

Maintaining Your Spiritual Fire

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Spiritual passion doesn't "just happen."

While the source of our fervency - our spiritual "fire" - is from God, we are personally responsible for maintaining it. The key is understanding the difference between what is our responsibility (what God expects of us) and what only He can do.

Many years ago when I was just starting out in ministry, I heard Revivaltime radio speaker C. M. Ward make this statement: "God will do everything for you that you can't do for yourself. But He will not do for you what you can."

That statement illustrates the balance between discipline and dependence in our spiritual lives. We must do our part in Christian service and at the same time depend on God to do what only He can. This principle is true in evangelism and every other aspect of Christian living.

It is to our spiritual benefit that the apostle Paul could not fulfill his desire to get to Rome when he wanted. Otherwise, we would not have the Book of Romans to teach us. All of Paul's other letters were written to churches he founded and visited. But when he wrote his letter to the Romans, he had not yet been there. I believe Paul's letter to the Romans offers such a complete teaching on the saving work of our Lord because Paul had never personally taught them. Therefore, he needed to be much more thorough in his writing.

The Book of Romans can be divided into two parts: theological instruction and practical exhortation. In chapters 1 through 11, Paul powerfully explains our Lord's saving work—what His sacrifice on the cross means and how we are sinners saved by grace. The turning point of the book occurs at the beginning of chapter 12. The rest of Romans essentially tells us what we should do in response to what God has done for us in Christ.

Chapter 12 is a somewhat complete passage that gives an excellent summary of how we should live in response to God's mercy. It challenges us regarding both what we should do in our service for the Lord and how we should fulfill those actions with the right attitudes.

In this book, I especially focus on Romans 12:11, which exhorts us to do everything with diligence, zeal and passion. Other passages in the chapter give specific attitudes attached to specific actions, but verse 11 is appropriate to all of the actions Paul lists. Everything should be done with diligence and fervency. This is similar to Paul's challenge to the Colossian believers to "do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."¹

The statement Paul makes in Romans 12:11—"keep your spiritual fervor," is an imperative—a command. The truth is, we are capable of doing things that will help us keep our spiritual fervor.

God's Word does not command us to do anything we are not capable of doing, either naturally or with the means and power He has provided us. The apostle Peter said, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."²

Paul expresses this divine/human interaction in Colossians 1:29: "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Notice that Paul advocates human effort shown by discipline ("I labor, striving") that depends on God ("according to His power"). While dependence and discipline are distinct from one another, they cannot be totally separated from each other. Each is essential.

While we can depend on the Holy Spirit to help fuel our passion, at the same time we must discipline

ourselves to keep our fervency.

This principle is clearly seen in Romans 12:1, 2. The meaning is even clearer when read in the original Greek. After giving such a complete explanation of the wonderful work of grace in the sacrifice of Jesus, Paul says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."³

Note that while these two verses are essentially commands, the first of the three actions is active and the last is passive. The middle action is in the Greek middle voice, which we do not have in English. The middle voice means that the subject is involved in the choice of the action. In other words, the world will conform us to its pattern, but we are responsible not to let that happen. And while the act of being transformed is passive, we are responsible to let God change us. In each case, we have personal responsibility.

An illustration of this principle is divine healing. I have personally witnessed a number of instantaneous healings. But I have never seen or heard a testimony of a person who instantaneously lost weight. Why? Because there is something we can do about weight loss. God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves through discipline.

¹ Colossians 3:23-24

² 2 Peter 1:3, NIV

³ Romans 12:1-2

⁴ James 1:22

Fading Passion

An extensive study related to personal evangelism revealed a consistent pattern in American evangelical churches. Almost all personal evangelism is done by less than 10 percent of the congregation. Of that 10 percent, the vast majority have been Christians less than one year.

Perhaps you have heard someone described as a "zealous new Christian." Why is the word "zeal" so often associated with new Christians? Possibly because many Christians' spiritual passion fades in time.

My Grandpa VanDover was a "zealous old Christian." The grace of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Spirit ignited a fervency in his heart that never diminished.

