

# ZEALOUS

## FOR GOOD WORKS



A study of maintaining our initial zeal  
as an individual and a church.

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A study of maintaining our initial zeal  
as an individual and a church.







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# Note

This work has been made with the hope that together we can search the scripture and develop a greater understanding of it. Hopefully, it will make your study of this topic more edifying, more profitable, and more enjoyable. It is not intended to take the place of your responsibility to prepare for the studies. Please devote adequate time to the material before our study, so we can all be edified by one another (Hebrews 10:24–25).

All verse references are taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 unless otherwise noted.

# God's Zealous People

## IN PREPARATION

Read Titus 2.

What has the grace of God done in its appearing?




What does the grace of God instruct us to do?




According to the text, why did Jesus give himself for us?




How do we show Jesus our zeal for His will?




**Jesus “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:14)**

We come to the Lord to seek truth and to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Through the gospel we lose the fear of death and gain an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom. We often reflect on the blessings we enjoy in Christ, and rightly so! Do we often stop to reflect upon what Jesus sought to gain through sacrificing Himself for us? Paul tells us in this passage that Jesus gave Himself to “redeem us” and to purify for Himself “a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Jesus wants a people who are zealous for His will!

Too often we become trapped in a pattern of simply ‘going through the motions’ in our service to God. Do you feel trapped in a spiritual rut? Have you ever felt that way in the past? This study book is dedicated to helping overcome those weights and pressing forward to new spiritual heights.

## What is zeal?

The word “zeal” in our New Testament is translated from the Greek word *zelos*. In other contexts this word is also translated as “jealous” and “fury” because the word has reference to a stirred up emotion. The image is comparable to a pot of water set onto a burner. Before the water heats it is at rest. However, the heat causes the water to move and boil. Likewise, our “zeal” is our excitement over something. In Titus 2:14, that excitement is “for good deeds.” Specifically, those works set out for us by the command and example of our Lord.

# God's Zealous People

**What does zeal, jealousy, and fury have in common?**

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Although zeal does involve some type of emotional investment, we would be mistaken to think that being “zealous” has reference to a Christian walking about with a constant emotional high. Rather, the stirred up nature of the Christian should be of anxiousness to do good for others. The idea is that we are purposed to find opportunities for the “good deeds” that Jesus has taught us to do.

**Read Ephesians 2:10. What were we for? Who prepared those things?**

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Our zeal for the works of God was purposed by the Lord before the foundation of the world was laid. God has always desired a people who know Him and seek His ways above all others. Christians were meant to be that people!

**Why should we be zealous?**

Knowing that Jesus has purchased us to be His zealous people, we should seek to remember why it is that we should be zealous to begin with. Paul gives us several reasons for godly zeal within the immediate context of Titus 2.

*“For the grace of God has appeared...” (Titus 2:11)*

The grace of God in this passage is a reference to the gospel message which comes through Jesus Christ. God’s mercy for us is a wonderful reason to return zeal to Him.

**Where would we be without the grace of God? (Read Colossians 2:13)**

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# God's Zealous People

*"...bringing salvation to all men," (Titus 2:11)*

God did not pick and choose which nations or individuals He would offer mercy to. Instead, He offers it to all mankind. You and I are not of some unfavored lineage that removes our eligibility for grace. Praise God for He desires all to come to Him! (2 Timothy 2:4)

*"looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," (Titus 2:13)*

Jesus told His apostles, "If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:3) This home is for all who serve Him and wait for His return! We are not abandoned to the world nor to its fate. An eternal home awaits us and that is reason to be zealous for His will!

*"who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed..." (Titus 2:14)*

The gospel and our salvation were not easily gained for us. The Lord suffered thoroughly so that we could have this hope. We have committed terrible things upon our fellow man; lies, murder, insults, slander, etc. We have also sinned against God in blaspheming and disrespecting His creation; our fellow man. Yet, Jesus went to the cross and suffered an agonizing death at the hands of men for our lawless deeds. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the reconciliation." (Romans 5:8, 11) The fact that Jesus died for us warrants our zealous service in His name.

*"and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession..." (Titus 2:14)*

We are Jesus' people. If anyone has ever had reason to glory in the ruler of a nation, we have more. Our King is perfect and loving toward us. His laws are just, right, and consistent for all. He exemplifies perfectly all that He tells us to be. We have great reason to be zealous for the One who has purchased and purified us!



# God's Zealous People

## **Are you zealous for good works?**

Consider your life. Have you been the zealous servant that Jesus deserves for you to be? Each of us has areas that need to be improved upon. Are we zealous to do good for others? Are we zealous to encourage the saints? Are we zealous to worship God? Are we zealous to spread the gospel? If not, why not?

## ***Where are some areas of your faith that need a 'zeal boost'?***

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Perhaps others can see our zeal waning more than we realize. Our actions and attitude are a testimony to the people around us about the value we have for the Lord and His ways. What are we teaching them?

The authors hope that this book can encourage us all to be the people that God has purposed us to be. Through study, meditation, and great effort we can experience a spiritual revival that will set us on path of zealous service. Are you ready to be what God wants you to be?

# The Father's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read Isaiah 9.

What is being prophesied in the first seven verses of this chapter?




What was the land of Zebulun and Naphtali in the time of Jesus?




What would the child be called and what would rest upon his shoulders?




What kind of government would the child have?




## A Zealous Father

Isaiah 9:7 reads as follows:

“There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”

This messianic prophecy explains that zeal is not just something that men possess, but it is something possessed by God firstly! As we think about zeal, it is easy to forget that we are made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26ff) Not that we look like God, but that we have an everlasting component as He is. That everlasting component has emotion that come from the Father. For instance, we love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) We have zeal because it is a quality of God.

Isaiah 9:7 explains that God's zeal would bring about the Messiah. God loves us and is zealous to do good for us! As we read about this prophecy of Christ and His kingdom in Isaiah 9, we truly see how great a love the Father has for us and we are thankful that He zealously was working toward the goal of making the blessed kingdom of Jesus a reality.

We have all been dependent on other people for various things in our lives. Thus those individuals hold power over us. How frustrating it can be when the person that we are depending on does not see our need as having the same priority level that we have ascribed to it! We would certainly be in bad shape if this was how the Father viewed us. Helping us was not a priority of His and He would just get around to it when He felt like it. Thankfully the Old Testament explains that the Father is zealous in His work for His people. It is a priority of His also!





# The Father's Zeal

## Zeal Will Accomplish

II Kings 19:31 has a phrase similar to the phrase in Isaiah 9:7.

“For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the Lord will perform this.”

What phrase do you find in II Kings 9 that is also found in Isaiah 9:7?

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What will be done according to II Kings 9:31?

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What does this mean? (See also Isaiah 11:16)

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As we look at these two passages we learn something very important about the zeal of God. It is not an impotent, pointless zeal. It is a working zeal that accomplishes its purpose! The scripture is clear that the Lord's will is always accomplished. Even King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon understood how the will of God works. Read Daniel 4:19-37 and answer the following questions.

What happened to Nebuchadnezzar and why?

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Was there hope for him escaping this fate according to verse 27? If so, how?

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What lessons did Nebuchadnezzar learn about God's will according to Daniel 4:34-35?

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# The Father's Zeal

If we are to strive towards godliness, we must have a zeal that is likewise directed. It is one thing to be excited and on fire about something, but another thing entirely to accomplish things with our zeal. It should be able to be said of us also that our zeal will accomplish. It is a working zeal.

## **Zealous for His People**

Isaiah records the following at Isaiah 26:11:

“O Lord, Your hand is lifted up yet they do not see it. They see Your zeal for the people and are put to shame; Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.”

Isaiah explains that God loves those who are His and demonstrates it to the surrounding peoples. They see the Lord's zeal for His people and are shamed by it. The world speaks wicked things about God and those that follow Him, but the facts clearly demonstrate that God zealously loves and does for His people showing the naysayers to be wrong.

According to 26:1, Isaiah is speaking about a certain day that the zeal of the Father would be made manifest and the surrounding naysayers would be put to shame. As we back up into chapter 25 to investigate further we see that 26:1 is talking about a day that has long been planned. Isaiah 25:1 says that he would give thanks to the name of God because he had “worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.” Isaiah 26 is talking about the day when the great plans of the Lord for His people would come to pass. Isaiah 25:6-7 explains that he was going to prepare a “lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain...and on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations.” He goes on to say at verse 8 that “He will swallow up death for all time”. This chapter is obviously speaking about the founding of the church, the start of His kingdom, as recorded at Acts 2.

As we think about Isaiah's words in connection with zeal, we learn that zeal is closely tied to the plans the Father has made for His people before the foundation of the world. Not the plans only, but also to the fact that He has faithfully carried them out. Indeed our Father is a perfect picture of zeal for us to observe and emulate!



# The Father's Zeal

## Zealous In Wrath

Half of the story would be missed if we simply talked about the zeal the Lord has for His plan and for His people. The Old Testament also makes clear that God is zealous in justice and judgment. He has just as much passion for rewarding right as He does for punishing wrong. We indeed have a passionate God who has kindness and severity.

*“Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.”*

(Romans 11:22)

What would the aroused zeal of the Lord accomplish according to Isaiah 42:33?

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What would the zeal of the Lord accomplish according to Ezekiel 5:13?

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What would the zeal of the Lord accomplish according to Zephaniah 3:8?

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It is such a common thought and mistake today by many who are religiously minded to think that God will simply overlook justice in favor of love. Yet time and time again we see in scripture that He is equally passionate about both. In fact, one cannot exist without the other for in overlooking justice against some He would then show hate to their victims. I perfectly holy God must be equally zealous for justice and love.

## Our Passionate Father

We must never try to fit our views of God into our own perceived box. So many today would think of the Father as devoid of passion. Devoid of zeal. Yet, our Bible explains that this could not be further from the truth. He is zealous to aid those that are His!



# The Son's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read Psalm 69.

What does most of this Psalm describe?




How were the people treating the Messiah in this Psalm?




The death of the person is compared to what in verse 31?




Although in great suffering, the person in this Psalm never loses faith in God. What is requested from God?




Jesus came into the temple and found it had been turned into “a place of business.” (John 2:16) He began to overturn tables and drive out the charlatans with a whip to the shock of His disciples. Then we read, “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’” (John 2:17) The disciples understood Psalm 69:9 to be speaking of the Messiah’s zeal for the Father and rightly applied the passage to the zeal of Jesus they were witnessing.

***What are some other Messianic statements in Psalm 69?***

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The Son of God came to earth with a purpose and those around Him could see His zeal plainly. In this lesson we seek to consider the zeal of Jesus during His time on earth and to reflect upon the lessons we can learn from it.

**Focused on the Father’s Will**

Psalm 69:9 points out that the Messiah would not be focused on Himself but on the Father. Jesus fits this description perfectly. He humbled Himself to the Father’s will even before coming to earth: “although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7) His purpose remained the same on earth.

Jesus explained His focus at 12 years of age saying, “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house [or *business*]?” (Luke 2:49) Even as a boy His zeal for the Father is



# The Son's Zeal

apparent! Although His parents did not understand it, we should! Years later the entire nation would know the name of Jesus of Nazareth and they would seek to hear His message.

Many today covet such fame, but Jesus never changed His focus from the Father's will and He seeks to turn all glory to the Father. He tells them, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." (John 12:28-50)

***Can a person reject the teaching of Jesus and still be pleasing to God? Explain.***

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Jesus shows His zeal throughout His ministry. He speaks boldly to the enemies of God (see Matthew 23:13-17). He speaks compassionately to the lowly (see Luke 19:7-10). He works mighty miracles and gives the Father the glory (see John 5:36). All of these things are accomplished through His zeal for the Father.

All are capable of seeking their own glory: Only a faithful servant seeks the glory of another. This is especially true when it comes at great personal cost.

## **He Put His Life in the Father's Hands**

The Christ was attacked from the beginning of His ministry. When He came teaching in His hometown of Nazareth He entered the synagogue and read from the Scripture concerning the Messiah. Seeing His implication, "they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff." (Luke 4:29) Many would have stopped preaching if they were so quickly met with hostility. Jesus was too zealous for the Father's will to be done to be dissuaded.



# The Son's Zeal

Threats of violence were ever-present as His ministry continued. Some of the Lord's disciples began to feel the pressure as well. Jesus was very close to a family of Bethany and news of illness in one of these, Lazarus, came to Jesus. After waiting two days, Jesus sought to return to Bethany. His disciples warned, "the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" (John 11:8) Jesus would not be deterred. He knew that this opportunity was beneficial to glorifying God through raising Lazarus. Thomas even scoffed saying, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." (John 11:16) Jesus was willing to put the risk of death behind Him in order to do the will of the Father even when others were actively seeking His life.

We should not be lead to believe that Jesus enjoyed this suffering, though. When His final evening came Jesus was praying in the garden and expressing to the Father that He does not wish to die the painful death awaiting Him. He prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me..." (Luke 22:42) Who wouldn't pray in such a way? But there was no limit to what Jesus would bear if it was in accordance with the Father's will, and so He continued, "yet not My will, but Yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

***How does Jesus' prayer show us that zeal is not merely an emotion? Describe His zeal for the Father's will in Luke 22:42.***

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The zeal that Jesus shows for the Father was of such strength that He was even willing to put His life in the Father's hands. This type of zeal is what all Christians are striving for.

## **Passing His Zeal to Others**

Jesus was not content to have this zeal only in Himself. He sought to influence the lives of others that they may share in His zeal for the Father's will. We began the lesson by remembering the disciples' application of Psalm 69:9 to Jesus. This psalm speaks much more about the Christ and also about the people He would establish. Using physical things to describe spiritual truths, David says, "God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah,





# The Son's Zeal

that they may dwell there and possess it. The descendants of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it.” (Psalm 69:35-36) We see that all that Jesus was going through was intended to spawn a nation that God would love and favor. We are the people that have seen the zeal of Jesus for the Father’s will and adopted it to ourselves.

***How does serving Jesus make us a servant of the Father? Use Scripture to support your answer.***

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“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” (John 14:7) With these words Jesus explains that He has been the image of the Father for the disciples; how the Father acts and what He desires from us in order to walk with Him. The zeal of Jesus is not meant to be inaccessible to us. We are to strive to be like Jesus and thus we will be zealous for the Father’s will. If we question how we are to zealously live for the Father on earth, Jesus is the answer.

# Zeal for the Church

## IN PREPARATION

Read Ephesians 5.

What key words are used to describe the husbands' and wives' duties in marriage?




In what way does Jesus sanctify the church?




What illustrations are used to describe how a husband should love his wife?




What is the submission of the wife to her husband compared to?




*“This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:32)*

Ephesians 5 contains a wonderful discourse on the home and marriage responsibilities. Woven throughout this message is a lesson concerning Christ and His church.

Jesus is zealous for the church. He fervently seeks good for the body and His dedication does not falter. Just as He was zealous for the Father on earth, His zeal for the people given to Him by God continues even to this day.

Jesus planned for His people long before the church was born. He tells Peter, “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:18) The apostle Paul describes the zeal of Jesus both in establishing His church and maintaining it in Ephesians 5.

## Zeal in Action

The word “zeal” is never used in Ephesians 5, yet zeal is described throughout this chapter! The powerful descriptions of Christ’s relationship to the church show us a zealous interest from our Lord. Consider some of these statements.

*“Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.” (Ephesians 5:23)*

Jesus has a strong interest in His people. He is the “head” and “Savior.” The church belongs to Him both with reference to authority and grace. The headship of Jesus is also described in Ephesians 1:18-23.

***How do we respect the headship of Jesus in His church?***

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# Zeal for the Church

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...” (Ephesians 5:25)*

Love for the church motivated Jesus to die for her. Zealous individuals have died for many causes throughout history and have had various motivations. Love is the most pure motive one can have. Christians continue to reap the benefits of His love and are expected to imitate it. (1 John 3:16)

***When might a Christian need to lay down their life for their brethren?***

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*“so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” (Ephesians 5:26)*

Jesus gave Himself up so that the church could be sanctified; separated from sin and the world and made holy to God. This is accomplished, on the church’s part, through being baptized in obedience to the Spirit’s word! (Mark 16:15-16)

*“that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5:27)*

Jesus loves the church so that He is adorning her to be presented to Himself. The image again alludes to the marriage of a man and woman. A groom seeks to have his wife adorned beautifully and rejoices when she is presented to him for marriage. Jesus has spared no expense as He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28) and He sees in the church His beautiful bride without “spot or wrinkle.”

