

Maintaining Your Spiritual Fire

Session #5 – The Essential Outflow

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First Assembly of God, Fort Myers
June 30, 2021

Even if we faithfully read God's Word, pray and allow God to cleanse our life from self and sin, one more aspect of the Christian life is essential to keeping our spiritual fervor—to maintaining our spiritual fire. The passion sparked by God's grace and sustained by His Word and Spirit has a **purpose**. Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit's energizing work in us is that we will be His witnesses in the world.¹ He clearly communicated the priority of heaven when He said, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."² His passion was the lost of this world, and His passion must be our priority.

The Gospels record three metaphors—salt, light and branches—that Jesus used to reveal the nature of what His followers were to be. All three metaphors share one primary quality: they have an effect beyond themselves. Salt affects whatever it touches. Light shines on everything within its reach. Branches extend the life of the vine to the fruit that is produced.

Jesus warned of the uselessness of salt that has lost its savor, of light that is hidden under a basket and of branches that do not bear fruit.³ Lifeless branches have lost their intended purpose and are fit only for a much lesser and short-lived purpose—to become firewood. Salt is not useful merely because it exists, but because it has the capacity of affecting what it touches. If salt has lost its "savor" or "saltiness," it becomes useless—good for nothing. In the same way, light that is hidden benefits no one and its illuminating characteristic is lost.

God never intended for believers to be unfruitful. Instead, He destined us to be productive in cooperation with His activity in people's lives. If we will let Him use us as He destined and called us to be (salt, light, branches), we will bear fruit.

What was Jesus' intention in using these three metaphors? To provide word pictures that would reinforce that every follower of Christ should make an impact on others.

My friend, Pastor Jeff Brawner, used to close his daily radio broadcast by saying, "May God bless you and make you a blessing." This statement summarizes Jesus' teaching concerning being salt, light and branches. Our Christian walk is not without purpose. God has commissioned us to bring His message of hope to those who are spiritually lost.

Probably my favorite example of a believer who has grasped this truth wholeheartedly is David, a friend of mine who drives a taxi in Jakarta, Indonesia. He has the same passion for souls today that he had when I first met him more than 15 years ago.

I met David after preaching three morning services in a large church in Jakarta. A missionary friend was supposed to drive me to the airport, but after the third service he told me that someone else had offered to take me. He said the man was insistent and would not take no for an answer.

David's beaming smile was infectious. After quickly stowing my luggage in the trunk of his little red-and-yellow taxi, he jumped to open the passenger door. After I was seated, he ran around to the driver's side and hopped in.

The taxi jerked forward, and soon we were weaving in and out of the bustling traffic as we

headed for the airport. The first words David spoke were, “We must talk fast. We only have 45 minutes!”

Excitedly he shared his testimony of how he, a bulldozer mechanic, felt led by God to quit his job and become a taxi driver so he could have contact with many people each day and share the message of Christ with them. Then he reached into the glove compartment, took out a small cassette recorder and popped in a blank tape. After pushing the record and pause buttons, he handed the recorder to me.

“What is this for?” I asked.

“I need salvation sermon,” he replied.

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“I just an evangelist. I not a preacher,” David replied. “Everyone who get into my taxi I ask, ‘What language you speak?’ If they say Mandarin, I take Mandarin tape.”

He pointed to a rack of cassette tapes on the dashboard. Each tape was labeled with the name of a language and contained salvation sermons by preachers who had accepted his offer of a “free” ride to the airport.

“Only language I don’t have is English,” David continued. “God sent you for my ministry today.”

I promised to take the tape with me, prepare a brief salvation message, and mail the tape to a missionary who would give it to David. But David was insistent that he needed the tape that day, because tomorrow someone who spoke English might get into his taxi. If he didn’t have a sermon, that person might go to hell.

I quickly agreed to make the tape and closed my eyes for a few moments of meditation and prayer. While I was praying I felt something on my knee and opened my eyes. David’s left hand was on my right knee, and he was praying in the Spirit for “the anointing.”

I turned on the tape recorder. For about 10 minutes I explained how all of us know in our hearts that we have sinned and need forgiveness...how the holy Son of God became a man more than 2,000 years ago and lived a life without sin...how He was killed and paid the penalty for sin without committing a crime...how death could not hold Him and in three days He rose from death...and how He now offers forgiveness and everlasting life to all who will believe in Him and confess Him as Savior and Lord. I invited those who might listen to pray and ask God to forgive their sins through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Then I led in a sinner’s prayer that they could repeat. Finally, I said, “If you prayed this prayer, please tell your taxi driver, David. He will tell you where you can find a church, a spiritual family where you can grow in Christ just as you grew physically in your natural family.”