Grandpa was a bartender and a drunkard who dealt cards and raked the poker table in a gambling house. Grandma had received Christ in meetings preached by P.T. Emmett, an Assemblies of God pastor. Not long after, Pastor Emmett drove to Grandpa's bar and asked him to step outside. He challenged Grandpa to commit his life to Christ and become a Christian husband and father. Grandpa was saved that week and took off his poker apron for the last time.

Until Grandpa VanDover went home to be with the Lord at age 82, he never lost the joy and wonder of his salvation. I took him out for lunch frequently during the final years of his life. If a waitress gave him 30 seconds, he was 30 seconds into his testimony of how God saved a drunken bartender more than 40 years before.

In Romans 12:11, Paul says, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."¹

The Greek word translated "zeal" is *spoude*, which speaks of earnestness or diligence. The Greek word translated "fervor" (*zeo*) has a connotation of temperature. It means "boiling" when referring to liquids and "glowing" when referring to solids. The Revised Standard Version accurately translates the expression for "spiritual fervor" as "aglow with the Spirit."

Other translators express similar imagery, such as "Keep your spirit at boiling point,"² "Maintain the spiritual glow,"³ and "Keep the fires of the spirit burning."⁴

From his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus Road, Paul was never the same. The fire in his soul never seemed to diminish. While this is not the norm of most Christians' experience, it is certainly God's will. The New Testament is clear that the spiritual life of the church was designed by God to exhibit a constant flow of His Spirit within and through His people.

A familiar hymn from my Pentecostal youth included this verse: "Revive us again; fill each heart with Thy love; May each soul be rekindled with fire from above." We don't really have a problem obtaining the fire; our problem is retaining the fire. Paul reminded Timothy to "kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you."⁵

Our service for the Lord goes beyond mere actions. It also relates to the manner in which we serve Him. A good question to ask ourselves is this: "Am I still doing the right things but without the right attitude?"

Jesus commended the church at Ephesus, one of the greatest churches in the New Testament era, for the fact that their doctrines and deeds were right. However, the believers had left their first love.⁶ Their spiritual fervor was gone. Right belief and right actions are important, but they must be done in the right way. If not, our spiritual fire is in danger of quickly fading.

Paul consistently addresses the importance of how we do what we do in our service for the Lord. In Romans 12:8, he gives examples of three spiritual gifts and how they should be exercised. If someone gives, it should be with generosity. This is not merely talking about the amount of the gift but giving with a generous spirit. Paul tells the Corinthians that giving should not be done "grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver"⁷—someone who gives joyfully. He states in Romans 12:8 that those who are spiritually gifted in leading should do so diligently or zealously. He repeats the same word in verse 11 to reinforce that all believers should not lack in diligence or zeal. Lastly, in verse 8 he says that those who show mercy need to do so cheerfully. It is not enough just to be merciful. We should have such an appreciation for God's grace that we show mercy with joy because God first showed mercy to us. Notice that in addressing each of these spiritual gifts Paul emphasizes not only what should be done but also how it should be done.

Even if we continue to do the right things, we can become like the church in Ephesus and lose our first love. However, we can kindle spiritual fire afresh in our hearts.

Second Corinthians 5:1-15, reveal two major factors at the heart of Paul's zealous, fervent life:

- (1) His focus on the eternal rather than the temporal
- (2) His personal devotion to Jesus Christ

In the first few verses of the chapter he rejoiced in the reality of our eternal "dwelling from heaven."⁸ For Paul, our earthly body does not even merit being called a building. Rather, it is a tent—a temporary dwelling.

Because of his devotion to Christ and his eye on eternity, whether he lived or died was not the point. He preferred death to life because death meant being at home with the Lord. For this reason, he could say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁹

Paul expressed to the Corinthians that his single ambition was to please Jesus.¹⁰ "Why? "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."¹¹ The judgment seat of Christ is an awesome thing to face.

When Paul admonished Timothy to "kindle afresh" the gift of God within him, he was telling Timothy that his spiritual fire was burning low and that he could and must do something about it.

Remember, our problem is not as much obtaining the fire as it is retaining the fire. But how do we retain spiritual fire? By maintaining that fire.

As a Boy Scout I learned that to maintain a fire, I needed three things: a constant, fresh supply of wood; a free flow of air; and continual cleaning out of ashes. Without these three things, a fire will diminish.

The same is true spiritually. To maintain the zeal of devotion to the Lord, we need three similar ingredients.

