

Radical Zeal

Lesson 5: How To Keep It

Having zeal for God requires regular maintenance and examination. For, like a fire that takes effort to build, it cannot just be left burning without it being tended to. Satan will certainly try and extinguish your spiritual fire that motivates your service to God any way He can (i.e. through trials, temptations, persecutions, discouragements, negative influences, apathy, etc.). Sadly, after once being zealous, some have lost their first love, become dead, and/or grown lukewarm over time (Revelation 2:2-4; 3:1, 15-16). Thankfully, God has given His people everything needed to continue zealously serving Him.

1) Draw nearer to God. Since God is the source of spiritual life and provides the fire to drive your service to Him, spending regular time with God is essential to keep the fire going. For example, the Psalms present some pictures of those who are righteous as being like trees planted beside the water who do not wither like the wicked (Psalm 1:1-6; 92:12-15). You must continue to grow in your appreciation for who God is, what He has done, and what He promises to do so that you will thirst for Him as a deer for the water (Psalm 42:1-4). For, you must recognize that God provides spiritual nourishment (John 4:13-14; 6:35). Therefore, spending time with Jesus and being connected through the life-giving resource of His word is necessary to having the spiritual fire you need to survive Satan's challenges. Although Satan often tempts people to spend less time in Bible study, prayer, and worship, you must recognize your continual need for both quality and quantity of time in these to draw ever nearer to God, who is your life!

2) Keep a spiritually-focused mind. The mind that is focused on the things of this world will not please God and will choke out God's word from being fruitful in your life (Romans 8:5-8; Mark 4:18-19). The things that challenge your zeal often

challenge you to focus more on the physical things going on around you or that are enticing you than you do on your soul. Therefore, no matter what you are facing in this life, you must remember the temporary nature of it all and the reward God has prepared for those who zealously obey Him. Consider how the apostle Paul used this to overcome his many challenges (2 Corinthians 11:22-33; 4:16-18). To help maintain this perspective, the Bible presents three illustrations you should consider. First, you must view yourself as an exile (stranger, pilgrim) who is passing through this land in search of a better land (1 Peter 1:17; 2:11-12). Second, you must view yourself as a runner trying to win a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2). Third, you must view yourself as a soldier fighting for your soul (2 Timothy 2:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-13).

3) Spend time with other zealous Christians. God uses the imagery of a Shepherd and sheep to describe the relationship between God/Jesus and His people (Psalm 23; John 10). Along with the need for the sheep to spend time with the Shepherd, this also emphasizes the need for sheep to be with other sheep. This provides security for the sheep as opposed to whenever they are separated and on their own. Therefore, one of the ways Satan tries to extinguish your zeal is to isolate you from others who zealously try to serve God. This was the case with Elijah, who was greatly discouraged at the thought of having his life threatened and being the only one who was faithfully seeking the Lord (1 Kings 19:10, 14). However, God said there were 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal (v. 18) and Elijah also found Elisha (vv. 19, 21). In the same way, God has intended for His people to live in community with others who are zealously attempting to serve God rather than be isolated. Particularly, God desires all His people to be connected in a local church (Acts 9:26-28; 11:25-

26). These connections of fellowship with other zealous Christians will work to keep your spiritual fire burning (Hebrews 10:24-25)! Therefore, you need to search out those who serve Christ zealously and connect yourself to them as closely as you can (Revelation 3:1-6; Proverbs 27:17)!

4) Keep going. True zeal for God is not an emotion that should constantly fluctuate. Therefore, when you are discouraged and feel like giving up, you must remember all the truths of what God has taught and cling tightly to your anchor of hope in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:19)! No matter what is going on, you must continue to push forward in doing what God wants from your life, trusting in Him and seeking to please Him (2 Timothy 2:3-4). For example, the prophet Jeremiah was often rejected for speaking God's words (i.e. Jeremiah 20:1-2). Because of this continual rejection, the words of God that had once brought Jeremiah joy and delight (Jeremiah 15:16) had now brought him to a point of being dismayed and ready to give up (Jeremiah 20:7-9). Yet, he could not hold God's words in and say nothing – and he continued serving God (Jeremiah 20:9)! In the same way, you must recognize that God does not promise those who follow Him an easy life on this earth (in fact, quite the opposite, Luke 9:23-26). Instead, He simply promises that zealously following Him and not giving up will be worth it and you simply must continue to do those things God desires (1 Corinthians 15:57-58; Galatians 6:7-10)!

Like a fire, you must tend your zeal so that it does not go out. For, Satan is constantly looking for opportunities to extinguish the eagerness of service for God that keeps people going. Sometimes he does so by giving people big obstacles at one time, while other times he does so by a gradual and slow process. Regardless, God has given you everything you need to keep your zeal until you reach the finish line of your faith (2 Timothy 4:6-8)!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?

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