I handed the tape recorder back to David. “There is your sermon, David,” I said. Then I asked, “Have people received Christ in your taxi?”

“Many times,” he replied.

I will never forget one of the testimonies he shared. A businessman got into David’s taxi. He told David later that he had planned to take his life. But before they reached his destination, he heard the good news about Jesus and received Christ. The businessman was in one of the church services where I had preached that morning.

After we arrived at the airport, I prayed for David and his family. David turned to leave, and I turned toward the terminal. Suddenly I stopped. “David, please come back,” I called. “Would you do me a favor?”

“If I can,” he answered. “What you want?”

“Would you lay hands on me and pray for me?”

As skycaps stood around us, David began praying in the Spirit. In my heart, I prayed, “O God, no matter how old I get, let me always have the spirit of passion for the lost that is in this man!”

Six years passed. I was traveling to Jakarta again and asked a missionary to contact David to

pick me up at the airport. David's hair was grayer, his red-and-yellow taxi had more than 250,000 miles on it, and his evangelism ministry was still thriving.

We embraced, and I got into his taxi. On the way into town, I asked about the businessman who had planned to commit suicide. "Is he still a Christian?" I asked.

"Oh, yes!" David replied. "He a pastor now!" After further conversation I learned that not only had many others received Christ in the past six years in David's taxi, but two others had also gone into full-time ministry.

The life of my friend David the taxi driver is a telling example of how a fervent heart moves us to do the good works God has prepared for us.⁴ It is through doing those good works that the essential outflow of ministry gives purpose to the "spiritual fire" in our hearts.

Maintaining our spiritual fire involves living out the passion God imparts to our hearts by being His witnesses in the world. For the flow of God's Spirit in our lives to continue, we need a continual outflow in ministry to others—both to believers and to the lost.

My father-in-law, Gustav Bergstrom, was a missionary in Brazil for 55 years and one of the greatest personal witnesses I have ever known. A few years ago, I preached in Rio de Janeiro and mentioned Gustav Bergstrom in my message. After the service, a Brazilian man, a former train conductor, approached me and told me his story.

"I am a believer because of Gustav," he began. Gustav rode many trains as he traveled throughout Brazil to witness and plant churches. He always had quantities of gospel tracts and usually carried Bibles to give to those who were responsive to his witness.

As this conductor was collecting tickets, Gustav witnessed to him. He was eager to learn more, but he didn't have a Bible. Gustav had none with him at the time, but he promised to bring one when the train passed through town again.

"When will you return?" Gustav asked.

"In three days," the conductor replied. "But we arrive at 3 a.m. and will stop only to refuel."

"I will be here," Gustav said.

The conductor didn't believe him and quickly forgot about the promise.

Three days later, in the middle of the night, the train lumbered into the town and stopped at the station. In the dim light the conductor saw a lone, shadowy figure standing on the platform. It was Gustav Bergstrom. Without a word, Gustav bowed his head toward the conductor, handed him a Portuguese Bible and walked away.

"Because of that meeting, I found Christ," the man said. "Today I am an Assemblies of God pastor."

Most believers were not reached in a church service or stadium crusade, but through a personal encounter. Believers who faithfully maintain their spiritual fire—who let God use them as salt, light and branches—will be like Peter and John in Acts 4:20 who said, "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."⁵

Most people who come to Christ through personal evangelism are not reached by strangers but by someone they know. Most of our witness will be among people with whom we have ongoing relationships. In these relationships, memorizing an evangelistic routine will not be adequate. We can't just keep repeating the same things to people we know. We must be ready to respond to them in a variety of ways.

If we are to follow in Jesus' steps, we should care about people as individuals, knowing that each is known and loved by our Heavenly Father. We must connect with them, not only in their cultural context but also in their personal lives. The most quoted verse in the Bible, John 3:16, was not part of one of Jesus' sermons. It was spoken softly in the night during a conversation with Nicodemus as Jesus responded to the Pharisee's searching questions.

Everyone—our friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers and every person we meet—will spend eternity in heaven or hell. Every person should be given an adequate witness of the gospel and the opportunity to make a decision concerning Christ's offer of salvation. People who are spiritually lost deserve what those who came in contact with Jesus received—a personal response. If Jesus gave His best to one person, so should we. Not only is sharing Christ one of the most thrilling experiences a believer can have, it is essential to maintaining our spiritual fire.

¹ Acts 1:8

² Luke 15:7

³ Matthew 5:13-16, John 15:6

⁴ Ephesians 2:10

⁵ NIV