- (1) A constant, fresh supply of the Word
- (2) A free flow of the Spirit in our prayer life
- (3) Continuous cleansing from sin and self-will

Paul feared that the passion for Christ would diminish in the Corinthian believers. He said, “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”¹²

As with Paul, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and eternity. The simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ will enable us to obey Paul’s exhortation not to be lacking in zeal, but keep our spiritual fervor.

My Grandpa Hurst lived a rich, full life as a Pentecostal preacher. He retired from the pastorate early to care for my grandma who was slowly dying from cancer. Even in retirement he was always zealous—daily searching the Word and spending time in prayer. He never stopped growing spiritually. When he went home to be with the Lord at age 89, his final utterances were a prayer in tongues and a song: “Oh, how I love Jesus, Because He first loved me!” The controlling focus of His life was still Jesus.

Thomas Trask, former general superintendent of the U.S. Assemblies of God, has been a close friend for many years. After a lifetime in pastoral ministry and district and national leadership, he exemplifies someone who has retained his spiritual passion. His personal commitment to be a consistent and effective witness to those with whom he interacts in the business community and among his neighbors is evidence of his devotion to Christ and focus on eternity.

One day Brother Trask called me in my office and asked me to go with him immediately to the hospital. On the way he explained the details.

Eddie was a business acquaintance of ours. A man who worked with Eddie told Brother Trask that Eddie had suffered a heart attack. Doctors weren’t sure if he would live. Brother Trask said to me, “We must make sure he is ready to meet the Lord!”

We walked into Eddie’s room in the coronary care unit. After a few words of greeting and inquiry, Brother Trask got right to the point.

“Eddie,” he said with great kindness, “I’m not trying to scare you, but the doctors say they’re not sure if you’ll make it.”

“I know,” Eddie replied. “They told me.”

“Randy and I had to come and talk with you today,” Brother Trask continued. “I have to know that you’re ready for heaven.”

I wish I had a videotape of the ensuing conversation. With a gracious and passionate demeanor, Brother Trask gently but clearly led Eddie to the point of decision.

“Are you ready to surrender your life to Christ?” he asked. Eddie replied that he was. “Then I’m going to ask Randy to lead us in prayer, and you and I will follow him.”

I led in a sinner’s prayer as Brother Trask and Eddie responded. Then Brother Trask prayed for Eddie’s new life in Christ and for his physical recovery. Eddie lived and went back to work—a new person in Christ. About a year later Eddie died and went to be with the Lord.

We can retain our passion and always be ready to share Christ. The teaching of God’s Word is clear. We are each responsible for our own spiritual condition.

The spiritual passion in our hearts doesn’t have to fade. We can, with God’s help, maintain our spiritual fire. In Romans 12, where Paul tells us to keep our spiritual fervor in our service for the Lord, he also reveals principles that will show us how, as we will see in the following chapters.

1 NIV

2 William Barclay

3 James Moffatt

4 J. B. Phillips

5 2 Timothy 1:6

6 Revelation 2:2-4

7 2 Corinthians 9:7

8 2 Corinthians 5:2

9 Philippians 1:21, NIV

10 2 Corinthians 5:8-9

11 2 Corinthians 5:10

12 2 Corinthians 11:3

Taking Your Spiritual Temperature

When Jesus appeared to the apostle John on the island of Patmos, He gave John messages for seven churches in Asia. Along with giving commendations, He described the spiritual state of each church and offered correction and rebuke.

Addressing the church at Laodicea, He said: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."¹

The term translated "lukewarm" is used only once in the New Testament, and its significance is clear. Hot is preferred to cold, but either is preferred to lukewarm.

The problem with being lukewarm is that everything seems acceptable. At least the person who is spiritually cold usually realizes it. Yet God's Word is clear that unawareness of spiritual need is extremely dangerous. That is why Jesus said the poor in spirit are blessed. They know and recognize their spiritual need.

Fervent Christians are often characterized as being "on fire for the Lord." How can we know if we are fervent? How can we gauge our spiritual temperature? We cannot adequately assess our spiritual condition without God's help. To reignite our "spiritual fire," we need truth from His Word and help from His Spirit.

