

Maintaining Your Spiritual Fire

Session #2—Fuel for the Fire

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David Petts, a friend of mine in England, was studying for his master's degree in philosophy at Oxford University. One day during a tutorial, the class discussed the philosopher Descartes and his well-known ontological argument. The professor vehemently attacked David's Christian faith.

Discouraged, David went back to his room and prayed to God for help. In desperation, he opened his Bible and his eyes fell on these words: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation."¹ The verse strengthened David's spirit. In the face of opposition, he was reminded that his source of faith is God's Word.

Years ago Ruth and I returned to the United States from missionary service in Samoa so Ruth could have major surgery. With a small inheritance, we made a down payment on a little house. What I liked most about it was the fireplace.

When we moved into the house, the ground was covered with about 8 inches of snow. I wanted to make a fire right away, but I didn't have any wood. I went down the street to my parents' house, where Dad had a woodpile in the back yard. The wood had been there for several years, so it was really waterlogged. I put it in the fireplace and tried to light it, but the logs would not burn. I needed a fresh supply of wood.

In a spiritual sense, we need a regular supply of fresh fuel to maintain our spiritual fire. That fuel is the Word of God. If our bodies cannot live without food, how can our souls survive without spiritual nourishment? Jesus taught us that we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.²

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: "We also constantly thank God that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."³ Notice Paul's statement that the Word of God "performs its work" in those who believe. God's Word *works* in us. It has life-giving power. It is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."⁴

God has spoken in different ways throughout history. In Old Testament times, He spoke through His prophets. But the Old Testament was not the complete revelation of God. Humanity could not know God fully until His Son came to earth. Jesus came to reveal what God the Father is like. Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."⁵

Jesus Christ is the Living Word. He was God in human form.⁶ The writer of Hebrews tells us,

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”⁷

After Jesus came, died, rose again and ascended to heaven, God inspired men to record His life and teachings and the work of the Early Church. These writings constitute the New Testament. It ends with Jesus’ future return to earth and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom. The written revelation of God’s truth is complete.

God still speaks by His Spirit to believers, but the timeless truth of His written Word has not changed and remains complete. Since the New Testament was written, the church has suffered times of spiritual deterioration and needed revival. These times didn’t indicate a need for new truth but rather a fresh move of the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. In the Reformation, Martin Luther and other reformers did not introduce new truth. They took the church back to the truth of God’s written Word—truth that was there all along but had been forsaken. The truth of God’s Word is timeless.

Solomon said, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”⁸ Without the guidance of divine revelation, our human nature will always lead us to destruction. The Bible is our final source of authority for all that we believe and do.

The writer of Hebrews says: “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”⁹ Drifting takes no conscious effort or strategy. The currents and winds of social trend and fad—in the church as well as in the world—are always in motion. We must keep on course and not drift from the Word, regardless of trends or fads.

A great violinist said that if he failed to practice even one day, he could tell the difference. If he didn’t practice two days, his critics could tell it. If he didn’t practice three days, his audience could tell it. If we don’t feed our souls for one day, we can tell the difference. If we continue to starve our souls, those closest to us can tell it. A little longer, and anyone can tell it.

Attacks against God’s Word come repeatedly. It began in the Garden of Eden when Satan influenced Eve to question the truthfulness of what God said.¹⁰ But God’s Word cannot be destroyed. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”¹¹

Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the *power* of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”¹²

The New Testament reveals that God’s Word has these four kinds of power: regeneration, sanctification, transformation and multiplication.

The power of *regeneration*—to give new life.

The Greek word translated “regeneration” is *palingennesia*. *Palin* means “again.” *Gennesia*, from which we get the word “genesis,” means “beginning.” Regeneration simply means “beginning again.” The new birth starts a whole new life by God’s supernatural work.

Peter wrote, “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.”¹³

Paul taught that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”¹⁴

The power of *sanctification*—to cleanse our lives.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the *washing* of water with the *word*, 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.”¹⁵

God uses His Word to confront us with the truth about ourselves and expose things that need to be cleansed. God’s Word cleanses our lives and penetrates our heart’s motives.¹⁶

The power of *transformation*—to change our lives.

God uses His Word not only to cleanse us, but also to change us. The kind of change described is radical, not merely a psychological adjustment. Paul told the Romans that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.¹⁷ The verb Paul uses for “be transformed” is an imperative passive. Transformation is passive because we are not capable of changing ourselves. Only God by His grace and power can change us. The Greek word translated “transformed” here is *metamorphoo*, from which we get the word “metamorphosis.” It implies an extreme change from one kind of thing to a completely different kind of thing—a change we are not capable of making ourselves. We are responsible to present our bodies as living sacrifices and resist the world’s attempts to conform us to it, but the transformation of our character is something only God can do. We can present ourselves to Him, but *He* must change us. He uses His Word to change our thinking and transform us from the inside out.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul says that this transformation process takes place step by step, making us more like Jesus from “glory to glory.”¹⁸

The most powerful firsthand example I have known of the sanctifying and transforming power of the Word took place in the life of my sister, Judy. When Judy was in her 30s, I noticed a dramatic change in her actions, speech and temperament. I mentioned this to my wife, Ruth, and she said she had noticed the same thing. Assuming Judy was going through some sort of phase, I didn’t say anything.

About two years passed before I finally said, “Judy, you are not the sister I grew up with. Something has happened to you. What is it?” She told me her story.

Judy was always a voracious reader, but her Bible reading was more casual and sporadic. One day she read Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”²⁰

She looked up the word “diligence” in the dictionary and concluded that her spiritual life was not in a place to seek the Lord diligently. She made a commitment to be disciplined in her daily Bible reading. As she continued to read the Word with an open mind and heart, the Spirit revealed things to her concerning her heart and motives. When she saw herself as she was, she began to seek God and ask Him to change her heart. He did, and Judy has never been the same.

To me, the most instructive and powerful aspect of my sister’s transformation is that it happened after she had been a born-again believer for more than 20 years.

The power of *multiplication*—to affect others through our lives.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said that when the seed of God’s message lands upon good

ground, it produces 30, 60 and 100 times as much grain. Not only does the power of God's Word change individual lives, but it also multiplies through those lives to change others. As Jesus revealed in the Parable of the Mustard Seed¹⁹, what begins as a seemingly small work can grow to enormous proportions. The power of God's message multiplies once it is received by a person whose heart is productive soil.

With God's help, we *can* change—even after serving the Lord for many years. The Word of God can fuel that dramatic transformation and keep our spiritual fire burning.

¹ Psalm 119:99, KJV

² Matthew 4:4

³ 1 Thessalonians 2:13

⁴ Hebrews 4:12

⁵ John 14:8-9

⁶ See John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:6,7

⁷ Hebrews 1:1,2, NIV

⁸ Proverbs 29:18, NIV

⁹ Hebrews 2:1

¹⁰ See Genesis 3:1-5

¹¹ Isaiah 40:8

¹² Romans 1:16, NIV

¹³ 1 Peter 1:23

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:25-27

¹⁶ Hebrews 4:12, NIV

¹⁷ Romans 12:2

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV

¹⁹ Matthew 13:31-32

²⁰ KJV