*“for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.” (Ephesians 5:29-30)*

Jesus is not inattentive to the needs of the church. He “nourishes” and “cherishes” it continually. He sincerely cares for the church’s condition and edifies. What a blessing!





# Zeal for the Church

## **The Church He Loves**

The description of Christ's relationship to the church in Ephesians 5 does not describe His relationship to every 'church' in the world today. There are a few aspects of His church that need to be remembered.

### ***His church is made up of believers.***

“The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.” (1 John 5:10)

Only those who truly believe make up the church of Christ. This is not an empty faith, but a living and active one. (James 2:15-26)

### ***Who adds individuals to the church? (See Acts 2:47)***

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### ***The members have counted the cost.***

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ (Luke 14:30)

Jesus' lesson was not meant to turn people from the truth but to weed out the uncommitted. Those in His church have counted the cost and vowed to give all for Him.

### ***They put Jesus above all.***

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:37)

Jesus' church doesn't put anyone before Him. Not even our families!

# Zeal for the Church

## **The Church's Response to Jesus**

The apostle Paul spends a great deal of time in the Ephesian letter explaining the church's relationship with Jesus. The beginning of the lesson revealed Christ's zeal for the church. Other portions of Ephesians reveals how the church responds to Jesus' zeal.

### ***She submits to Him.***

“But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:24)

Many churches do as they wish and fail to consider what the word says. Christ's church seeks to make Him the head of all things in the church. (Ephesians 1:22-23) She looks for His guidance and considers His word while seeking His authority.

### ***She honors Him.***

“to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:21)

His church is His bride and so she seeks to bring honor to Jesus' name. She invests herself in His worship and dedicates herself to seeking out the lost. She knows that He is honored by the proclamation of His will to all mankind!

### ***She is faithful to Him.***

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus...” (Ephesians 1:1)

As a collective and as individuals who make up His body, we are to be faithful to Him lest we are found as the Israelites of old who were like the wife who played a harlot. (Hosea 1-4) Our faithfulness is a reasonable response to the zeal that Christ has shown for His church!

# Apostle to the Gentiles: Paul's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read II Corinthians 11.  
In what ways does Paul demonstrate his zealous nature toward the Corinthians?

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How would you characterize Paul's work among them?

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What are some things that Paul endured in his travels as a servant of Christ?

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To what degree would you say Paul was devoted to Christ?

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## Paul the Passionate

As we read about the apostle Paul, one thing stands out, He was on fire for whatever He was doing. When he was growing up in Judaism, he was on fire for learning and being all he would in that role. When he was persecuting Christians, he was on fire for finding them, imprisoning them, and testifying against them. When he became a Christian, he was on fire for doing whatever the Lord directed him to do. He was certainly passionate about His activities.

A person who so wholly devotes their self to whatever activity they are doing is hard to come by. There are not many in this life that tend to have that kind of passion. Paul was certainly of this sort. A man who did nothing half-way. A man who was completely consumed by whatever was worth doing. While we may not naturally have that same zeal that Paul and some others have, there is much that we can learn about being zealous and passionate for the work of Jesus by examining the example of Paul.

## Paul's Training

Paul explains his background to the mob as he makes his defense before them at Acts 22. Answer the following.

Who educated Paul and where?

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What kind of education was it and what did it produce in him?

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# Apostle to the Gentiles: Paul's Zeal

Paul's education in Judaism was the foundation of his zeal and who he was. It was not a zeal based on ignorance. Rather it was a zeal based on a great knowledge and deep respect for the law of God. Paul enjoyed this training in the word of God and began to pursue it diligently.

What does Galatians 1:14 say was the result of Paul's zeal and dedication to the Law?

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How was Paul with respect to the righteousness found in the law? (Philippians 3:6)

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No doubt many today would be well-pleased if their children would take training and schooling as seriously as did Paul. He was on fire for the training and for the Law of God. However, this zealous training led to a misdirected, ignorant zeal. As Philippians 3:6 explains, it produced one who was a zealous persecutor of the church!

## **Passionate for Persecution**

After Stephen was put to death with the approval of Paul at Acts 7, he began to persecute the church. By Paul's own admission at Philippians 3:6 he did the persecution zealously. He was 100% convinced that this Nazarene sect was in opposition to the plan and will of God and that God would want it destroyed.

How did Paul (Saul) feel about putting Stephen to death according to Acts 8:1?

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What was Paul's state of mind and what was he doing according to Acts 9:1-2?

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# Apostle to the Gentiles: Paul's Zeal

What does Jesus tell Ananias that Paul needed to learn at Acts 9:15-16?

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What does Paul say about himself at I Timothy 1:15?

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Paul was certainly on fire to persecute the Christians. It is a pain that would haunt him for the rest of his life after he learned the truth about the Messiah and His followers. However, just as Paul was a zealous Jew, he was a likewise a zealous Christian who did not let things like the past get in his way. In his own words, he pressed “on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14)

## **Passionate for the Messiah**

II Corinthians 11 was read in preparation for this class period. That passage certainly demonstrates to us the dedication of the apostle Paul to the purpose of Christ. Jesus told Ananias that Paul was going to have to learn how much a saint suffers for the name of Christ. Indeed he did! II Corinthians 11 has Paul recording all the terrible things that he suffered for the name of Christ. Yet he was willing and ready to do so. In fact, Paul describes himself as “eager” in spite of the suffering that inevitably came his way.

What was Paul eager to do according to Romans 1:15?

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What was Paul eager to do according to Galatians 2:10?

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What was Paul eager to do according to I Thessalonians 2:17?

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# Apostle to the Gentiles: Paul's Zeal

## **Following Paul's Passionate Example**

Paul told the Philippians at 3:17 to "join in following my example". He often encouraged brethren to follow his example as he followed the example of Christ. Indeed we can learn much about zeal from the apostle. Here are three lessons.

**Love the Truth** - The apostle Paul would not have been the person he was had he not zealously pursued knowledge of God. If we are going to be the zealous servants for Christ that the Lord wants us to be, it must be on a solid foundation of knowledge. As Paul told Timothy at II Timothy 2:15, "be diligent". He had to study diligently if he was to preach faithfully and effectively. In reality Paul was trying to pass on his zeal for the word to his child in the faith, Timothy. As Paul told Timothy at II Timothy 2:2, he wanted Timothy to learn the word so that he could entrust it to others who would be able to teach others also. Indeed saints are to be zealous for the truth.

**Avoid Misdirected Zeal** - Paul tragically demonstrates to us that one can be zealous for all the wrong things! Paul was 100% convinced that he should be killing Christians. Paul discovered from the Lord Himself that he was 100% wrong. Sadly we look around today and see many people that indeed have zeal, even a working zeal, but it is a zeal that is not working the works of God. (Ephesians 2:10) There is certainly no limit to how misdirected our zeal can be. If Paul can zealously work the murder of saints, certainly we can see that misdirected zeal could involve many activities right up to that. May we be zealous for His works, not our own.

**Zeal Suffers All** - Paul was zealous for God's works even in the face of loss of life. Acts 14:19-20 has Paul at Lystra. Jews came and had him stoned and dragged out of the city. In spite of this "message" to leave, Paul got up and went right back into the city. If we are to be servants of our King, we must be committed to serve Him regardless of the suffering that may come. Jesus does not desire "fair-weather servants". He desires those who are wholly, zealously dedicated to Him.

## **Faith of Our Fathers**

May we ever be thankful for the righteous, zealous example left to us by Paul and those like him. If Paul could accomplish such great things, certainly we can to some extent also. May we all strive toward that goal.

# The Foundation of Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read 2 Timothy 1.

Find places where the ideas of knowledge, gratitude, and fortitude are mentioned by Paul.

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Where did Timothy learn to have faith?

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What struggles does Paul mention having in this chapter?

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Is Paul's zeal apparent in this chapter? Explain.

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## Foundation Repairs Needed

All structures need a proper foundation. This truth is seen in both ancient and modern architecture, and it is assumed in Jesus' illustration of the man building a house (Matthew 7:24-27). If the foundation is flawed so will the rest of the structure be flawed. Our zeal also needs a proper foundation.

Many Christians want to be zealous but they seem to fall back into the same ruts again and again. Their "zeal house" falls to the ground repeatedly not because they are insincere, but because they are attempting to build their zeal on weak foundations.

### ***Weak Foundations for Zeal:***

#### *Emotion*

We seek to worship God in such a way that our emotions are stirred within us. However, our emotional response should be secondary to praise of God and admonishing of others. Emotionalism is a bad foundation for worship and a weak foundation for zeal. It is easy to be on fire for the Lord's will when we are on an emotional high, but our emotions change. If we build our zeal solely on how we feel in the moment it is only a matter of time before our zeal stops.

#### *Praise from Others*

Some seek to build their zeal on the foundation of praise from others. We should seek to give honor to whom honor is due, but expecting praise is not a godly motivation nor is it wise. Others will take us for granted at times. Many will never realize the work we put in to something. And that's okay!



# The Foundation of Zeal

***Should Christians work for praise? Consider Luke 17:7-10***

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## **Strong Foundations for Zeal**

Putting aside the weak foundations, let us focus on the three strong foundations that will help us to build a zeal that will stand the test of time.

### ***Knowledge***

God granted humanity amazing minds. No other creature can compete with human intelligence. It makes sense, then, that knowledge is a strong foundation for lasting zeal. Particularly, knowledge of God's word and of why we are to serve Him.

Do you spend much time in study of God's word? The importance of regular bible study is difficult to overstate. The word is our nourishment that we should crave. Peter instructs, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." (1 Peter 2:2) If you have been struggling with maintaining your zeal for the Lord and His works ask yourself how much of a priority daily bible study has been for you. Do you read the word regularly? Do you discuss it with others? If you want to be zealous for the Lord then start being His student?

We need an understanding of the "why"s to keep our zeal. Why should I be zealous? Why did Jesus die for me? Why does He teach me to live in this way? Answers to these questions is found in the bible. Even learning these answers once is not enough. A "once-learned" approach wasn't even good enough for Timothy, an evangelist and student of the apostle Paul.

Timothy learned a "sincere faith" from his mother and grandmother. (2 Timothy 1:5) They had raised him with a knowledge of the Scriptures. Then he became a student of Paul and saw the works of God firsthand. Yet, even he is told, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) If Timothy needed to spend a great deal of time studying the word then certainly we do as well!



# The Foundation of Zeal

## **Gratitude**

Another strong foundation for zeal is deep gratitude to God. We have so much to be thankful in Christ. These things do not change as time passes and our appreciation should only deepen as we understand and realize more that has been done for us.

First of all, we should be thankful for the forgiveness granted us in the blood of Christ. It is true for each of us that, “you were dead in your trespasses and sins” apart from Christ. (Ephesians 2:1) Jesus died so that we might live again. What a foundation for our zeal! He laid down His life that we might be raised from spiritual death. There is no greater gift!

We should also be grateful for the pattern of life we have taught to live by God. Those in sin pretend to pity Christians for passing by the temptations of evil. Yet, those same individuals live in turmoil and stresses due to their sin. We know where they are and have been there. That is a pitiable life! Christians, though, seek to model their walk and homes after the peaceful path of God. We find fellowship and comfort among our brethren. We have something to live for. Praise to God for teaching us a better way to live!

Besides these things, we have an eternal hope of a home after this life ends. Never do we need to fret over the powers of darkness nor fear of death. Our hope is assured as long as we are putting the kingdom of God first in our lives. Those without hope cannot appreciate the relief we feel by knowing what awaits us in the next realm. Are you grateful for the hope you have? Difficult days should only increase our gratitude to God due to the hope we have. This, again, makes gratitude an excellent foundation for a lifelong zeal.

**What are some ways we can express our gratitude to God?**

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## **Fortitude**

The last great foundation of zeal is fortitude. Fortitude is defined as, “mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation courageously.” All

# The Foundation of Zeal

who seek to overcome some difficulty require fortitude to complete the task. An event runner needs fortitude to press on when his/her body strength is failing. A soldier needs fortitude to perform the task when fear and stress lay hold of them. A Christian needs fortitude when temptations, persecution, and weariness arise against them from evil of the world. Without fortitude our zeal will fail first, and our faith itself afterwards.

Fortitude is needed to keep our commitment to remain true to Christ. Whatever may tempt us to leave-- family, coworkers, social pressure, etc.-- we must be able to withstand. Peter was appealing to the idea of fortitude when he commanded the Christians, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13) Are you prepared in mind for action? We may call this mindset "mental grit." Get your head in the game and prepare to fight!

***What are some struggles of faith you have needed fortitude to overcome?***

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Fortitude is also need to have an abiding desire to advance in the faith. Was there a time in your faith when you wanted to be stronger and know more? What happened to that desire? Was it inspired by a lesson but the effect quickly wore away? You may need to build more fortitude. Do it because it is hard to build more fortitude. Is it difficult to get up earlier to read and pray in the mornings? Do it because it is hard-- and will pay dividends. Too much of our lives center around finding the easiest ways to live. Sometimes we need to accept that things are not easy and do them simply for that reason.

Stop wasting time attempting to build a foundation of zeal on passing things like emotion and praise from others. Build your zeal on the things that remain: knowledge, gratitude, and fortitude!

# Hindrances: Misunderstanding Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read Revelation 2:1-7.

What was the church at Ephesus doing well according to the words of Jesus?




What was his problem with the church at Ephesus?




What does Jesus tell the church at Ephesus to do to correct the problems?




How would you define “leaving your first love”?




## Zeal Without Knowledge

Paul describes the Jews in Romans 10:2 in this way:

*“For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”*

As we see in this passage, zeal alone is not enough. Also of note is that zeal that is based on ignorance is not the type of zeal that the Lord commands and expects of His people.

It is not uncommon to see churches today that have no zeal to speak of. They are doing little more than keeping the doors open on Sunday and that is not being done very well. The feeling in the assembly is one of habit and ritual. We are here because the Lord commands and nothing else.

Why? We wonder and wish that we could figure out why zeal can be so hard to come by and why it is so severely lacking in many of the Lord’s churches. One great contributor to the lack of zeal is that zeal is often misunderstood. The presence of zeal can make people feel that there is a change agent in their midst. Someone who wants to alter things against the will of God. Of course, this is not generally the case, but it is perceived as the situation in many cases. People are suspect of this desire to push the church into action.

People tend to have false understandings of zeal and this produces a suspicious feeling toward it. As with all things, we must define zeal in a biblical manner rather than by how I feel or think about it. The Bible explains to us what zeal is and also what it is not. In this lesson we will examine four common misunderstandings about zeal that can cause brethren to feel the need to shut it down before it begins.



# Hindrances: Misunderstanding Zeal

## **Misunderstanding One: Zeal is buying into the latest fad.**

Indeed the religious world, like the world, is full of fads. Jesus shirts, Jesus bracelets, church coffee shops, church tattoo parlors, guys breaking cinder blocks in the name of Jesus, riding horses and barrel racing in His name, etc. It seems that we live in a time where a “Christian” can literally wear his “Christianity” on his sleeve. It is clear in the word of God that we serve a God that does not change with the times. He is the same and applicable and effective in whatever time it may be.

What does Hebrews 13:8 tell us about our Savior?

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How does God view time according to II Peter 3:8?

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How does time and circumstance affect the church according to Matthew 16:18?

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The word is clear. The message is not to change. God’s word will be the same and should be understood in the same way until the end of time. It is wise for brethren to guard against churches giving in to fads. Fads inevitable fade away and we certainly do not want people’s commitment to the Lord to fade away with the fad. God has established His kingdom in a timeless way.

However, the other side of this is that zeal is not about continually following the latest thing. While there are certainly some that only want to follow things they feel are fresh and different, the scripture advocates for zealously walking the ancient paths. (Jeremiah 6:16; 18:15) Zeal is about diligently working to preach the gospel to the lost. Diligently working to give our best service to the Lord. Diligently working to see to it that people hear the truth and it not obscured by ourselves and our traditionalism.

# Hindrances: Misunderstanding Zeal

## **Misunderstanding Two: Zeal is merely excitement.**

We have already examined several circumstances that demonstrate that zeal must be accompanied by knowledge and action. If zeal is misunderstood by us as simply excitement, then it will fade and we nor the work of the kingdom will be any better off. Make no mistake, excitement is important and is a part of zeal, but zeal is much more.

Sadly, many brethren hear zeal and they think it is just about excitement, which is then associated with ignorant youth and abandoned. This could not be further from the truth. Excitement is important. After all, we are a part of that holy and blameless group that has been predestined for good works as defined by God. We are the hands and feet of the Lord to work in His vineyard that souls may be saved and as many as possible may inherit Heaven. (Ephesians 1:3-9) If there is anything worth being excited about, surely it is this!