I believe Romans 12, verses 11 and 12 can help us determine our spiritual temperature and recognize our spiritual need. The apostle Paul's purpose in this passage is to address believers and focus on practical heart issues. Immediately following his challenge to "keep your spiritual fervor," he notes these three spiritual qualities: "rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer."²

In each case, the spiritual condition described has an application both in attitude and in action. When someone is "rejoicing in hope," their *attitude* is joyful, which is also translated into *active* rejoicing. When they are "persevering in tribulation," they have an *attitude* of patience, which is demonstrated in the *action* of enduring through trials. A person who is "devoted to prayer" not only has an *attitude* of devotion to prayer, but ongoing *action* of continuing in prayer. The American Standard Version accurately translates this as "continuing steadfastly in prayer."

Rejoicing in Hope

In this context, the concept of hope relates to looking toward the future with positive anticipation. For the person who is growing in Christ, life can get better and better, even when circumstances get progressively worse. Though we suffer the effects of age as all humans do, we can grow stronger and more joyful in spirit, possessing greater faith and a deeper peace.

Jesus' first miracle illustrates this spiritual principle. When Jesus turned the water into wine, the master of the wedding banquet said in amazement, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."³

When we serve Jesus, He always saves the best until last. When we live in God's will, Christian service gets better and better. Christian marriage gets better and better. Everything done with Christ as Lord makes life increasingly better.

On the other hand, when the enemy brings temptation in the fleeting pleasures of sin, he offers his best first and then the rest is downhill. The first taste of sin gives the most pleasure. Ask any addict. The first high is the best. The same is true of drunkenness or any other sin. But soon more and more is required to get less and less satisfaction.

Along with bringing greater hope for the future in this life, rejoicing in hope involves looking forward to heaven and eternity at the return of our Lord. Paul refers to this in Titus 2:11-13: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the *blessed hope* and the appearing of the glory

of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

Christians are to live joyfully in the present, but our greatest joy is reserved for eternity.

In the Parable of the Sower, the thorns that choked the spiritual life in the plant are described as “worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life.”⁴ Focusing only on this life and its temporary pleasures will destroy the spiritual life that begins in our hearts when we receive the message of Christ’s Kingdom.

The fervent Christian enjoys a fruitful life now while looking forward to a joy-filled eternity.

Persevering in Tribulation

A fervent heart enables a Christian to face the hard realities and inevitable suffering believers will face in life.

Surrounded by comfortable churches and religious freedoms, we can easily forget that suffering for the cause of advancing Christ’s kingdom still exists. In many places in the world, severe persecution is a constant reality. Multitudes of believers endure hardship and even torture for their unwavering dedication to Christ.

While we will never know the names or exact number of Christians who have suffered for their faith, several Assemblies of God pastors in Iran stand as testimonies to them all. They paid the ultimate price for their faithfulness to God’s call and remind us why prayer for the suffering church is so vital.

In 1994, Haik Hovsepian, general superintendent of the Iran Assemblies of God, valiantly and boldly appealed to the world on behalf of AG pastor Mehdi Dibaj. Pastor Dibaj was scheduled for execution after 10 years of imprisonment for converting to Christianity.

Born into a prosperous Iranian family, Mehdi received Christ as Savior as a teenager after reading a gospel tract. During his imprisonment, he endured unending pressures to recant his faith, including two years of solitary confinement in a 4-foot square cage. During this time he endured numerous beatings and mock executions.

In a written defense for his court trial on December 3, 1993, Mehdi wrote: “Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore, I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of His holy name, but I am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord and enter His kingdom sooner, the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life.”

Haik knew he had to speak out against violations of religious rights. On January 10, 1994, he wrote to a missionary: “Please don’t worry about me; I am quite ready for anything.” He knew that speaking publicly on behalf of Mehdi could mean his death, but he counted the cost.

His appeal was effective, and Mehdi was released from prison January 16. The next day he entered Haik’s home in Tehran, where 50 believers joyously greeted him by singing, “In the name of Jesus, we have the victory!”

Only two days later, while on his way to the airport to pick up a family member, Haik disappeared. A week passed before international news media were informed, and the family was called to the morgue to identify his body. When they arrived, they were instead given photographs of Haik’s body, which showed evidence of torture. On February 3, about 2,000 people from across Iran gathered in bitter cold and stood for three hours in the cemetery for Haik’s funeral.

