word, and demonstration of an active faith.

If your spiritual fire is not a roaring blaze right now, I want to encourage you to go to God in prayer, spend time with him and his word on a regular basis and just ask him, fan the flame.

It'll never happen if you don't spend time regularly, daily with the Lord in meaningful prayer, just talking to God, reading his word, listening to him.

I want to encourage you also to find a Christian friend to talk about the things of God with. Pray for each other. Encourage each other. Challenge each other. Find a friend.

Make a new friend to do this with. It could be you do it with your spouse. It could be you do it with an older child. Your parent. Find somebody. And then start using what God's given you.

[37 : 31] Your talents, your gifts, your abilities. In some kind of ministry that will truly honor God and help us as his church to serve his purpose.

Ask God to help you know what you need to do to fan the flame of Christian faithfulness now so that it will burn more brightly this coming week.

Let's pray together. Father, show us now how we should respond. Help us to see, to be certain, and then to respond that way.

Father, if there are people in this room who there is no fire within them because they do not know you, they don't have a relationship with Jesus, help them to see that clearly, but to know if they will admit their need, turn from their sin and trust Jesus, call upon him to save them, that you will light the fire right now.

You will change their life. Help them to do that. Let's just all, in an attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord and respond to him however he's speaking to you.

[38 : 45] If I could pray with you here at the front, I'd be happy to do that during these next few minutes. Let's just respond to the Lord. Thank you.