However, zeal is not merely excitement and it should never be frowned upon. Zeal is about diligent work. Zeal is about excitedly understanding the wonderful blessings bestowed upon us by our Savior and then getting busy in diligently doing the work that He has given us. In other words, zeal is about doing the work of the Lord not because we have to, but because we get to. Realizing the privilege of laboring in His vineyard.

## **Misunderstanding Three: Zeal inevitably wanes.**

We all know the story. A person is baptized into Christ. Their sins are forgiven and you can see the relief and joy in their face as they emerge from the water. They immediately begin diligently studying their Bible and are at every assembly. They are busy telling their friends about the blessing that they have received. Then a few weeks go by. A few services are missed here and there. The Bible reading is done mainly when the convert is in the assembly. Their friends have not met their conversion with the enthusiasm that they imagined. Their zeal has waned.

Unfortunately brethren tend to see this as the natural process. This is what is supposed to happen. While it is true that some of that initial excitement does wear off, it is not necessary, natural or inevitable for zeal to disappear!

# Hindrances: Misunderstanding Zeal

Consider the saints in Acts 8.

What was happening to them according to Acts 8:1-3?

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What were they busy doing in spite of it according to Acts 8:4?

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If anything should make your zeal wane it would seem persecution should do it! However these brethren continued steadfastly and excitedly proclaiming the name of Jesus to all that would hear. Zeal does not have to wane. We need to have it ourselves. Find it if we have lost it. Help new converts maintain it.

## **Misunderstanding Four: Zeal can exist solely in “thou shalt not”.**

Going back to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2 we see this exact problem. Everything that the Lord commends them for is related to maintaining what they have. It is all related to abstaining. They will not allow false teaching, etc. Rightly did the Lord say they had lost their first love. In Acts 20 Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders about how he labored with them night and day in tears. These Ephesians were initially workers. Sadly they had apparently come to the point where they thought that Christianity and zeal for Christ is summed up in abstaining from various things a Christian and a church should not do. This could not be further from the truth.

We must always remember that zeal is about zealously abstaining from wrong while at the same time zealously doing what a Christian should. Teaching others. Helping the helpless. A Christian is to be busy. Zeal is not and cannot be contained in “thou shalt not”.

## **Having Zeal by Squashing Misunderstanding**

Zeal is frowned upon in churches that misunderstand it. We should not look suspiciously at it. We should encourage it. Fan the flame. If it lacks understanding, then add the understanding, but do not douse the zeal!



# Hindrances: Naysayers

## IN PREPARATION

Read Amos 7.

What do you think the plumb-line represents in vv. 7-9?

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What was Amos' background before he began to prophesy?

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What did Amaziah speak to the king to try and stop Amos? Was it true?

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What was to be Amaziah's punishment for hindering Amos?

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## Naysayers are Nothing New

Naysayers are people who scoff at God's message and those who proclaim it in order to stop spiritual progress. Every generation deals with its own set of naysayers and this has been so since the beginning. They have the potential to put out our zeal if we allow it.

Amos prophesied to the people of Israel during the mid-700s b.c. concerning the corruption of the upper class and rulers. His boldness attracts attention and shocks the reader but there were many opposed to him in his day. One particular opponent mentioned is Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. After hearing Amos' message he says, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and royal residence." (Amos 7:12-13) Amos was not deterred by this naysayer.

***Do you think Amaziah troubled Amos? Summarize Amos' defense of his work in the rest of Amos 7.***

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Jesus Himself had many naysayers against Him as well. His message challenged the people, rebuked the rulers, and uplifted the dejected. Many times He was warned to stop preaching. John describes it simply, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (John 1:11) Yet, Jesus pressed forward in His work.

The apostle Paul was sent forth by Jesus in the power of the Spirit to bring souls to the truth, and even he faced naysayers.



# Hindrances: Naysayers

Some said of Paul, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.” (2 Corinthians 10:10) Another said of him, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.” (Acts 26:24) Paul continued to zealously preach the word through all of this and saved countless souls!

## **Naysayers...**

Scoffers can extinguish our zeal and shut down our spiritual momentum if we allow them to accomplish their mission. They are attempting to affect our mindset and they often succeed.

### **... Can Make Us Feel Unheard**

These people attempt to make our efforts seem meaningless and as though no one is listening. Their loud voices of mocking are all we can hear in our moments of weakness. But, it's not true! Our zeal affects others as does our ability to tune out the naysayers. Consider what God said to Ezekiel: “I am sending you to them who are a stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God! As for them, whether they listen or not-- for they are a rebellious house-- they will know that a prophet has been among them.’” (Ezekiel 2:4-5) God realizes what we all need to realize in order to keep our zeal; what we do makes a difference whether the naysayers admit it or not. Just as Israel would eventually know that a prophet had been among them, so will others eventually realize zeal for the truth we have in Christ.

### **... Can Make Us Feel Foolish**

Paul's naysayers were sometimes found among the Christians he had taught. For instance, in Corinth some had come to believe themselves to be wiser than the apostles! Paul took their attempts to make him feel foolish and used it sarcastically to teach them saying, “We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.” (2 Corinthians 4:10) Their attempts at shaming him had not succeeded and instead he goes on to show the folly of their reasoning! Oh that we would overcome our naysayers with such confidence!

# Hindrances: Naysayers

## ***... Will Change Their Minds***

Naysayers may be convinced at the moment of their position but they will eventually change their minds. Some will repent in this life after the truth and our zealous example has had its effect, others when they face the Lord in judgment. One day, “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” (Philippians 2:10-11) Whether they are weak Christians trying to discourage us or those of the world, everyone who attempts to put out the zeal for God around them will regret that decision.

***What should understanding the fate of our naysayers motivate us to do? (See 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 for one thought.)***

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## **Responding to Naysayers**

We must prepare to overcome those who do not want to see us live zealous lives for the Lord. Most people are content with their shallow and meaningless faith and want us to remain as they are. Here are a few ideas about handling them.

### ***Shake Them Off***

When Jesus sent His disciples out on the limited commission He instructed them, “Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.” (Mark 6:11) This lesson is applicable still in preaching the gospel but also when it comes to any type of naysayers in our life. We must not allow their influence to take hold of us. We must put distance between us and shake their negativity to the ground while we move on to greener pastures. We are under no obligation to waste our time with the toxic faith of others. There are too many people to encourage and be encouraged by for to us keep ties with those who refuse to keep a zeal for Christ.

# Hindrances: Naysayers

## ***Recharge Among Zealous Brethren***

“Show me your friends and I will show you your future.” (John Kuebler) These wise words show us where to go when we need a spiritual boost. Our closest friends should not necessarily be those that we grew up with or have family ties to. We should choose friends that share a passion for good works of the Lord. These people will keep us strong and we will do the same for them. Our church should be a gathering place for the zealous. Our assembled worship should be an overflow of the individual worship we have been giving to God throughout the week!

***What are some ways that our assembly is to recharge our zeal? (Hebrews 10:23-25)***

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## ***Remain Loving Towards Them***

Although “zeal-killers” need to be kept from having influence over our lives, we still need to remember that we ourselves may once have been naysayers as well! We should remain loving towards them just as with all of our spiritual enemies. Romans 12:20-21 exhorts, “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Let us pray for them and show them the blessed spiritual walk of one who is zealous for good works!

# Hindrances: Environment

## IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 9:17-29.

What happened to Saul in Acts 9 and what did he become known as?




After his conversion who was he firstly persecuted by? Why?




What did the saints do to protect him from the plot of the Jews in Damascus?




What happened when he first arrived at Jerusalem?




## The Challenge of a New Environment

Becoming a Christian is a wonderful thing! Our sins are forgiven. We receive a new life. We are saved. We have communion with God, the right to approach His throne with confidence. (Hebrews 4:16) We have a new family of believers who care for us and want to help us. Truly many blessings indeed.

Of course, reality sets in soon after conversion. Regardless of what the denominational world would have you to believe, all our problems are not gone when we come up out of the water. We have the same problems as before. The same bank account. The same friends. The same job. The thing that is changed is that we have Christ Jesus to help us cope with life and the changes that must occur.

What does Paul say at I Corinthians 10:13?

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There is no doubt that conquering our troubles is within our grasp. By the strength that comes from Christ we can accomplish what He has commanded. However, we do not want to downplay the struggle that is there. The apostle Paul found that after his conversion he still had the mess of his previous life to deal with. The Jews wanted to kill him because he changed sides. The Christians were afraid of him. His previous brethren wanted him dead and his current brethren were afraid that he was trying to make them dead. Indeed it was a difficult time. The apostle Paul had left his life and friends behind and now had to rely on this new life and the new friends that came to him from the Lord. A challenge to say the least!



# Hindrances: Environment

The same thing can be said of the Christian today. While it may be to a lesser extent of what Paul encountered, it is still an extremely hard thing to maintain zeal while encountering these trials. One would think that Paul may have given up because of the initial obstacles and the effort required to overcome, but instead he flourished. No doubt we can flourish in the face of post-conversion obstacles also.

Make no mistake, environment can be a zeal killer. When we become Christians it is easy to have our excitement snuffed out as Satan throws our previous life back into our face. Yet if we can identify from the start that environment can destroy my zeal, then I can certainly avoid this attack of Satan and maintain my zeal.

## **Environmental Zeal-Killer One: Bad Company**

Paul told the Corinthian brethren the following at I Corinthians 15:33:

*“Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”*

The apostle wants these brethren to realize that associating themselves with evil associates will lead to evil. So many have the idea today that they cannot be effected by evil. “I am strong enough to stand against that!” Yet this is rarely the case. If we associate ourselves with bad company long enough, the words of the apostle will come true basically without fail.

When I become a Christian I must realize that re-immersing myself in the same friendships I previously had can likely destroy my zeal. It may be that I had some good friends, but all friendships need to be re-evaluated in light of my new found knowledge and commitment to Jesus. It is even possible, and often observed, for established Christians who reacquaint themselves with friends that they have had to leave behind and have not changed to be pulled back into the sin of the past. We must not let bad company kill our zeal. Paul warns of the danger even from fallen saints.

What does Paul warn of at Galatians 6:1?

# Hindrances: Environment

## Environmental Zeal-Killer Two: Bad Pursuits

There are many things that we tend to be involved in before becoming saints that should not be done as a Christian. This can come in the form of watching wicked movies, playing wicked games, and going wicked places. Becoming a Christian means that I must re-evaluate the pursuits in which I involve myself and make change as necessary. If I just go back to doing the same old things, then I will lose my zeal. I will find that I am more committed to things I should have left than I am to Christ. Suddenly the commitment I made to the Lord does not seem all that important.

What does Paul tell the Philippians we should do at Philippians 4:8?

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I need to avoid those things I pursued in the past and focus myself on things that are honorable. If I will just make these things my priority, then I will maintain my zeal for Christ. I will be motivated to do the things upon which I focus!

## Environmental Zeal-Killer Three: Bad Jobs

Paul the following at II Thessalonians 3:10:

*“For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”*

Notice that Paul mentions it not as new command, but as something that he and his companions apparently told new converts continually. Undoubtedly we have the responsibility to work and provide for our own as saints. No one disputes this. However, sometimes the way that we did this prior to becoming a saint was not a good thing. It may be that we were doing something that is just not compatible with being a Christian. If I made my living serving alcohol and the like, I will have to find a new line of work.

Often this is not the case. The problem more often than not is that I was making my living doing something that was fine, but amongst people that were dragging me down. The

# Hindrances: Environment

problem was a work-environment that was unsafe for my soul. There is nothing that is more important than getting to Heaven. Even if it mean finding a new job, that may well be something that I have to do to ensure that my zeal does not wane. It is so easy to be on fire and busy for the Lord initially, but then to find that zeal destroyed as day in and day out is spent amongst wicked people at a job.

This can even be a problem for established saints. Often Christians will do well in their jobs because they are living as Christ has said. As a result they get promoted and the money and standing of the new position can get between them and serving Christ. Their zeal is gone and sometimes they are gone too!

## **Environmental Zeal-Killer Four: Tainted Activities**

Sometimes it is not a wicked pursuit or wicked friend that destroys my zeal for Christ. Sometimes it can be something that is not wicked in-and-of itself. Before becoming a Christian I may go certain places and do certain things and listen to certain music. The places I go and the things I do and the music I listen to may not be bad at all. However, my brain may associate those things with my former life. Then when I partake in those things after becoming a Christian it can drag me away from my zeal for Christ and back into a longing for the previous life.

Music, for instance, can be a very powerful thing. Just hearing a song on the radio can transport us back to when we first heard the song instantly. Suddenly we feel like we did at that time and remember vividly the things that surrounded us. This can be good, but in some cases it can be bad. We may be transported back to a place and feeling that are not good for us as zealous Christians. The activity is not a bad one, it is just tainted by who we were when we were involved in such things.

If I am in danger of losing my zeal for Christ, then I must guard even against things that may be fine for someone else, but are not good for me.

## **An Environment that Helps**

We want to be zealous for Christ. May we always surround ourselves in an environment that encourages us to maintain that zeal. Whatever the environment, it is not worth putting our Lord on a back-burner.



# Hindrances: Self

## IN PREPARATION

Read Numbers 13.

What was the mission assigned to the spies?

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What did most of the spies claim that was beyond the scope of their mission?

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Who were the two spies that disagreed with the rest? What did they disagree about?

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What people were particularly frightening in the land? Why?

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We are sometimes our own worst enemies. Problems within us can stamp out the zeal we are attempting to foster in our hearts unless we identify those problems and take action to repair them.

Imagine yourself as one of the spies being sent to bring a report of the land back to the Israelites in Numbers 13. God had promised this land to your people and He had delivered you from the Egyptians. Now you are granted a privilege to be one of the first to see what is to be Israel's inheritance and new home. We would all love such an opportunity! They found beautiful country and an abundance of food. But the spies allowed their own internal problems to remove the gladness of heart. All but two of them said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." (Numbers 13:31) The people of the land were not actually the problem; the problem was in the heart of the spies!

Who is it that eventually led the people into the promised land? Who went forth to defeat the Nephilim?

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We cannot allow our own issues to bring our zeal to an end. Let us consider some of the internal problems that cause us to become our own hindrances to zealous living.

### Lack of Repentance

It is impossible for us to be zealous for good works when we know that we have sin in our lives we are not remedying. The





# Hindrances: Self

pattern often goes like this; We know are struggling-- we are tempted-- we give in to temptation-- we feel ashamed-- we pray-- the process begins again. This type of living is a sad existence for a Christian. It is time that we ended this cycle. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." (Romans 6:12-13) But what can we do to break this cycle?

First of all, seek out a Christian you trust to be accountable to and have them pray for you and encourage you. (James 5:16-17) It is important that we stop trying to fight these battles alone! Secondly, actively take steps to discourage temptation from arising. Distance yourself from the things that have caused your stumbling. Change your situation so that you can overcome yourself! Whatever you do, don't give up! You can overcome yourself!

## **Criticizing as a Habit**

Another self-hindrane to zeal is having a habit of criticizing others. We can allow ourselves to drift into an attitude that is never pleased with the contributions or work of others. This may or may not destroy their zeal, but it will certainly destroy our own. This malcontent grumbling is a cancer to our zealous spiritual life that must be cut out.

Overcome this habit through actively seeking to see the benefits of others. The apostle says of the church in Rome, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to each of us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:6-8) Everyone has their place and a work to do even if it is different than ours. We must appreciate them for it! Focus more on finding your place than how another is handling their own.

## **A Skeptic of Church Success**

Sometimes we simply become skeptics of the church's ability to succeed and allow this



# Hindrances: Self

negativity to destroy the zeal we could have had to help build it up. Satan understands the potential of God's church and seeks to stamp it out; some Christians don't see the church's potential and beat Satan to his work.

The local church is designed by God. (Ephesians 4:11-12) The gospel is carried forth as issued by God. (Romans 1:16) The spiritual growth that comes through that message is given by God. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7) As long as we are doing as we are commanded in faith then 'the sky is the limit' for God's church. The church at Ephesus trusted in God's plan so that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10) Zealous Christians change the world! Instead of wasting time and energy being skeptical about, get onboard with it and help this church to become even more exceptional than it is-- for His glory!

## **Being Distracted by Worldly Things**

Distractions remove our attention from where it should be. Distractions from our spiritual priorities will cost us our zeal. These distractions take many different forms including hobbies, sports, etc. No matter the form, we have heard the call from Jesus, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)

Nothing is as important as our spiritual walk with God. This is a relationship we must foster and tend to lest it weaken and we lose sight of our Maker's will. Paul knows that the threat of distraction is present for Timothy when he says, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (2 Timothy 2:4) Focus is everything for us. Are you truly putting Jesus and His ways first or are distractions robbing you of your zeal? Choose today to exalt Jesus as the King of your life!