Immediately afterward, Mehdi set out to travel around Iran and encourage local churches. One Iranian believer said, “We all noticed how his face was shining. The light and love of Christ shone from his face.”

Just six months after his release from prison, Mehdi’s body was found in an alley. He had been stabbed multiple times, and his assassin was never identified.

Mehdi once said, “It is a terrible waste for a Christian to die a natural death.” His courage and commitment to Christ served to strengthen believers in Iran to press on, despite the cost.

Mohammad Bagher Yusefi, a 34-year-old pastor who helped care for Mehdi’s sons during his imprisonment, was killed less than three years later. His body was found hanging from a tree near his home.

How can believers endure such great physical and emotional suffering as these men did without breaking? How can faith be so strong?

A fervent heart enables a follower of Christ to persevere in tribulation.

Devoted to Prayer

Of the three spiritual conditions Paul gave, the third one—devotion to prayer—is the most objectively and easily measurable. While we may have difficulty assessing whether we are truly rejoicing in hope or persevering in tribulation, we can certainly evaluate whether we are devoted to prayer. Are our prayers merely perfunctory or only offered fleetingly in times of need? Do we find it difficult to spend time in our Lord’s presence, pouring out our heart to Him, worshipping in adoration, freely confessing our sins, thanking Him for His blessings and petitioning Him with our needs? The answer to these questions is a clear indication whether our spirits have become lukewarm or even cold.

By looking at our souls in the mirror of the truth of God’s Word and seeking the Holy Spirit’s help, we should be able to ascertain if we have diminished in our passion for the Lord and need to “kindle afresh the gift of God”⁵ within us. If our spiritual temperature is not what it should be, God’s Word will direct us as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to refuel His fire in our hearts.

¹ Revelation 3:15, 16

² Romans 12: 11, 12

³ John 2:10, NIV

⁴ Luke 8:14

⁵ 2 Timothy 1:6

The Spark of Fervency

My friend Mike McClaflin, AG World Missions regional director for Africa, asked the general superintendent of the Tanzania AG why Tanzanian believers are so passionate in evangelism. “We’ve never forgotten how desperately lost we were,” the superintendent replied. “And we’ve never forgotten how great a price Jesus paid to save us.”

This African church leader expressed the feelings of believers who truly have an awareness and appreciation of our Lord’s sacrifice. When we lose that sensitivity to Christ’s marvelous grace, our passion for the Lord and His service diminishes.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul described the effect the love of Christ had on his heart: “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”¹

The Greek word translated “compels” in this verse is *sunecho*. In the King James Version the word is translated “constrained.” In the Gospels, it is often translated “taken with.” People who were brought to Jesus were “*taken with* diverse diseases and torments.”² Peter’s mother-in-law was “*taken with* a great fever.”³ People in the country of the Gadarenes were described as “*taken with* great fear.”⁴ *Sunecho* is also rendered “throng” in the account of the woman with the issue of blood who pressed through the crowd to Jesus. Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” and Peter told Him, “Master, the multitude *throng* thee.”⁵

As people were “taken with” diseases, fever or fear and Jesus was pressed in on all sides by a throng of people, so Paul describes the degree to which the love of Christ controlled him. Comprehending Christ’s grace and love in our lives prompts a passion for Him that grips us as a fever or disease controls a body.

For Paul, Christ’s compelling love represented much more than a sentimental or emotional feeling. He concluded that Jesus died for all, therefore we “should no longer live for ourselves but for Him.”⁶ The Greek

word translated here as *concluded* refers to making an intellectual and ethical judgment, not a decision based on emotionalism.

Paul's fervency was founded in his wholehearted devotion to Jesus. To him the issue was simple: life is a response to the sacrifice of our Lord. He said it clearly in his well-known statement: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."⁷

The King James Version renders "spiritual act of worship" as "reasonable service." The New International Version translates it "spiritual worship." The New American Standard says "spiritual service of worship." The original Greek expression is translated interchangeably throughout the New Testament as both "service" and "worship." Very simply, our service for God is also our worship to Him. We cannot separate the concepts of worship and service. We worship the Lord in church on Sunday, but we also worship Him through our service Monday through Saturday.

For many new believers, the impact of God's grace on their hearts is so powerful that they immediately have a passion to share Jesus with others. Maria Lourdes experienced that passion, and God used her in a dramatic way.

Nineteen-year-old Maria committed her life to Christ in 1973 on the first night of missionary-evangelist Bernhard Johnson's evangelistic crusade in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The next night she was filled with the Holy Spirit. The following Sunday morning in church, the pastor challenged the people to personal witnessing. Maria realized that she had not yet told anyone about her new faith in Christ, so she prayed, "Lord, I will tell someone today what You have done for me."

Maria was determined to witness to someone on the 40-minute bus ride home from church. But no one sat beside her. As she ran home from the bus stop, she felt she had failed God.

As she opened the door to her apartment, she sensed the Holy Spirit impressing her to go to the telephone. She opened the telephone book, closed her eyes and put her finger on the page. The book had opened to the letter "S," and her finger landed on the names Johnny and Clara Sousa. She dialed the number.

After the sixth ring, Johnny answered angrily. "Who is this?" he asked.

Maria couldn't think of anything to say. Her mind was racing, and all that came to her was the song the choir sang at the crusade. So Maria started to sing into the telephone, "Just as I am, without one plea..."

Something changed in Johnny's voice. "Please, tell me who this is," he said.

Maria answered, "My name is Maria."

"Maria, please don't hang up," Johnny pleaded. "I'll be right back." A minute later he came back on the line. "My wife, Clara, is standing next to me, and we're holding the telephone so both of us can hear. Would you please sing that song again?"

Maria sang the only two verses she knew of "Just as I Am." She didn't know the Four Spiritual Laws or the Romans Road. She couldn't even quote John 3:16. But she knew Jesus! She simply shared her personal testimony of what her life had been like before and the difference Christ had made. Now she had peace, the knowledge of sins forgiven and hope for everlasting life in heaven. She knew enough to explain to Johnny and Clara why Jesus gave His life for mankind, and she asked if they wanted to receive God's forgiveness too. Over the telephone she led them both in a prayer to receive Christ.

Then Johnny told the Sousas' story. He and Clara had been married seven years. They could not have children and were too poor by government standards to adopt a child. Six months earlier, Johnny lost his job, and they were down to their last few cents. They expected to be evicted the next day.

"My wife and I were so desperate that we took the last money we had and bought poison. We agreed to drink it together and die. I mixed two glasses and gave one to my wife. I picked up the other. We raised the glasses to our mouths, but just as the poison neared our lips the telephone rang."

Johnny and Clara Sousa's story didn't end the night they received Christ. God called them into the ministry, and Johnny became an Assemblies of God pastor. His congregation in Santa Rosa, Brazil, eventually grew to more than 20,000 members.

Testimonies abound of new believers who passionately shared the message of Christ and led others to

Him. Christ's example of God's grace sparks spiritual fire in people's hearts. That fire does not have to fade and die. It can be retained and reignited.

As great as our Lord's sacrifice was, He knew that we would have a tendency to forget its magnitude. He instituted Communion as a way to help us remember and continually go back to the Cross to ponder the meaning of His grace.

The English word "communion" implies "coming together." But in Samoa, where I served as a missionary in the South Pacific, the word for the Communion service is a compound word, "fa'amanatuga." The common prefix, "fa'a" means "to cause something to happen." The word "manatuga" means "a memory." The entire term means to create a memory of an event we did not personally witness. The bread and the wine remind us of His broken body and shed blood.

Of course, this remembrance service can become a mere ritual or ceremony. But its true purpose is to provide a time of precious remembrance that leads us to contemplate our Lord's sacrifice for us. That fresh awareness of His grace should motivate us to worship Him, serve Him and obey His command to share His message with those who have yet to experience His salvation.

How can we rekindle our zeal? We must focus on Jesus and His grace. The personal realization of our Lord's sacrifice for us sparks the flame of spiritual passion in our hearts. A verse of the great old hymn "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" says it well:

"May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire!
As Thou hast died for me, O may my love to Thee
Pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire!"

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NIV

² Matthew 4:24, KJV

³ Luke 4:38, KJV

⁴ Luke 8:37, KJV

⁵ Luke 8:45, KJV

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

⁷ Romans 12:1, NIV