## **Deprecating Our Value and Abilities**

Another self-hindrance to a zealous life is thinking that we are worthless to God's service and comparing ourselves to others who are 'better.' Zeal and the way God views our



# Hindrances: Self

service to Him are non-comparative. He does not determine the validity of my offering based upon the offering of another. God judges me based on His word and my ability. And we do not all have the same abilities.

The church at Corinth was valuing spiritual gifts in such a way that discredited prophecy and exalted speaking in tongues. Not only were they wrong in their estimation (prophecy, Paul says, was much more important than speaking in tongues) but they were wrong to discredit the need for any of the spiritual gifts. He says, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" (1 Corinthians 12:18-21) Each miraculous ability was important and was needed for the complete work to be done.

***Why did the church at Corinth value tongue speaking so much? Do you think some non-miraculous abilities are often exalted for the same reasons?***

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The lesson is true also with non-miraculous abilities; they are all necessary and beneficial to the body. When a foot is needed a hand will not suffice. Our abilities are important and we should focus on doing what we can do in the best way we can do it.

Do not allow these internal conflicts to derail your zeal for good works. Recognize them and repair them to see your spiritual walk prosper as never before!



# Hindrances: Burnout

## IN PREPARATION

Read Galatians 6:1-10.

What should a Christian do for someone who has fallen away?

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What should each Christian examine according to verse 4?

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What else should the Christian do with regard to work according to verse 9?

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Who should we do good for according to verse 10?

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## Do Not Grow Weary

Paul told the Galatians to stay zealous. They were not to “grow weary” of doing good. In one word, “burnout”. Paul is commanded them to guard against burnout.

This is a common problem amongst humanity. We have the ability to do the same thing over and over. However, one danger is to get tired of doing it. While many people today will have a number of jobs, even careers, in their life, that has not always been the case and is not always the case today. Some people stay at a company doing largely the same thing for decades. One common refrain I hear from people who are nearing retirement from such jobs is that they are simply tired of going in and facing the same thing day after day. It is not so much that they hate the work, but that they are simply tired of doing it.

This can be true in many areas of life. Some variety is needed in our diets. Otherwise even our favorite foods can begin to taste detestable to us as we are burned out from eating it. It can even be true spiritually speaking. Sometimes people find themselves spiritually burned out. They have grown weary of doing good as Paul would have worded it. While it may not matter that I no longer like my favorite food, becoming spiritually burned out can be disastrous! Consider Paul’s words to the Thessalonians.

How had the Thessalonians been doing per II Thessalonians 3:4?

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What was Paul’s warning at II Thessalonians 3:13?

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# Hindrances: Burnout

## How does spiritual burnout happen?

There are many ways that we can become spiritually burned out. Let's examine four.

Mindless Observance - The word "observance" is one that has permeated denominationalism. They have Christmas observances. Easter observances. Sunday observances. On and on it goes. It seems that religiously minded people do little more than observe other people working any more. We can certainly fall into the same trap!

Christ has commanded me to do many things. List the command of our Lord found in each corresponding passage.

James 1:27 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 10:25 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 16:15-16 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Indeed we have much to do. However, if we are solely focused on doing and not the motivation behind it, then we can find ourselves burned out on what we are to be doing.

Failure to Restore - Christ is our source of strength. As previously pointed out, the apostle Paul encountered and endured much struggle in this life for the cause of Christ. He often went without, but he was happy to do it. What gave him this ability?

What does Paul credit for his strength at Philippians 4:13?

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What was this strength specifically per the previous verses?

\_\_\_\_\_

# Hindrances: Burnout

It is clear from examining Paul's life that he always went back to Christ the source of strength. Paul was prayerful and studious. Probably one of the more beautiful passages regarding Paul is the shipwreck of Acts 27. Here he is aboard this ship that was about to be lost and he encourages the people on board to eat. How does he calm them in the midst of the storm? He prays before them blessing the food!

So often when we become burned out it is because we have not been restoring ourselves from the fount of Christ. We have not been praying as we should nor studying as we should. Burnout happens when we are spiritually dry.

Trapped by Tradition - Announcements, one song, prayer, one song, Lord's Supper, two songs, lesson, invitation song, announcements, and closing prayer. We all recognize this as the traditional assembly that is performed by churches throughout the world. Is there anything wrong with this? No. Not necessarily. However, being trapped by tradition can lead to spiritual burnout if we are not careful.

While tradition can be good, it can also be stifling. We certainly must hold to the apostolic traditions without fail (II Thessalonians 3:6), but we must never elevate human tradition to a degree where it stifles zeal.

It is not just our assemblies that can be affected by rigorous tradition keeping. It can happen in many areas. Maybe I go through my day to day life and do not deviate spiritually from the traditions that I have established. Maybe it is prayer that has become stale. Maybe it is study methods that have become too familiar. The reality is that traditions can affect us as a group or as an individual and can lead to the loss of zeal, burnout.

Disconnected from Brethren - It is easy to say that we are members of the church. It is easy to say that we are working with a local church when we attend on Sundays and Wednesdays. However, in reality there is much more to this than just saying it. God did not design us to be island Christians. We are supposed to stay connected with our brethren throughout the week in addition to the first day of the week. We may see this association as inferior to the worship of the first day, but it is equally important.

# Hindrances: Burnout

What were the brethren doing in worship at Acts 2:46? What about throughout the week?

Obviously the Spirit sees this association as important as it is mentioned right along with the worship that was taking place. When I am disconnected from brethren I can begin to feel like I am the only one doing anything. This is rarely the case and some association will correct this misperception. However, if we allow it to go on too long, we will find ourself burned out, with no zeal for the work we should be doing!

## **What can we do to remedy burnout or prevent it?**

Meditate - One of the greatest things we can do to prevent burnout or deal with it is to meditate. Just find some time daily to thin about the Lord and the blessings he has bestowed and to read from His word. He is the source of our strength, we must trust in Him. We are in good company in doing so. (Genesis 24:63)

Concentrate - We need to continually focus not just on the what, but the why. Why are we serving Christ? Why has He given us the commands that He has? Examining the motivation behind our actions in Christ is as important as the actions themselves. Fight burnout by remembering why we are doing this in the first place.

Associate - We must work with our brethren. Not just to see that the assembly goes as it should on Sunday and Wednesday, but throughout the week. Christ has given us the local church as a continual resource. When I see others working and struggling with me, it goes along way toward helping me to continue in zeal and avoid discouragement and burnout.

Innovate - We strive to worship God in a way that is well-pleasing to Him and in which we can be engaged. We should offer our best in the assembly for the Lord and that will help us to continue. Not only should we seek to do things in an engaging way in the assembly, we should also innovate privately. Read the psalms to discover new ways to pray. Speak with brethren or read books to develop new and improved study methods and habits. We should strive for excellence in all we do. It is pleasing to God and good for avoiding burnout also.

## **Staying On Fire**

We must carefully avoid our fire burning out. It is much easier to avoid than trying to reignite. Focusing ourselves back on Christ's commands can be done and must be a priority!

# 52 Days: Nehemiah's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read Nehemiah 1.

What was Nehemiah's position before he returned to Jerusalem?




What news came to Nehemiah about his people?




What was Nehemiah's response to the message?




What are the main points of Nehemiah's prayer in this chapter?




Nehemiah served God zealously and impacted the lives of all in Jerusalem during his day. More than that, he continues to serve as an example for all who seek to be zealous for good works.

## Identifying a Problem

Nehemiah served in the court of king Artaxerxes when news first came to him of Jerusalem's plight. He was told, "The remnant there... are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:3) He remembers his reaction; "I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." (1:4) Nehemiah was not just moved to tears; he was also moved to act. He put together a plan to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city walls. He first gained permission from the king (2:5) and set a timeline for his work (2:6). He then gathered materials for the mission and set out to the city. (2:8) Nehemiah's zeal did not simply give him an emotional high. His zeal pushed him to plan with wisdom and take action. This is the type of zeal that accomplishes its purpose!

***Many were saddened by Jerusalem's state. What made Nehemiah's sadness unique?***

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## Zeal that Moves Others

Nehemiah could not build the city walls himself (although he probably would have tried if no one went along with him!) He realized that he needed others to be involved and he planned



# 52 Days: Nehemiah's Zeal

accordingly. When he entered Jerusalem he did not tell the people his plans at the first. Instead, he explained the situation to them and reframed it so that they could see it through his eyes. Zeal is infectious and Nehemiah utilized that fact. He says, "I went out at night by the Valley Gate... inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire... Then I said to them, 'You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire.'" (2:11, 17a) Perhaps the people did not truly see the situation as it was. They had lived in it so that it was normal to them. This outsider's zeal was about to change their perspective completely!

Nehemiah wasn't just complaining, he was also prepared to offer a solution. "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." (2:17b) He recounted his planning and the approval that was already given and the people said, "Let us arise and build." (2:18) One man's zeal had just moved a nation to action!

## Leading by Action

Now that the people had agreed to the need and mission, Nehemiah did not sit back and watch. He was involved in every stage of the effort and dirtied his clothes as well. This zealous worker knew to lead by example. He worked alongside the people and participated in the defensive efforts when enemies approached. He says, "So neither, I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each too his weapon even to the water." (4:23) Who among us would not be inspired by such zealous leadership? And so the people worked alongside Nehemiah, and he saw the project through to the finish.

***Jesus also led by zealous example. What are some times that Jesus showed his disciples what to do by the doing of it?***

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# 52 Days: Nehemiah's Zeal

## Overcoming Hindrances

Several hindrances arose that could have stopped the progress of construction in Jerusalem. Each of these was met head on with the fervent zeal of Nehemiah.

Naysayers plagued Nehemiah's efforts from the beginning. One of the worst was Sanballat the Horonite. He did not want the Jewish construction to be complete so he attempted to destroy their zeal and stop them through intimidation. "He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?'" (4:2) Their enemies even attempted to deceive the king into believing that a coupe was being attempted by the Jews! Nehemiah saw through these naysayers; "For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, 'They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.' But now, O God, strengthen my hands.'" (6:9)

There were also struggles among the people. Burnout was taking hold of many due to the pressures of daily life and distractions of employment were tempting them to stop progress on the walls. "For there were those who said, 'We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.' There were others who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.'" (5:2-3) Nehemiah says, "I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words." (5:6) Instead of giving up at his efforts, he spoke to the wealthy and persuaded them to stop exacting usury from the people and to support the efforts to rebuild the walls. They saw Nehemiah's zeal, were impacted by his passion and logic, and agreed to comply with his requests. Instead of having his zeal extinguished, Nehemiah used his zeal to help overcome hindrances!

## Giving God the Glory

Nehemiah understood that, despite his great effort, God was to receive the praise and honor for the work that was accomplished. Before the work even began he announced, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and

# 52 Days: Nehemiah's Zeal

build..." (2:20) The walls were completed in 52 days and Nehemiah's mindset never changed. After completion, the people assembled together to praise God, pray, and recommit themselves to Him. The zeal of one man had rebuilt the nation's mindset.

***Did Nehemiah see God's approval as a call to work or a call to standby? What lessons can we learn from this?***

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## **Imitating Nehemiah**

There are many lessons we can learn from Nehemiah's zeal. We need to have the concern and wisdom to identify needs as they arise. We must be involved with others to have the greatest impact. Sometimes, you are the leader that is needed to accomplish a task for the Lord even though you may think another could do it better. We have push through the hindrances to zeal that arise in our paths and, at the end of it all, praise God for His blessings. If you want to see results like Nehemiah you must have his zeal for good works!

# Maintaining Zeal: Being With Brethren

## IN PREPARATION

Read II Timothy 4.

According to the first 8 verses, what was about to happen to Paul?




What does he request of Timothy at verse 9 and why?




Who else was Timothy supposed to bring that was not formerly useful but now was?




What does Paul request at verse 21? Why the repetition?




## The Burnout Hindrance

We previously studied hindrances to having or maintaining zeal. One of those hindrances was burnout. As Paul said, growing weary in doing good. One of the causes of burnout is being disconnected from brethren. In this lesson we will examine maintaining zeal by being with the brethren in more detail.

## Lessons from Paul

One thing that Paul shows us very clearly is the need for association with our brethren. While there is no doubt that the apostle enjoyed worshipping with the saints (Acts 20:7), he also derived great encouragement in his day to day associations as well. Paul endured much. II Timothy is what is known as a prison epistle. Not only is Paul in prison, he is soon to die. Luke was with him and a great help to him, but he also longed for the companionship of Timothy and requests his coming on two occasions in that chapter. Paul needed the good brethren.

It is truly an amazing change. We looked at Paul's conversion account in Acts 9 previously. After he was first converted, he could not even get the brethren to associate with him without the intervention of Barnabas. Now at this point in his life the apostle can hardly get along without the association!

We want to always be zealous for good works. We want to maintain that initial zeal for our whole lives that we may be well-pleasing to the Lord. A large part of that is the fellowship we have in Christ and our day to day association one with another.

## Why have Christian friends?

Many of us have great friends who are not Christians. We enjoy



# Maintaining Zeal: Being With Brethren

their company immensely. While this is true, it is also true that there are some discussions that we must be very careful about. No doubt we have talked with our friends about their soul's condition in the past and no change has been made. Thus we must always gauge what we say. Are we setting a good example? Is our speech seasoned with salt? Have I crossed a line with them spiritually?

This turmoil is largely gone from our heads when we are associating with brethren. We are able to speak openly and frankly about our faith and our struggles. We share similar problems. We encourage one another to be zealous for good works. There is just something about friendship with fellow saints that helps me maintain my zeal for the works that the Lord has given. The scripture acknowledge this.

What are we to consider according to Hebrews 10:24?

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Indeed it is not only a matter of encouraging one another in our association, but it is actually commanded. We are supposed to work on helping one another to be zealous for good. We will certainly be more likely to maintain zeal if we associate with our brethren throughout the week who are as interested in our zeal as we are!

## **Why should we be social with fellow Christians?**

Acts 2:46 explains that the brethren were taking their meals with one another in gladness. It is certainly one of the more beautiful pictures in our Bible. Saints who loved one another not just in the assembly but throughout their lives also. It is evident in this passage that there was great benefit to the brethren in enjoying social activities together outside of the assembly.

For one thing we do not have to worry about where we are going and what we are doing. When we are spending time socially with brethren we can basically without fail trust that we will be doing something that is compatible with the life of a Christian.

# Maintaining Zeal: Being With Brethren

Secondly we can trust that the language and behavior of those that I am with will be good for me. I should not have to worry about having to tell a fellow saint that their language and behavior is inappropriate. I can also trust that we will not diminish our influence with others when we are together.

Lastly, it is a zeal booster. When I spend time with saints relaxing it encourages me to be zealous for the Lord's work. I see that others are with me. They are busy working with me and also are able to enjoy being in this life with me enjoying my company. Indeed being disconnected from my brethren can harm zeal, but spending time with them can build it.

## **What about my kids?**

No doubt we are to be concerned with our children. Numerous passages explain the responsibility we have toward them.

What command is given to fathers at Ephesians 6:4?

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What does Deuteronomy 6 tell us about raising our children?

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How much influence do you think other children have on our children?

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Our kids mostly spend their days with non-Christian friends. They are at school for 7 hours a day. They have after-school activities with other kids who are not Christians. It is certainly a good thing for our children to have opportunities to let their light shine so that they may learn how.

However, there is another side to the coin. We must also be zealous to protect and

# Maintaining Zeal: Being With Brethren

maintain the zeal of our children. We want them to be on fire as they are trained to serve the Lord zealously. Part of this training involves them associating with other brethren and their children. Just as the zeal of an adult can be benefited by association with other brethren, so can the zeal of our children.

Our children need to learn that they are not alone. Many of our children go to schools where they may well be the only Christian there. Then they go on to college and it may well be the case that they are the only Christian there. This can be very difficult as we grow. We feel isolated. We feel that we are the only ones doing what is right. Even the strongest young person can lose their zeal and just be going through the motions, a short step from quitting altogether. It is thus important that we provide opportunities for our kids to be around peers that have the same precious faith and zeal for Christ.

## Being an Encouragement

Paul uses the word encouragement quite a bit. What does he say about encouragement in the following passages.

Colossians 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 2:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

We see from these passages that we are to be an encouragement to others. All of this talk about the benefit of being with our brethren is dependent on the fact that we as saints are acting as we should with one another. We are not in the business of tearing down, rather we are to build one another up. We want our children to be an encouragement to fellow saints and peers so they must be trained to do so. We must all be careful that we are trying to help stoke the fires of zeal rather than pouring water on our fellow saint's fire!

## A Great Blessing

It is very difficult to do things all by ourselves. Thankfully the Lord has bestowed the blessing of our fellow saints and local churches. May we never take those associations for granted and may we use them to their utmost!

# Maintaining Zeal: Being Active

## IN PREPARATION

Read Colossians 3.

What should a person who has been raised up with Christ be doing?

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What is the perfect bond of unity? Why?

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What act of worship is mentioned by Paul in this chapter? How should it be done?

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What does it mean to “do all in the name of the Lord”?

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We often think of zeal as something that motivates us to ‘get active.’ While that can certainly be true, it is also often true that we have to ‘get active’ in order to maintain our zeal. We should avail ourselves of the opportunities to be active both inside and outside of the church in order to keep our zeal flame well-stoked.

## Zeal in the Church

Being active in the church will allow you to encourage your brothers and sisters, but it will also help to keep you spiritually focused. Often people think that the only way they can be truly “active” in the church is to stand at the front and direct the assembly, but that’s not true! We need to be active in every part of worship!

When the church is being led in prayer are you actively engaging your mind with the thoughts being expressed? It can be helpful to repeat the words being said in your own mind. In other words, make the prayer your own. The same is certainly true of the other things being done. Do you sing? When you sing, do you try to focus on the words? (Colossians 3:16) Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is another area where focus is needed. Visualize the death of Christ and pray in gratitude for it. In all of worship we should be seeking to make it personally impacting or else we are just ‘there.’

***How will my zeal in worship affect others? Give one passage that supports your answer.***

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# Maintaining Zeal: Being Active

Other ways you can be active in the church include things like teaching and leading in the assembly. Those are the things that people typically think of when they consider becoming more active in the church. Teachers and leaders in these ways need to be committed and prepared to give an account to God. (James 3:1)

But have you considered the things “behind the scenes” that you can do to be more active? Mowing the grass may not seem like a glamorous job, but the church needs it for a good impression to be made on visitors to the church! There are also things in the workroom that must be taken care of for the church to function properly. These responsibilities help us to stay motivated and invested in the church. It helps us to keep our zeal when we know that others are trusting us to care for things and it keeps us from being able to slowly withdraw ourselves from the church. The temptation to ‘skip church’ is undermined when we know that people are counting on us to do a job.

All of the things we do in the church should be done out of love. We are admonished, “Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.” (Colossians 3:14-15) The church is “one body” and what we do for the church is in gratitude to God and to show love for our brethren. Whether it be singing loudly, teaching a class, or mowing the grass, these things are expressions of kindness that help keep us zealous for the Lord. We should seek to do these things and thank others are who doing them!

## **Zeal Outside the Church**

There are many things that are outside of the local church that are also very beneficial to maintaining zealous living.

***Using 1 Timothy 5:16, explain the difference between what the church does and what an individual in the church can do.***

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# Maintaining Zeal: Being Active

Brothers and sisters in this congregation often open their homes for people to come and study the Bible and share a meal. These events are great opportunities to be active and keep your zeal alive! Taking a dish, leading a study, and even simply attending the event is taking an active part in the lives of the brethren outside of services. Just as the early Christians did these things regularly (Acts 2:46) so do we!

***What were the brethren doing “day by day” in Acts 2:46? What affect did that have on the brethren and on the community?***

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There are also many opportunities to help the needy outside of the church. James says, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27) Being active to supply the needs of the suffering in the community is a great thing for keeping our zeal alive. At times, brethren cooperate together to provide a need that is too great for one person to tend to. Whether a storm has decimated a foreign population and they stand in need or a soup kitchen could use help serving the poor, actively pursuing opportunities to help those in need is a sign of pure and undefiled religion that benefits others and ourselves!

Evangelism is probably the most important area for outside activity. Not many people hear or obey the gospel during services any longer. We average about 10 baptisms outside of services for every one during services. Beyond this, virtually all of those that respond during services were already being contacted outside of services by Christians. The lesson is simple for all of us; if we are not spreading the gospel outside of services then we are not spreading the gospel. This reveals an excellent area for any Christian to be active in outside of the church.

A future lesson will be dedicated to building zeal in unbelievers where specific approaches to this effort will be discussed. It will suffice for now to say that there’s likely no other



# Maintaining Zeal: Being Active

activity that a Christian can do that will be more effective at maintaining their zeal than evangelism.

***Why do you think that seeing others obey the gospel is so effective at inspiring a Christian?***

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Do not allow laziness or distraction keep you from having an active faith both inside and outside of the church. Remember, Jesus died to “purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds,” and the things mentioned in this lesson are certainly good deeds that Jesus has prescribed for us! (Titus 2:14)

# Maintaining Zeal: Being With God

## IN PREPARATION

Read Genesis 3.

How close was the relationship of Adam and Eve with the Father?




What happened after they partook of the tree?




Read Genesis 18 and describe the relationship of Abraham with God.




How would you describe the patriarch relationship with God?




## Meditate

Previously we discussed how one hindrance to zeal is a lack of communion with God. When we are not meditating and communing with Him in the various ways He has prescribed our zeal can wane. Being with God as we are commanded and desire to be is crucial to being zealous for Him as we should. We may wonder what exactly it means to be with God, to commune with Him.

## The Importance of Communing with God

What is communion? We use this term in reference to the Lord's Supper all the time. There are certainly many shades to the meaning of the word in our modern culture, but at its most basic form it simply means "to share one's intimate thoughts or feelings with" someone. (New Oxford American Dictionary) Using this definition we can understand easily what it means to commune with God.

The zealous Christian is going to be a person that regularly is in contact with the Lord. Information is being exchanged with Him. Not through some supernatural means, but simply by speaking to Him in the various forms He has given and by Him speaking to us through His word.

An old adage says that "long distance relationships never work". We understand that it is hard to maintain the fire of a relationship in which the two people are apart more than they are together. More often than not such relationships are doomed to failure as the zeal for one another wears off. Sadly, many Christians live disconnected from God. They do not regularly commune with Him and then wonder why they have no zeal for Him or His work.



# Maintaining Zeal: Being With God

It is certainly the case that in the beginning Adam and Eve were able to directly commune with Jehovah. Tragically, due to their decision to disobey His command that direct communion was severed. Yet there was still a closer communion than we have between other Patriarchs such as Abraham or Moses with God. Then to fast forward to the time of the New Testament and consider the disciples and their communion with Immanuel, what a wonderful thing to consider. They walked with Him, talked with Him, and ate with Him.

What do you think it would have been like to directly commune with Jesus?

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What do you think that connection would have done for your zeal level?

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The reality today is that our connection with God is somewhat more indirect. We do not receive visions from Him. We do not receive direct prophecies. We do not hear His voice in our ear. Certainly we can see that it is exceedingly important that we commune with Him as He has described to maintain our zeal. Disconnected from God is a short step from falling away. Of course, it is fallacious to think that patriarchs and prophets were always in direct contact with the Lord. We just tend to have record of the times that God spoke with them. It was not a constant occurrence.

## **Methods of Communing with God to Maintain Zeal**

As we strive to stay on fire for the Lord, it is important to consider the ways that we are able to be with God, to commune with Him. He has actually given us a number of ways that we may do this. If we will take advantage of these we will be far more likely to stay excited and busy in His work.

Praying - One thing we see time and again in scripture is that the faithful, the ones that were on fire for the Lord, were prayerful. They spoke to God and spoke to Him often. The disciples even begged the Lord to teach them to pray.

# Maintaining Zeal: Being With God

How did Daniel pray according to Daniel 6:10? Why is this significant? What did he usually do?

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After reading Matthew 6:5-15 what do you note as some rules for prayer?

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Talking with God is important firstly because it keeps on our mind that God is there. Secondly it is important because He answers prayer! At Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4 we find that the prayers of the saints come right before the throne of God. If we ask for His help and wisdom, He will grant it. (Hebrews 4:16; James 1:5) It is easy to be zealous when we keep in mind that God is there and that He responds to our plight!

Fasting - Fasting is something that has fallen out of favor in recent times, especially in our culture. It is certainly true that we are not commanded to fast as Christians, but it is also true that the faithful in our New Testament fasted! (Acts 13:3; 14:23)

Fasting is important because it is a time to abstain from the physical and focus specially on the spiritual. This is why we see it taking place when such serious things as appointing leaders was taking place in our New Testament. The brethren wanted to be focused on the task at hand. Certainly we can see the benefit toward our zeal by incorporating this manner of communing with God. It is an action that tells God that we take His will and work seriously!

Meditating - Meditating is something that has also fallen out of favor in recent times. It would seem likely that this is due in part to the pagan concept of mediation being a time to shut off the brain through chants and achieve some higher state of being. Meditation is found in our Bible and it is not spoken of in such a way. It comes often in the form of taking some quiet time to think about the word of God and God Himself. Thinking often of God certainly helps zeal!

What did Isaac do at Genesis 24:52 and how did he do it?

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# Maintaining Zeal: Being With God

What was commanded at Joshua 1:8?

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What does Psalm 4:4 have to say about meditation?

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**Worship** - God has given us a number of ways that we may worship Him. We do it through singing, prayer, giving, and the Lord's Supper. All of these are designed that we may commune with God. We sing praise to Him, we speak to Him, we give towards His work, and we meditate on His great sacrifice through the Lord's Supper. It is all time to convey to Him the adoration and respect we have and feel and He deserves.

While we often refer to the command to assemble and worship at Hebrews 10:25, we need to understand that this assembling and worshipping is something that is for our good as well as adoring Him. It is opportunity to be with God along with our fellow saints. It is a marvelous way to stoke the fires of zeal. When we fail to worship regularly as commanded, our zeal wanes and we tend to fall away. We need to assemble and worship and we need to worship God throughout the week also. Any chance to commune with Him in worship should be taken. God is worthy of the exaltation and we need the encouragement it provides and the zeal it inspires.

**Study** - All the previous methods of communion have been centered on how we speak to God and convey our thoughts, feelings, and desires to Him. Study is how the Lord speaks to us. The time for direct words from God has passed. (1 Corinthians 12) Today we have the word to direct us. (Hebrews 1:1-3; Jude 3) It is impossible to maintain zeal if we are not receiving any direction from our Master. We must regularly go to the word in search of what the Lord wants us to do and be. A studious person is generally a zealous person!

## **A Close Connection**

God has made it possible and easily accessible for us to be close to Him. He has not withdrawn from us, but we can withdraw from Him. May we continually commune with Him that we may be zealous in His vineyard.



# A Youth for God: David's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read I Samuel 17.

What gift was promised to the man who killed Goliath?




Why didn't David wear the armor provided for him?




What weapon did David choose to take into the battle? Why did he choose this weapon?




What did he do with the head of Goliath? What about his weapons?




We often associate youth with zeal mostly due to the energy that young people have. While most of youthful zeal runs out with time and is flighty at best, David is an example of a godly zeal in youth that set a consistent course for his life. We will spend the lesson primarily focusing on the famous fight between David and Goliath to remember David's zeal for God's people, his zeal for God, and his zeal to act. Whether young or old, we can all learn from the youthful zeal that propelled David into life.

## Zeal for God's People

David often writes of his love for his brethren. Later in life he would pen the famous words about God's people, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1) David had this same love for the nation in his youth. He was anointed to be a future king for Israel by Samuel after being told, "God sees not what a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (I Samuel 16:7) After some time David was tending his father's sheep while his brothers were assembled with the army to fight the Philistines. David came to the camp to visit his brothers and heard a giant man named Goliath taunting the army. All were afraid to fight against him. David's heart is stirred and he asks, 'who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?' (I Samuel 17:26) It was unfathomable to him that the Lord's people should be so mocked. He tells Goliath before battling him, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted." (I Samuel 17:45) David rightly understood that God loved His people and would defend



# A Youth for God: David's Zeal

them, and his love for God meant that he, too, should love the people.

David was always very interested in his brethren and that helped him to maintain his zeal for many years. He serves as a great example for us in this regard. If we desire to maintain a zeal for good works we should be invested in the workings of God's people.

***Explain at least one other example in David's life that reveals his zeal for God's people.***

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## **Zeal for God**

The story of David and Goliath also shows David's zeal for God. The love he has for the people is directly related to the love he has for God. As discussed earlier, the Lord knew the heart of this young man long before this day of battle came. When David sees Goliath taunting God's army, he loves them and is angry on behalf of God. He has confidence that the God he loves will be with him against Goliath and remembers, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:37) Standing without a sword or armor against Goliath, David says, "the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands." (1 Samuel 17:47) The defeat of Goliath did not bring David's zeal to an end. Throughout his life David keeps a steady zeal for God that allows him to face enemies, trials, and heartache with confidence since he knows that his God walks with the righteous.

***Who doubted the purity of David's motivations for being at the battle? How did David overcome these naysayers?***

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# A Youth for God: David's Zeal

We need to have a similar zeal for God to keep us moving in the right way on the journey of life. David views his problems through a spiritual lens. Others saw a mighty and giant man that could not be overcome; David saw an affront to God that needed to be stopped.

If we hope to maintain our zeal we have to reframe our view of the world. Time spent with God before the day of trial is key. How many hours had David spent praying to God before this day of battle? How many times had he fasted before Him? His speech to the king assures us that David had meditated on all that God had done for Him. These things had built a zeal for God that is an example to us as well. Like David, we need to focus on having zeal for the Almighty that can help get us through the attacks of the evil one.

## **Zeal to Act**

There were probably others in the army that day who were zealous for God's people. Undoubtedly, there were others who were zealous for God. But David had something others lacked on top of those things; the zeal to act.

Goliath was a problem for king Saul, the army, and the entire nation. Among all of them, though, it was a youth who rose to meet the challenge. David takes responsibility when he tells Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:32) He did not have the attitude of most that 'someone else will do it.' His zeal was active and ready to work. Goliath had no respect for David as he was only a youth. "The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine also said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.'" (1 Samuel 17:43-44) With threats like these, who can blame others for hesitating to battle Goliath? But in David's mind it was his responsibility to do. His zeal pricked his heart to act against the enemy of God and His people.

What is it that separates great men from mediocrity? Intelligence can be found in the great and the lowly alike. Wealth can be gained and lost by anyone. Courage is present in the heart of many who sit on the sidelines. The single greatest trait that propels one to greatness before another is the willingness to act while others only watch.



# A Youth for God: David's Zeal

***Thinking Deeper: Did Saul know David before this event? How would you harmonize I Samuel 16:18-23 with I Samuel 17:55-58?***

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Are you 'great' in spiritual terms? Are you zealous to act whether in the church or outside the church? Are you seizing the opportunities to advance your spiritual standing to the encouragement of your family and all others? Do you see the spiritual needs around you and arise as the one to meet them? If not, let David be the encouragement for you. In order to maintain lifelong zeal we have to get active!

The youthful zeal seen in David's confrontation with Goliath reminds us to examine ourselves and to maintain zeal throughout our lives. The Lord has provided the avenues for us to be like David and to keep our zeal; let us take advantage of them!

# Helping Others: Aliens

## IN PREPARATION

Read Read Mark 16.

What is going on in the life of Jesus at this point in the book of Mark?




What does He identify as important at verses 15-16?




Why was Paul going to remain at Ephesus until Pentecost per I Corinthians 16:8-9?




What did Paul ask the saints to pray for at Colossians 4:3?




## A Lost and Dying World

Isaiah writes the following at Isaiah 50:9:

*“Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment And its inhabitants will die in like manner”*

Isaiah realized that he was living in a fallen world; a place where things did not last forever. All the elements around him were descending into chaos. Anything that man builds descends even faster into chaos. Even the bodies that we inhabit are wearing out and descending into chaos.

There was only one thing that was everlasting, the will of God. Those that subjected themselves to His will could partake of the everlasting benefits. It was the mission of a prophet to encourage people to align themselves with God rather than against Him. Those that align themselves against God would perish, but those that were with Him could have everlasting life.

The people of Isaiah’s day were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. We stand at the distinct advantage of knowing that He has come and understanding the blessings bestowed as a result of His coming. Thus we live in this world with an exciting message to share with anyone that will hear it! It is imperative that we remember that the church is the pillar and support of the truth. (I Timothy 3:15) It is up to us to uphold the truth in this world and share it with others. If we are derelict in our duties, then people will lose their souls.

## Helping Bring Aliens to Christ Increases My Zeal

There is nothing more exciting in this world than studying with someone and watching as their sins are washed away in the



# Helping Others: Aliens

waters of baptism. You can see the look of relief and joy on the face of a new convert as they come up out of the water. The Lord has washed them in His blood and they are now as clean of sin as they were at birth!

As a preacher, it is easy to feel that no good is being done. It is easy to get discouraged. However, when someone puts on Christ in baptism it is a fire starter like nothing else. The zeal is renewed and the desire to find another patient in need of the Great Physician is once again high.

It is certainly true that the prayer and study required of someone that is teaching someone else is good for zeal. Yet the act of doing the teaching tops it all. The time spent with the alien explaining God's will to them and seeing them respond is amazing. Certainly we can see that the early church saw the need to share the gospel and were excited to do so. Consider these passages.

What were the dispersed saints doing at Acts 8:4?

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What kind of impact were they having according to Acts 8:6, 12-13?

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These saints had undergone terrible things in Jerusalem, but their zeal was enormous. They were encouraged to proclaim the gospel and no doubt were amazed as they saw the great response in Samaria of those that were hungering and thirsting for the word. Indeed we will experience similar rejuvenation as we teach and witness conversion.

## **Complacency Is the Word of the World**

"I am good enough." "Surely the Lord will find a way to save me." "I am not the kind of person that goes to Hell." Satan has done a good job convincing the alien that they are good enough as they are and that the blood of Jesus was not essential for them. Sadly, this



# Helping Others: Aliens

could not be farther from the truth. Complacency will not get a person to heaven. A fire must be started. Zeal must be instilled in the alien if they are to come to God. A sense of urgency. A sense that something must change.

What do we learn about the jailor and his family's conversion at Acts 16:32-33?

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Indeed in all the conversions in Acts we see that a sense of urgency was conveyed and understood. The alien realized that he was missing something that was needed desperately and he must receive it immediately. When we are working to help an alien, we must remember that instilling zeal is imperative.

## **Zeal is Contagious**

We have all taken classes where we had an exciting teacher. It may not have been that the person was particularly exciting, but more likely it is because the teacher was excited about what they were teaching. It certainly makes learning much easier when we have someone teaching us that is on fire about what they are teaching.

We have all also taken classes where we had a boring teacher. The teacher was not particularly interesting as a person, but more so they were not that interested in what they were teaching. At least, if they were interested they did not convey it well. It makes learning difficult. It can make simply staying awake difficult.

Which of the two would you prefer to teach you? What have your experiences been?

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How do you think the teacher impacted your understanding and zeal of and for the topic?

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# Helping Others: Aliens

Now, take that thought and apply it spiritually. How do you think your zeal for the topic and teaching it will impact the hearer? Are you likely to instill zeal and urgency in the student if you appear indifferent toward it? We need to be zealous for helping others to the truth so that we can help them to see the importance and have the zeal.

## **Solid Teaching Is Key**

The most important thing when we are helping aliens to the truth is that we have a good understanding of the truth and are able to communicate it in an effective way. This is going to require that we are zealous for study. We will not be effective if we do not truly grasp what we are teaching.

Another thing that we must have zeal for is learning how to teach. We may think that we will just do whatever comes natural, but in reality we will generally be hit with questions we cannot answer. The lesson will wander from what we intended because we have not considered how to keep the study on topic. The lesson can even wander into questions that are dangerous to the study. They may be topics that are important, but not in this moment. At this moment the important thing is that they repent of their sin and are washed in the blood of Jesus.

Helping aliens to the truth is such an important part of being a Christian. We are the mouth by which the words of life come in this day and age. When we have opportunity to teach, we do not want to waste it. Having the proper zeal for study and learning to teach will see to it that we speak with grace and make the most of the opportunity. (Colossians 4:5)

## **On Fire Forever**

This lesson began by examining Isaiah 51:6. Isaiah knew that everything around him was wearing out and that things were going from worse to worse. Yet the verse concludes with this declaration of his attitude.

*“But my salvation will be forever, And my righteousness will not wane.”*

May our righteousness remain zealous and not wane. May we always be one fire to seek and save the lost by the message of Christ.

# Helping Others: New Converts

## IN PREPARATION

Read Acts 19.

What types of disciples did Paul find when he came into Ephesus?




How can the zeal of the converts from witchcraft be seen?




What was one major struggle the Christians at Ephesus had to endure?




What do you think is worthy of imitating among these new converts?




When were you first converted to the truth in Christ? Whether you were young or old, you will recall the spiritual struggles that you had to face and overcome to develop into a firmly rooted believer. Knowing our own struggles, we should be anxious to help others who are recently converted to push through difficulties and become a staple in the faith and in the local church. We will consider some of the ways we can new converts in their quest to become zealous for good works.

## Be a Good Example

A good piece of encouragement we can give to new converts is simply to be a good example for them. Paul notes that good examples can build up the zeal in others. The church at Corinth was working to provide for the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. Paul tells them, “it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.” (2 Corinthians 9:2) The zeal of Corinth stirred up other churches; our zeal can likewise stir up other Christians.

While this is the most obvious and easiest way to help new converts to build zeal, it is still very important. Do what you can to humbly show a righteous zeal to the spiritually young and you will be surprised at the power of your example!

## Teach Home Studies

Our method of evangelism in this congregation requires the aid of many people besides the evangelists of the church. One aspect that this is most apparent is in the teaching of home



# Helping Others: New Converts

studies for new disciples for Christ. Lesson material is already prepared for those who would teach these studies, the only thing needed is more active teachers!

The apostles themselves show us an example of the need for home studies. “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42) We can all feel as though we do not have time for these appointments. However, by setting a schedule, involving our families, and putting a time limit on the length of the studies (usually one hour), we can help those newer in the faith to be grounded in the word much more quickly than could ever be accomplished from ‘pulpit teaching’ alone. You don’t have to know everything to teach some things! Get involved with helping others in this way!

## **Build Relationships**

Most all of us have felt the awkwardness of trying to find our “place” in a congregation we have joined. It seems to us that everyone knows everyone else and it can be difficult to make new friends in that environment. But, when we do begin to build relationships we are all the more glad to assemble with the saints and develop a zealous faith! All of us should go out of our way to help those going through that transition.

***Who was the first person you built a good relationship with when you joined this congregation? How did that help your spiritual walk?***

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Even the apostles were built up by their relationships in the church. John calls Gaius one “whom I love in truth” and was very encouraged by Gaius’ godly example. (3 John 1-6) Paul felt a special bond to certain brethren at the church in Rome as he mentions in Romans 16. These relationships are a natural outgrowth of spiritual fellowship and compatible personalities. But relationships have to begin with pleasantries and kindness. If we will make effort to get to know new members we may find the best friend we have

# Helping Others: New Converts

yet had, but we will encourage others regardless! A zealous faith is not likely to grow without relationships among members. Do what you can to encourage that growth!

## Offer Spiritual Perspective

The truth of Christ changes our understanding of the world. Where once we saw only earthly issues we now see spiritual warfare. An experienced Christian should be able to see the spiritual issues in daily struggles more easily than a new convert to Christ. Offering this spiritual perspective can help others to open their spiritual eyes more fully.

We are under assault from the forces of darkness in various ways. Sometimes these are direct assaults through the lust for sin, but sometimes the concerns of this world are used to drag us away from the faith without us realizing that we were in a spiritual battle! Paul says that by putting on the whole armor of Christ and “taking up the shield of faith... you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” (Ephesians 6:15) He assumes that the evil one is sending these arrows our way! Do you see the arrows of evil in your life? Often times new Christians have the most difficult time identifying those arrows. Be the loving voice of spiritual aid for them and help them to see what is at stake. Doing so will help them to develop a stronger faith since they will not be set back by the struggles they did not recognize. Their zeal will grow as they gain momentum in the faith. You can help to ‘keep the ball rolling’!

***What are some common “flaming arrows” that Satan sends against new Christians? Get some ideas from Luke 8:11-15.***

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## Make Opportunities Available for Good Works

This study book is predicated upon the idea that we all desire to be zealous for good works. We have to know what are good works to accomplish that task; we have to see opportunities to do those good works, as well. Those who are more mature in the faith



# Helping Others: New Converts

can help others by kindly informing them of those opportunities as they come available.

I tend to overlook certain opportunities for hospitality. For instance, when I hear that a person is ill it will not necessarily appear to me to be an opportunity to do something nice for them such as preparing a meal. However, my wife helps to make up this oversight with her perspective on the same information. We all can overlook differing types of 'good works' that are available to us. One who is new in the church may be at the greatest disadvantage in this regard. By mentioning some opportunity you may help them to help someone else.

There is much we can do help new Christians build a zealous faith that can withstand the test of time. While all of these things require effort on our part, the payoff will be of eternal benefit to those we encourage! Let us be brothers and sisters in word and deed to those born of water and the Spirit in this church!

# Helping Others: Established Christians

## IN PREPARATION

Read Hebrews 10.

What command is found at verse 25 that all Christians must follow?

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What are we to do according to verses 23-24?

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What are some ways that the passage identifies to “hold fast our confession”?

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What do you think is the willful sin mentioned at verse 26?

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## A Full Plate

It can be a very difficult thing to keep ourselves going in the direction that we ought. There is much to be done. We must learn to abstain from sin as defined by our New Testament. Not only this, we must also be busy doing the work of a Christian such as assembling with the saints, studying, praying, teaching others, and so forth. This of course is all in addition to our day to day responsibilities. After all, Paul did tell the Thessalonians that if a man was unwilling to work then he should not eat. (II Thessalonians 3:10)

Yet the scripture is clear that while we definitely have plenty to keep us busy, we not only must mind ourselves, but also work to help our fellow saints to be zealous in their spiritual pursuits also that we might all reach Heaven. While it may seem like much, we definitely can do it all.

What does Paul command at Galatians 6:1-2?

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What do you think this involves?

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What does II Corinthians 11:27-29 tell us about Paul?

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What do you know from Paul’s life that demonstrates this?

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# Helping Others: Established Christians

## **The Problem: What can we do?**

Some saints have a difficult time leaving the past behind and being strong in the faith. It would seem that the Corinthians definitely give Bible precedent for this problem. However, Paul did not just write these brethren off. On the contrary, two of the longer New Testament books are dedicated to helping them through their problems so that they might be right in the sight of our Great God.

Though there were problems, how does Paul describe the brethren at I Corinthians 1:2?

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What does Paul have to say to these brethren at II Corinthians 2:4?

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It is clear that we must work with those that are willing to work towards Heaven. They may struggle more than I do, but that is no reason to be done with them. We are actually commanded to help those who are weak. (I Thessalonians 5:14) Truthfully, it does not seem that in most circumstances the problem is that brethren do not want to help. Most saints are truly good people who genuinely love their fellow weaker brothers and sisters and they want to help them get to Heaven.

In spite of this, many times the zeal of Christians fades around us until it goes out. We may well be on fire for the Lord, but something is not translating over. The help is just not there. It is true that some people will fade away as pictured in the sower parable of Matthew 13 regardless of what we try to do. The soil was just not where it needed to be. However, many can be helped, we just sometimes do not know what we can do.

## **What We Can Do...**

We must carefully evaluate our plan for helping fellow saints maintain zeal. If we do not have a plan, then we are not likely to succeed. Here are a few simple things that we can do in our pursuit to help our fellow saints be zealous.

# Helping Others: Established Christians

Keep an Eye Out - Step one is being aware that there is a problem. If we are going to help maintain zeal in our fellow saints, we must be there to notice when things begin to wane. Obviously we need to have a relationship with our fellow saints if we are to know them well enough to identify a spiritual problem that is beginning.

What famous words did Cain speak when God asked him where Abel was? (Genesis 4:9)

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What do you think is the answer to that question?

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Do you think it is spiritually true per Galatians 6:1-5 and Hebrews 10? How so?

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The reality of the church is that it is designed so that we can look out for one another and help build one another up. The apostle Paul speaks these words at I Corinthians 14:26, "Let all things be done for edification." The word "edify" meant "to build up". Paul speaks here with reference to the local assembly, thus explaining that all things the assembly does should be for the purpose of building one another up. While it is true that the local churches are there to worship God, that is but one purpose. Another main purpose of the local church is to build each other up and help one another press toward greater godliness!

Sadly, many times we do not have the relationships with one another that we should and as a result people lose their zeal and fall away before anything is done. We must be working with one another to build relationships so that we can identify problems at the start before they have grown into some huge problem. This is not to say that I have to be close with every person in a local church, but if we all are close to some, then all will be looked after!

# Helping Others: Established Christians

Know the Signs - People tend to be taken by surprise when someone falls away. However, it is not something that happens out of the blue. There is usually a gradual decline in the individual's zeal that can be observed, if we are observant. Consider the following:

Is the individual increasingly missing assemblies?

Is the individual harder to talk to when together?

Has the individual started changing behavior such as leaving as soon as services are over?

Has the individual begun missing opportunities to be with saints socially?

Is the individual's participation in things like bible classes declining?

Are there alarming things being posted by the individual in various public forums?

Is the individual not as happy in assemblies and the like as they once were?

There are many things for which we can look. It may turn out that it is nothing. We all go through difficult times in our life, physically and spiritually. We just need to keep an eye out so we can help if possible.

Act! - We can keep an eye out and know the signs of waning zeal all day long. However, if we are unwilling to act upon the knowledge that we have gained, then we are ineffective. It can certainly be an uncomfortable thing to speak to someone about something so personal as this, but it is our responsibility.

Not only must we act, but we must do it wisely. As previously mentioned, our speech is to be with grace as though seasoned with salt. This is toward outsiders and those of the household of faith. We will do well if we are careful in our speech. We need to go to the person one on one. Cards, phone calls, and texting should be avoided! We need to be in front of the individual so that they can see the love and concern we have for them in our faces. We can gently ask, "How have things been going recently?" We just need to show with our speech from the beginning that it is about them and helping, not about ourself and some need to seem superior.

## **Brother's Keepers**

We are certainly our brother's keepers. We must be careful that we keep our own house in order as Jesus commanded at Matthew 7, but we must watch out for our fellow saints also. Let's be zealous to help each other be zealous!

# Spewed Out: Lukewarm Laodiceans

## IN PREPARATION

Read Revelation 3.

How does Jesus describe Himself when speaking to Laodicea?




What is the true condition of the church?




What should these Christians buy from Jesus?




What is promised to those who overcome?




What would a letter from Jesus to our congregation say? The seven churches of Asia that are spoken to in Revelation 2 and 3 were able to answer that question, and some did not receive good news. One of these chastised churches was located in the ancient city of Laodicea. Jesus' words to them have been oft quoted and the principles should warn all Christians to seek after a zealous and grounded faith or else incur the anger of the Lord. These are a few of issues that Jesus addresses in His message found in Revelation 3:14-22.

### Church Without Zeal

Jesus wants every church to be a zealous church. He finds no pleasure in a church that attempts to merely 'go through the motions.' The first words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea reveal His disappointment in the lack of zeal in that church: "I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold; I wish that you were cold or hot." (Revelation 3:15) Jesus wants a fiery commitment in the hearts of the believers in Laodicea. He desires this commitment so badly that without it He would rather they not even be claiming His name.

How can Paul's words in Titus 2:14, the theme of this book, be any more illustrated than Jesus does in this text? He desires a people "zealous for good deeds" or no people at all! Let us fulfill the wish of Jesus in this congregation. Let us be "hot" in our zeal!

### Jesus' Anger

This was more than an empty "wish" of Jesus; He was angry that the Laodicean Christians were not doing as He desired and they had to change. Jesus continues, "So because you are



# Spewed Out: Lukewarm Laodiceans

lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” (Revelation 3:16) The image given of spitting out (literally, “vomiting up”) this church is powerful and frightening in its meaning. The church is the people, not the building. Therefore, Jesus was showing that the result of their mediocre faith was the loss of their salvation altogether. He would vomit them up so that they would share no part with Him.

How many brothers and sisters will be surprised at the anger of Jesus on the final day due to their lack of zeal for Him? Foregoing sin here and there is not the deepest desire of our Lord. He wants our hearts and minds; devoted love and service. Is this church, and ourselves as individuals, supplying that to Him?

## Trusting Wealth

The root of the “zeal-less” service in Laodicea was the love of wealth: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,” (Revelation 3:17) These brethren were self-sufficient. At least, they *thought* they were self-sufficient. Their material wealth had blinded them to their spiritual poverty. They believed their success to be by their own efforts and for their own glory. They should have remembered the teachings of Jesus when He says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Matthew 6:24)

Like these brethren we live in a materially wealthy place. “Work hard and prosper” has been the motto of doom to many in our society. While working hard and prospering are not evil, putting these things before God is. Just as they could not see their true condition, we must be very cautious in our introspection lest we remain ignorant of our own shortcomings.

***What does Paul tell Timothy the love of money is? Find that text. In the passage, what advice does Paul give Timothy for dealing with the love of money?***

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# Spewed Out: Lukewarm Laodiceans

## Buy From Jesus

These brethren had many possessions but they needed to come to a better merchant and buy spiritual goods. Jesus says, “I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” (Revelation 3:18) No one can supply our spiritual needs other than the Christ.

Are you “buying” from Jesus the things you need to walk with Him? He gives clarity of vision to us in His word, white garments in His blood, and spiritual wealth in the gospel hope. These things do not perish and cannot be stolen. Zealously seek them!

## Renew Your Zeal

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.” (Revelation 3:19) Jesus had not cast these brethren off so that they could not return. Rather, He exhorts them to hear the warning and renew their zeal! The call can likewise be made to us; Be zealous! And if you haven’t been, repent! It’s time to live the type of faith that our Lord has prescribed for us and receive the benefits associated with it!

## A Promise From Christ

Although they were currently weak and to be spit out, the promises given to them if they repented and renewed their zeal are wonderful to fathom: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:20-21) Shared fellowship with the Son of God is pictured in a meal setting. We can dine with the Most High! A sharing of glory is pictured in the sitting on His throne. He has a seat prepared alongside Him for those who overcome the temptations of this world and efforts of Satan to pull us away.

# Spewed Out: Lukewarm Laodiceans

The contrast between the anger in the prior verses and the comfort of this passage should help us see the importance of being zealous in our faith. Lacking zeal will anger our Lord and having zeal will have wonderful consequences throughout eternity!

While the Laodiceans had serious spiritual problems there was still hope for them, and if we see similarities in ourselves we must also see the hope set before us. Instead of being spewed out, let us be a people zealous for good works that is anxious to bring praise, glory, and honor to Jesus our King.

***Read through Revelation chapters 2 and 3. What are all of the specific things churches are commended for?***

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***Read through Revelation chapters 2 and 3. What are all of the specific things churches are chastised for?***

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# Something To Be Excited About

## IN PREPARATION

Read Matthew 25.

What did the man with five talents and the man with two talents do?

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What did the one talent man do with his talent?

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How did the master judge them when he returned and demanded an account be given?

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The master knew they knew him? What do we know about our master?

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## Lukewarm Laodiceans

In the last lesson we examined the lukewarm Laodiceans. Jesus speaks to them through the apostle John in Revelation 3:14-22. These brethren had come to a point where they just did not care. They were a church in name only. They looked at their physical situation and thought it to be a reflection of their spiritual situation. In reality the opposite was true. They were physically rich and in need of nothing, but they were spiritually destitute with need of everything. Their zeal was gone!

While we are primarily concerned with individual zeal in this study, it is important to note that if most of the saints of a given local church have lost their zeal, then the entire church suffers. The church can even come to the point where there is no fire there and they are essentially playing church. Since a church is nothing more than a group of saints, then we must understand that the spirituality of those individual saints affects the group as a whole.

## Powerful Philadelphians

Jesus speaks to another one of the Asian churches just before His letter to the Laodiceans. The church of Philadelphia was completely opposite of the church at Laodicea. The brethren were on fire!

What did they have a little of according to Revelation 3:8?

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What had they done with it and what would Jesus do in return?

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# Something To Be Excited About

As we consider and compare these two churches a very important question arises. What makes the difference between being a lukewarm church versus a powerful church that is on the rise? As we have already identified, it comes largely down to the zeal level of the individual members of the local church. Thus we then would wonder, how do we examine zeal's "cumulative" effect. That is, what can individual saints do in an effort to increase the zeal and power of the local church as a whole. This is truly the next great step in the consideration of zeal and what I can do. It is one thing to realize that I must be a zealous worker if I am to be well-pleasing to the Lord. It is an entirely different and greater thing to realize that my zeal must increase so the work as a whole can increase! So, what then must I consider and do in an effort to increase my zeal towards increasing the zeal and power of the local church?

## Identifying Talents

We all need something to be excited about. Not only do we need it, but we have it! God has given each and every one of us different blessing and talents. Many times when they are being under-utilized or are growing atrophied altogether it is because we have not taken the time or understood the need to identify them.

What does Peter say about the use of God's gifts at I Peter 4:10?

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What do you think some of these "gifts" might be today?

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What do you think are some gifts you may have?

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We all have various things we can do. Some of us have greater ability to help financially than others. Some of us have physical abilities such as construction and repair. Some of us



# Something To Be Excited About

have singing or speaking abilities. All of these are gifts given us by the grace of God. We need to identify what we are able to do and work in those capacities for the furtherance of the church.

## **Passionate About Talents**

Identifying talents is a great thing to do. Yet, we must examine this through the filter of zeal. We need to be passionate about those talents. God has given us the ability to do great things in His kingdom. When I identify these talents I must zealously carry them out. I must work to be the best at those things that I can be!

What phrase does Paul use at both 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and 4:10?

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What specifically were they to do this with regard to?

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How do you think this phrase would apply to us today?

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Many churches are plagued with an attitude of “It’s good enough!” We just do the “best” we can and that is all we can do. This would be fine if it was truly what was happening. However, more often than not, the statement is not really talking about our best. Rather it would be more accurate to say “We are doing what we wish and that will just have to be fine with God!” Our “best” is often no more than our best in the moment with no previous thought or effort to do differently or better. God does not want what we think is our best. He wants us to “excel still more”. He wants us to always strive to do greater and greater service in His kingdom.

If I am going to lead singing, I need to be the best song-leader that I can be. I need to work

# Something To Be Excited About

on honing that talent and doing it properly. I need to focus on how I can best lead the congregation in worship and praise of our Creator. If I am to teach Bible class then I need to strive to be the best possible teacher. I need to study the topics at hand and also study how best to present them. I need to spend time at home in preparation for my class. I need to be passionate as I pursue the work involving these gifts the Lord has given to me!

## Square Peg, Round Hole

A great problem in the Lord's churches is the attitude that everyone must be able to do everything. A person is often told that he needs to be able to give a talk. He need to be able to lead a song. He needs to be able to teach a class. It is good for us to have some experience in everything that we can, however, this misses a biblical point and flies in the face of common sense.

According to James 3:1, what were the many not to do? Why?

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What then do you think are some qualification to becoming a teacher?

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Some of us have no natural ability for public speaking. Try as we might, we may improve but will always do poorly at it. And that is okay! Some of us have no natural ability for singing. We may improve, but will always do poorly. And that is okay! We do not all have to be song-leaders, or teachers, or talk-givers, etc. Ephesians 4:11 explains that God gave many different things to do in the churches. We need to zealously labor in the area that we are gifted. If each of us do this, then the church will be zealous and powerful as a whole. Discouragement and decreased zeal come when we grieve over not being able to do something that we have been made to feel like we should do.

## Excited

We will accomplish great things as a whole when each individual has identified their gifts and is zealously working at those things. The church prospers when each individual part is properly working. (Ephesians 4:16)

# Misdirected Zeal: Ahab's Dedication

## IN PREPARATION

Read I Kings 18.

Why was Ahab seeking water for the animals?




Describe Obadiah's character and his conflict.




What had Jezebel been doing to the prophets? Who does Elijah seem to blame?




Describe the contest between the idol priests and Elijah.




Zeal is only as good as what it's focused on. Christians are to be zealous for good works but many have been (and are) zealous for evil things. The Jews "have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." (Romans 10:2) Before a Christian, Paul says he was, "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church..." (Philippians 3:6) These types of zeal are not helpful to salvation or the cause of Christ. King Ahab is another example of misdirected zeal that can teach us about the folly of giving our energy over to sinful things.

Ahab was king in Israel from 874-853 B.C. Elijah is the most notable prophet who interacted with him. Despite the number of ungodly kings Israel endured, we read, "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him....Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him." (I Kings 16:30, 33) This man was zealous for all types of evil and we can learn about the dangers of misdirected zeal from his example.

## Zeal for False Religion

Ahab was a religious man. While that statement may seem like a positive one, it is not. Ahab was zealous for a false religion and no religious zeal at all would have been better for him. "It came about, as it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat [an idolater], that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal... which he built in Samaria." (I Kings 16:31-32) He was so zealous for a false religion that he married a woman named after the idol Baal and built an altar in Samaria. The Lord was furious! Truth seekers, like David, "hate every false way." (Psalm 119:128. Ahab loved his false way and killed for it. At the



# Misdirected Zeal: Ahab's Dedication

provoking of Jezebel Ahab attempted to kill all of the prophets of the Lord so that many were sent into hiding in caves. (1 Kings 18:13) He replaced them with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah. (1 Kings 18:19) Was Ahab spiritually zealous? Yes! Did it do him any good? No!

Spiritual zeal must be accompanied by truth. Jesus says, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17) We need to make sure that the spiritual things we are investing ourselves into are worthy of our efforts!

## **Zeal for Himself**

Ahab was a conceited man. He behaved as though the world revolved around him. At one time he desired to purchase a vineyard from a man, Naboth, but he refused to sell. We read, "So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed... for [Naboth] said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food." (1 Kings 21:4) This behavior is more common for a child than a man-- and we shouldn't allow it of our children! Naboth's refusal to sell cost him his life and Ahab claimed his land. The petulant child had to have his heart's desire.

Another time Ahab's conceit is evident is when planning to war against the king of Aram in alliance with Jehoshaphat of Judah. Jehoshaphat wanted prophets to be consulted before the battle and many false prophets were found to approve of the war. When Jehoshaphat wanted a prophet of the Lord, Ahab told him, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil..." (1 Kings 22:8) Ahab did not consider that his own actions had brought these "evil" prophecies upon him!

Ahab had a great zeal for himself that blinded him to the effects his actions had on others and to the obvious disapproval of God. We can fall into the same trap with misdirected zeal. Is your passion for yourself or for your God and His will?

***How does Ahab's selfishness violate Matthew 7:12? How do we fulfill Jesus' desire?***

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# Misdirected Zeal: Ahab's Dedication

## Zeal for Evil

Ahab was zealous for false religion and for himself, but besides (and including) these things he was simply zealous for evil. He was unwilling to hear God or pay heed to any messages that God sent him, even when they were accompanied by miracles. Elijah described Ahab as having “sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord.” (1 Kings 21:20) After the Lord lit a water-soaked altar before the idolatrous Israelites we read, “all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.’” (1 Kings 18:39) The miracle was enough to convince them, but not so with Ahab: “Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.” (1 Kings 19:1) He complained to his wife and unleashed her to pursue Elijah’s life.

Ahab’s complete rejection of God eventually brought the judgment of God upon him. He was slain during battle with the people of Aram: “The battle raged that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot in front of the Arameans, and died at evening, and the blood from the wound ran into the bottom of the chariot... So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried the king in Samaria. They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood (now the harlots bathed themselves there), according to the word of the LORD which He spoke.” (1 Kings 22:35-38)

If we spend our lives being zealous for evil and rejecting the Lord should we expect a better fate? In fact, our spiritual doom will be far worse. The Lord will not be mocked by the arrogance of man. Her mercy is offered to all, but the arrogant and boastful will be brought low.

***What are some ways that we might become zealous for evil without realizing it? Consider 3 John 11 in your answer.***

# Misdirected Zeal: Ahab's Dedication

## Provoked by Jezebel

We have already seen references to the evil of Jezebel, Ahab's wife. The Scriptures ascribes more evil to her: "Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him." (1 Kings 21:25) Ahab cannot pass the blame for his sin onto anyone else, but Jezebel had a terrible effect on his life that made his walk much more difficult.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33) Just as Jezebel was a bad influence on Ahab so can others be bad influences on us. We should consider this truth seriously when choosing a spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, and friends. Only a fool would argue with the Scripture on this. Are the people you are close to building you up to zealous for God, or are they building zeal for evil?

***Describe the character of person a Christian should be allowing to influence them. Who is a person in Scripture you think pictures this ideal well?***

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Ahab's misdirected zeal reminds us zeal for false religion, selfishness, and evil are things that will bring us into condemnation before the Lord-- and we should be spending our time with those who build us up to more holy and productive goals. Which direction is your zeal headed?

# Benefits of Zeal: Immediate Effects

## IN PREPARATION

Read John 2.

What did Jesus do in this chapter that caused the disciples to think of His zeal?

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Why was this a demonstration of the zeal of Jesus?

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What would God have zeal for according to Joel 2? Where in the NT does Joel 2 occur?

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What are some of the effects of the zeal of God for Christians?

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## Consuming Zeal

Jesus came to this earth on a mission. As a result of this, He was wholly dedicated to this purpose. We was consumed with zeal for the will of the Father to be accomplished.

What was the mission of Jesus according to Philippians 2:1-11?

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How did Jesus sum up His own mission at Luke 19:9-10?

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Indeed we are greatly benefitted buy the zeal of God. The Old Testament tells us that the zeal of God for His people was instrumental in preserving the remnant that would return to the land and from which the Messiah would come. Then Jesus came to this earth to zealously carry out His wonderful mission, though it involved horrible suffering for Himself. As a result of God's zeal for us we have wonderful blessings that are available to us.

Just like there were great effects due to the zeal of God, we find that there are also great benefits to us having the zeal that God requires of us. Just as Jesus was consumed with zeal for His Father's house, so should we be consumed for zeal with the same. We should love the Lord, His church, and His work so much that we are consumed with the desire to serve Him and His people. If we are zealous as we should be, we will find that there are benefits we will also enjoy due to our attitude. Zeal benefits not only the Lord, but also me. As with all commands of the Lord, they are likewise for my benefit.



# Benefits of Zeal: Immediate Effects

## **Zeal's Immediate Effects**

So what then are some of the effects of being a zealous Christian? There are certainly many, below we will consider a few.

Motivation - This speaks to the cumulative effect of zeal. When we work to increase our zeal, we become motivated to do more. As we work doing more, we become more zealous.

Motivation can certainly be a difficult thing to acquire in this life. We have so many things that must be done from day to day. Maintenance of ourselves and our homes require much of our resources. At the end of the day we tend to be exhausted from our labors. Sometimes it can be hard to find the motivation to take care of the spiritual things that need to be done as we have outlined in this book. However, one thing we will discover is that if we work on being zealous as we have studied, we will find ourselves to be more motivated in spiritual pursuits. Being a zealous person in the spiritual areas that I have been gifted will lead to motivation to pursue greater spiritual works.

Motivation means that we see the benefit of our spiritual pursuits and are eager to accomplish them. We consider the apostle Paul. He was a very busy and no doubt very tired man. However, He was zealous. This led to him being motivated to pursue greater works since he was zealous for the work of God. As mentioned in our earlier studies, even though the apostle had plenty on his plate, he was still eager to do more works such as preaching in Rome. (Romans 1:15)

Protection - Zeal for Christ leads to a new attitude with regard to the dangers of this world. It is certainly true that Christians at any time may be called to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. However, the zealous saint realizes that this zeal for Christ is a protection against being devastated by temporal harm. Peter speaks about this at I Peter 3:13.

What does Peter say zeal accomplishes in this verse?

# Benefits of Zeal: Immediate Effects

As he goes on to say, this is not a promise that suffering would not occur. Rather it is a new attitude toward the suffering. The zealous servant of Christ recognizes that the world does not have any real power over us. Zeal is a willingness to stand up for what is right even in the face of persecution. The zealous servant knows that at the end the only thing that matters is service to Jesus. The persecutor could harm or even kill the Christian, but the saint's zeal for Christ would preserve and protect him on the last day!

Perfection - The Christian is to strive for perfection, that is completeness in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 5-6 records some brethren who were content to be where they were. They should have been advancing toward perfection but were instead stuck needing someone to teach them the elementary things once more. This is not the way a saint should be. One main reason that saints do not benefit from perfection is that they allow their zeal to wane. Rather than staying on fire for the various pursuits the Lord has commanded of us, saints become content to be as they are. The result is perpetual imperfection!

What did Jesus say that the Laodiceans needed to do at Revelation 3:19?

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Their lack of zeal was tied with sin. The penitent person who is not zealous must then understand that repentance in that situation means stoking the fires of zeal. Repentance is effort being made to perfection as a saint. Thus we can see that being zealous leads to perfection while lacking zeal has the opposite effect. We all desire to be complete in Christ so must all likewise desire to increase in zeal!

Expectation - As we have previously noted, lack of zeal for Christ is sinful! We must be zealous! Therefore when I am zealous I can live in expectation, hope.

What did Paul tell the church at Philippi at Philippians 3:13-14?

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# Benefits of Zeal: Immediate Effects

According to this passage the zeal of Paul was directed towards his expectation. As he zealously labored forgetting the deeds of the past that threatened to drag him down and reaching forward to what was ahead he was zealously living in hope. He knew that through his zeal for Christ he had expectation of something better! When we are consumed with zeal for our Father's house we are people that live in expectation of a better country!

Contagion - Another immediate benefit of having zeal is that it is contagious. When we are zealous we push others toward having the same attitude of zeal. This occurs purely as a side-effect of our own attitude. Paul told the Corinthians of this effect.

What does Paul say happened as a result of their zeal according to II Corinthians 9:2?

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Of course, since we are saints working together at a location I must realize that the contagion works both ways. Not only does my zeal help others to increase in zeal, but also their zeal has that effect on me. We help one another toward love and good works when we are zealous for Christ!

Apart from the increasing of other's zeal, it also increases the work of the Lord at my given location. Paul explains at Ephesians 4:16 that when each part is properly working, the growth of the body as a whole occurs. Thus when I am zealous for the work of Christ, Christ and His church benefit from my zealous labor.

## **Everyone Benefits**

The growth of myself, those around me, and the work is largely dependent on the zeal of each member being as it should. While there are certainly eternal benefits that will be examined in the next lesson, the scripture is clear that we benefit from zeal right now. When we are zealous as we should we are motivated to greater things as we strive for the hope that is ahead and seems reachable as it should.



# Benefits of Zeal: Eyeing the Prize

## IN PREPARATION

Read Revelation 4-5.

Describe the activity of the four living creatures.

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Why did the 24 elders say God is worthy to receive glory?

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Who was found worthy to open the scroll? Describe his appearance.

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Name all mentioned that sing praise in chapter 5.

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The benefits of godly zeal extend far beyond this life and into eternity. Understanding these eternal benefits now aids us in keeping our zeal alive and pressing past current struggles. The apostle knows this when he 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 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.” (Colossians 3:1-4)*

If you desire the eternal benefits of zeal later you must start ‘eyeing the prize’ now! This advice is given by motivational speakers all over the world and is termed “visualization.” ‘Visualize to realize’ is a common refrain. Picture the eternal result of zeal in your mind as a present reality to motivate you to arrive there in the end!

## Scoffers Will Be Answered

While there are many good effects of zeal in this life (see last lesson), there is also the potential for negative effects. Particularly, some individuals may bring troubles against Christians in order to stop their zeal. Visualization can help us to get past these scoffers.

Stephen preaches the gospel with conviction to the leaders of the Jews in Acts 7. He reminds them of their spiritual history and their past rejections of God in order to prick their hearts to behave differently regarding the Son of God, Jesus. Instead of being motivated to righteousness, “they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.” (Acts 7:54) It



# Benefits of Zeal: Eyeing the Prize

would have been easy for Stephen to be moved with fear at the wrath being directed at him. Instead, Stephen kept his eye on the eternal: “But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” (Acts 7:55-57) This image motivated him to keep focus even through being stoned to death. While we may not see heaven opened up in such a miraculous way, we still can keep a strong mental image of our goals in spite of the scoffers around us.

In the face of anti-Christian assaults we should remember Paul’s words;

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of glory...And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:18-19, 23)*

The reward we have awaiting us is worth overcoming any scoffer today. Don’t allow the enemies of truth to distract you from the prize!

## **Heaven is for the Zealous**

Those that keep their zeal in this life have a home prepared for them. Heaven is not a place for the lazy or unmotivated.

Jesus speaks throughout His ministry to the apostles about the types of servants they are to be. They were to be willing to confess their faith in the face of persecutions (Matthew 10:32), to make servitude their highest aim (Mark 10:42-44), and to love one another fervently (John 13:34). These aspirations characterize a zealous faith. Having taught them these things, Jesus says, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place of you.” (John 14:2) Heaven is this prepared home for His zealous servants. Are we striving to be the type of person while on earth that will be welcomed there?

# Benefits of Zeal: Eyeing the Prize

Revelation chapters 4 and 5 contain what is likely the most vivid illustration of what heaven is like. Reading these chapters gives us an image of the type of person that will find a home in that place. The scene begins with John seeing an open door and a voice inviting him to come up. He records, “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.” (Revelation 4:2) The throne scene that follows reveals a busy and zealous assembly.

***Why was John invited to come up? Relate these words to 1:1-2 and the book’s purpose.***

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The One on the throne is surrounded by four living creatures. These creatures are busy with their work of praising God: “day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.’” (Revelation 4:8) These creatures are zealous and unceasing in their praise of God. Do we have an attitude like them?

There are also 24 elders around the throne. The elders take their cue from the worship of the creatures and worship with them:

“And when the living creatures give glory... the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’” (Revelation 4:10-11)

The elders have crowns that must symbolize greatness. Yet, they cast those crowns down before God. They are zealous to praise Him and give Him all glory and honor and power. Do we share their zeal for His name?

A book was in the hand of God. One worthy to open the book was sought and yet none

# Benefits of Zeal: Eyeing the Prize

were found who were worthy to open it. Disappointment was present in the assembly. The apostle John “began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.” (Revelation 5:4) John was invested in the purpose of God. This apostle rejoiced at the worship of Him and wept at the apparent disappointment. Is it any wonder that John was invited to view heaven in this way? John is the type of zealous person that heaven welcomes. Are we as invested in spiritual things?

Finally, One is found to open the book; the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Heaven erupts in praise to Him as He takes the scroll. The twenty-four elders fall down before Him. Many angels, the creatures, and the elders praise Him saying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” (Revelation 5:12) The praise does not end there. “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’” (Revelation 5:13) Heaven is filled with zealous praise for the Father and Son. Are we zealous in our worship now in a way that would be fitting in heaven?

***Why is Jesus described as both a lion and a lamb?***

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There is no forced change of will coming that will cause us to be zealous in heaven while we have been slothful in worship on earth. Are you zealous now in a way that warrants your company with the zealous heavenly host? Set your eye on that prize and stay zealous here so that you are prepared for a heavenly home!



# A King for God: Josiah's Zeal

## IN PREPARATION

Read II Kings 22-23.

How old was Josiah when he became King? Who were the two kings before him?




What kind of kings were the two preceding kings?




What relation did Josiah have to the preceding two kings of Judah?




How old was Josiah when he began renovating and restoring?




## He did right?

The divided kingdom was not known for strong, godly leadership. In fact of the Kings of Judah, only four, possibly five, were considered good kings by the standard of God. The picture was even bleaker of the northern kingdom. Not a single one of the twenty kings were good. They ranged from bad to "Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord". (I Kings 21:25)

Yet we find Josiah in II Kings 22. He was king of Judah from 639-608 BC. This had him reigning just 22 years before the southern kingdom would ultimately be taken away into Babylonian captivity. Josiah did right. Instead of a terrible epitaph like Ahab left behind, we are given much better words in memory of Josiah from II Kings 22:2.

How does this passage describe Josiah?

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What did the law command at Deuteronomy 5:32?

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So here we have a king who was doing what was right in the sight of the Lord for a change. Not only was he doing what was right, he had a great zeal for the command of the Lord. This led to him being willing to do whatever was necessary to be right in His sight. Certainly there were drastic changes that were going to have to be made and imposed on the nation to be right. Yet thanks to his great zeal for Jehovah, he was willing to make those changes regardless of the price.



# A King for God: Josiah's Zeal

## Whole-Heartedly

Josiah was a man who wholly dedicated himself to God. There had been a couple of kings in Judah's past that were basically good, but were not wholly given over to the Lord's purposes. Josiah, however, sets out to be given completely over to Him. His zeal for what was right was exceedingly high.

How does II Kings 23:3 describe Josiah and his covenant?

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What do you think is the meaning of this description in light of Deuteronomy 4:29?

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We learn from this that Josiah had determined to do right as a king at a young age. However, it is when he is 26 that he begins renovations and discovers the book of the law. He realizes at this point that he has been striving to do right, but was still missing the mark since he did not have the law to direct his steps. This is actually a common problem, one that would repeat itself in his ancestors in the days of Jesus and the apostles.

How does Paul describe the Jews at Romans 10:2?

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What do you see as the main difference between Josiah and the Jews of Paul's day?

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Being zealous is to be whole-heartedly given over to something. In our case we have decided to follow Jesus and doing it half-way is not enough. If we are to be well-pleasing we must follow in the path of Josiah and be zealous. We must be whole-heartedly devoted to Jesus and whatever changes His word demands.

# A King for God: Josiah's Zeal

## Against All Odds

It is hard to pinpoint exactly from where the faith of Josiah came. When we look at his family history it is pretty bleak. He did not come from righteous stock.

How does II Kings 21:1-18 describe his grandfather Manasseh?

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How does II Kings 21:19-25 describe his father Amon?

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Upon examining these texts it is clear that there was not much hope for Josiah to be a good king. There was not really much hope for him to be less than a murderous villain. After all, the command of the Lord in Deuteronomy 6 is to parents. They are commanded to teach their children the way of the Lord so that they would not depart from it. This certainly did not happen in the case of Josiah. Yet we learn from Josiah that the proverb at Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it", is axiomatic. Just like all children that are trained in the way of truth do not grow up and follow the truth, it is also true that all children that are trained in the way of wickedness do not grow up and follow the way of wickedness.

Not only did Josiah develop a righteous heart against all odds, he even developed one that was zealous for what is good! Certainly we are all without excuse. If this 8 year old boy king could find the truth in the absence of good parents and good teachers of the word, certainly we can in the day of a Bible in every lap! Not only can we find truth, we can be zealous about it!

## A Man of Prophecy

Josiah's name first appears about 300 years before his birth. All the way back at I Kings 13 there was a young prophet that was commanded to go cry against Jeroboam and the altar at Bethel. He went and did this dangerous mission as the Lord commanded.

# A King for God: Josiah's Zeal

What is the young prophet's prophecy concerning Josiah at I Kings 13:2?

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What does II Kings 23:16 have to say about this prophecy?

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What were the words of the observers according to II Kings 23:17?

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What are some of the other reforms mentioned in II Kings 22-23?

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What do you think were the dangers encountered by Josiah for his actions?

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We are likewise people of prophecy! Not exactly in the same way as Josiah, but of prophecy nonetheless. I Peter 2:9 explains that we are a people for "God's own possession" to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called" us "out of darkness into His marvelous light". Paul tells us at Titus 2:14 that Christ "gave Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." The inspired words of God say that the children of God were going to be a zealous people that are special to the Savior. Thus we must be zealously given to the will of the Father if we are to be His as Josiah was.

## **Avoiding the Consequences**

Sadly it was too late for the nation of Judah. They were going to go away to captivity regardless of what they did at this point. It was necessary for the people to be judged by the Lord at this point. (II Kings 22:16-17) However, the zealous individual Josiah was able to avoid this fate personally. (II Kings 22:18-20) We may well have obstacles in this life, but through grace and zealously obeying our Master we can overcome.

# A Fresh Start

## IN PREPARATION

Read Read Colossians 2.

To what does Paul compare baptism in this chapter? How does he describe it?




What does it mean to be raised up with Him in a newness of life?




What has happened to the dead body of flesh that was removed in the process?




How then should we live as people who have been baptized?




## Going Forward

What do we do now? After spending 26 lessons concerning zeal, you may have identified some changes that need to happen. If we have no zeal, what do we need to do? If our zeal has begun to wane, what is our next step? If I have zeal, how do I increase it? What change can I make today?

These are all important questions. As with any task, if we view all the changes needed we can easily turn it into an insurmountable obstacle and give up. This would be tragic as the consequences are at the least wandering through life half-heartedly following Jesus and at worse falling away and losing our soul!

The most important thing we can do at the outset is realize that I will not just suddenly do all that needs to be done and be the zealous Christian that I should be overnight. It does not work that way. As we have shown over the course of this study, zeal for Christ is a lifelong pursuit. Zeal can wane over time and there is certainly an ebb and flow to it. That is okay as long as we recognize trends and are constantly evaluating ourselves to make corrections as needed.

Since it is a life-long pursuit, the only thing that I can truly be concerned with and change is today! These are the thoughts of Jesus. He warns us against worrying about problems over which we have no control.

What does Jesus command at Matthew 6:34?

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# A Fresh Start

What is the surrounding context? (Matthew 6:25-33)

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The point to this passage is not that we should ignore the future. Indeed it is a fool that never thinks about tomorrow. The point that Jesus is making is that we only have control over today. We need to take care of today in a way that is good and right and will lead to a better tomorrow. Thus it is wise for us to consider our zeal 1 or 5 years from now and to plan for it, but the main concern is what step do I need to take today toward being in a better place a year from now. Today is what I can control.

## Five Steps I Can Take Today

As with anything in life, we need a plan. What can I do to accomplish my goals? We have set in this study the goals of acquiring, maintaining, and reigniting zeal depending on our current condition. Since Jesus explains that it is today that we can control, we will identify five steps that we can take today toward being more zealous by sundown.

1. Honestly Evaluate My Condition - I must first come to terms with my situation. Where do I stand before God with regard to zeal? Am I whole-heartedly dedicated to Him and His purpose for His people? These are all important questions to ask myself.

How would you describe Paul's evaluation of himself at 1 Timothy 1:15-16?

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How would you evaluate yourself today with regard to zeal?

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2. Pray About My Condition - After determining where I stand with regard to zeal, I need to speak to the Father about it. As we have previously identified, prayer itself is a form of communion with God and an excellent way to stoke the fires of zeal. When



# A Fresh Start

we examine the lives of godly men and women in our Bible, we see people that examined themselves and then went to God with the results. Job is a prime example of this. He spent a very long time in misery with nothing to do other than examine himself. After the Lord finally answered him from the whirlwind as Job had demanded, he got some perspective. He was evaluating himself as God spoke and he did not like what he found.

What did Job discover about himself according to Job 42:1-6?

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This passage is essentially a prayer although he was speaking with God directly. He did exactly what he should have done after self examination. He went to God with the results and asked for the help he needed. After we examine ourselves with respect to zeal, we may like what we find. Maybe we are zealous as we should. That is good. Now pray that the Lord helps you to excel still more. However, more often than not we may not like what we see. We all likely can find room for improvement or maybe we find sin. Pray to the Lord for help to overcome.

3. Commit to Improving My Condition - It is certainly true that change is not going to take place in a day. We are not going to magically be different. However, we can repent today. That is commit to God that we will do differently and begin the process! Once I have identified the areas that must change, I need to commit to the process. I must acknowledge that a lack of zeal is not what the Lord wants of His people and that I am going to begin today working towards greater things.

We previously studied the parable of the talents at Matthew 25. Certainly to the person who loves God that parable can put a sinking feeling in our stomachs. We want to be found by the master as a zealous worker for Him. Not as a non-zealous talent-hider. The judgment that came upon that one talent man was harsh. Something that none of us want to face. We must commit to zealously doubling our talents!



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4. Devote 15 Minutes to Talent-Improving - As we previously studied, we all are given gifts by the Lord over which we are stewards. Peter identifies this at I Peter 4:10. Since we all have been given gifts by the Lord we should earnestly be working at honing those skills for the most effective service to Him that is possible. If I have determined that I have a gift for leading worship in song, then spend 15 minutes today toward learning how to better do that. Learn a new song. Spend some time working on your next song service. Evaluate the words to a song that maybe you have never considered. There are many things we can do to hone our talents. This is true of anything that you do for the Lord. Certainly some time focused on that with which the Lord has blessed me will be time well-spent and time that will increase my zeal.

What have you determined as gifts you have toward the service of God?

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What can you do toward improving your use of that gift?

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5. Do One Thing for a Fellow Saint - We have identified a number of spiritual pursuits that are zeal builders. One that is of great importance is time spent with fellow saints. We encourage one another to be zealous for Christ when we spend time with one another. Of course, there is no greater way to spend time with someone than to impart some blessing to them! Take a meal to someone that is in need. Give a call to someone that needs some encouragement. Take care of something for someone and do not even tell them that you did it! There are an infinite number of things that we can do for those that are around us. We are rarely as zealous for the Lord as we are in the moments that we are serving someone else.

## A Fresh Start

Zeal is an exceedingly important quality to acquire. As we have mentioned, it is not optional, but is a command. It is actually just the simple nature of a true servant of Christ. We have been greatly blessed by Him and are excited to serve Him as He has specified. May we all strive toward greater zeal starting today!

This book belongs to:

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