

Carry the Fire!
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I felt led to study to topic of fire this week. I looked at every biblical reference to fire – and there are hundreds.

One of the first mentions of fire is found in Genesis 22, which is the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son. Of course, God did not allow that to happen. But I want you to see verse 6, which says:

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.

I'm not teaching this story today, I just want you to see this:
 Abraham did not expect someone else to carry the fire!
 He did not expect the fire to be already lit when he arrived.
 He carried the fire with him.

I'm preaching a message called Carry the Fire!

God wants all of us to be carriers of His fire. By fire I am not referring to actual burning flames. I am talking about being a carrier of the fire of God!
 The zeal of the Lord! The presence and power of the Holy Spirit!

You see, FIRE in the Bible represents:

God's Presence

2 Chronicles 7:3

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord.

God's Protection

In Zechariah 2:5 God speaks of Jerusalem and says: *“And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,” declares the Lord, “and I will be its glory within.”*

God's Power

Hebrews 12:29 says - *Our God is a consuming fire.*

God's Purification

Baptism of fire – John the Baptist spoke of Jesus in Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

God's Judgment and Punishment

Revelation 20:14-15

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

One of the fascinating passages about fire is found in Luke 12:49-50 where Jesus said:

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Some commentators think this fire has to do with the division and discord that came to earth because of the gospel of Christ. I find it hard to believe that Jesus was looking forward to that! It makes more sense to take these words as the expression of Christ's longing for an outpouring of the Spirit in power the like of which had not yet been seen in history. Jesus had to die before this could happen. That was the baptism He had to go through before the Holy Spirit came.

But one day the fire fell like He said it would! Acts 2:1-4 says:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit kindled the fire of God on earth that judged sin but also resulted in spiritual life, power and purification.

The synonyms for the word fire are passion, excitement, enthusiasm, exuberance, intensity and zeal. The antonyms – or opposite meanings – are apathy, indifference, lack of interest, lethargy, laziness, lack of spirit.

Which describes you better?

Passionate or apathetic?

Interested or indifferent?

Excited or bored?

Zeal or laziness?

And do you think it really matters?

Well it matters to Jesus! Here's what He said in Revelation 3:15-19

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent.

The Amplified version says –

So be enthusiastic and in earnest and burning with zeal and repent [changing your mind and attitude].

The Wuest Translation says –

Be constantly zealous, therefore, and have a change of mind at once.

Evidently, God does not desire for us to be lukewarm, but zealous. And evidently, we have the choice to be zealous or not! Lack of zeal is something Jesus said we need to repent of!

Biblically – the word is zealoo and it means to be on fire, to boil, to desire earnestly and pursue with exertion, or intense effort.

The bottom line is this: God wants us to be on fire for Him! On fire – not lukewarm! Constantly on fire – not occasionally. So – how do we catch fire, stay on fire and carry the fire of God?

I want to talk for a few moments about the science of fire. Fire is the phenomenon of combustion caused by the chemical reaction between a fuel and oxygen. Fire is manifested in light, flame, and heat.

Fires don't just happen. Certain conditions must be met for a fire to start. For fire to start the following 5 things are needed:

FUEL – OXYGEN – HEAT - CHEMICAL REACTION - IGNITION

Take away any one and the fire goes out.

For instance, we can remove fuel from the path of a fire to stop it. This is why firebreaks are constructed in forests. A firebreak is a wide strip of land where there are no trees. If there were to be a forest fire, the fire would run out of fuel when it came to the firebreak.

We can remove heat from the fire by applying water, which absorbs a lot of heat.

We can remove oxygen by smothering the fire. We throw sand on a campfire to extinguish it.

You might throw a fire blanket over a burning pan in a kitchen. Firefighters often use a blanket of foam over fire.

You can remove the chemical reaction in a fire with special extinguishing agents that are able to remove the free radicals from flames and prevent the chemical reactions that occur in flames. These agents are used in fire extinguishers.

Okay, Fire Marshall Joe – enough about fire! What’s this got to do with me? Here’s the application:

There are 3 observable manifestations of fire: light, flame and heat. These manifestations are either seen or felt. And those same 3 manifestations of the fire of God should be seen in us!

Matthew 5:14 says *we are the light of the world.*

2 Timothy 1:6 says we must *fan into flame the spiritual gift God gave you.*

The Amplified Version says: *stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you.*

Rev. 3:15 says God wants us to be hot, not lukewarm.

So, we are to manifest the characteristics of fire: light, flame and heat. But we cannot manifest the characteristics of fire without being on fire!

We saw that for fire to start the following 5 things are needed:
FUEL – OXYGEN – HEAT - CHEMICAL REACTION - IGNITION

Spiritually speaking, here’s how I see this:

- The fuel is the word.
Jeremiah 23:29 says "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord.
- The oxygen is the presence of God – the spiritual atmosphere
- The heat is our zeal for God
- The reaction is relationships in the body of Christ that fan our flame
- The ignition is prayer

James 5:16-18 says:

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Fervent prayer is passionate, zealous, burning, intense. In fact, the Holman Version says *The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful.* It’s interesting to see this verse in the original Greek.

When it says Elijah prayed earnestly – it basically uses the same word twice. That's why Young's Literal Translation says:

Elijah was a man like affected as we, and with prayer he did pray —

I like the way Pastor Olen used to say it: this means Elijah prayed in his prayer! He didn't just say some religious sounding words. He actually prayed in his prayers!

Obviously, we play a role in the fire of God. We must be in the word, in prayer, in God's presence, in church – we must remain on fire for God.

Are all five elements present in your life for fire to burn? Remember, remove any one and the fire goes out.

Where are you now? Smoldering? Smoking? Blazing? Or totally out? What's going to set you on fire? Do you really think you will just spontaneously combust someday? Don't expect to be on fire for God if you're not in the word, not in prayer, not in church, not in the presence of God.

I don't really have time to talk about all the elements of fire today, so, I want to concentrate on zeal for God. Remember - Zeal is a synonym for fire. Other synonyms are passion, fervor, enthusiasm – these are all intense emotions which compel action. Romans 12:11 says:

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

The word fervent means boiling hot – so hot you glow. In fact the RSV translates this *be aglow with the spirit*.

If you recall back to Rev. 3 and the church at Laodicea - they were not on fire for God – they were lukewarm.

The Lord said in v. 19 - *So be zealous, and repent.*

The Amplified Version says - *So be enthusiastic and earnest and burning with zeal.*

God is saying, if your fire is low, fan it; if you're not on fire, get on fire. He didn't say wait for someone else or wait for spontaneous combustion, just get on fire. He holds us responsible for being on fire spiritually. If it goes out, it's our fault. God does not put our fire out, not matter how weak it is. Isaiah 42:3 says:

A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.

In the Old Testament, the priests were responsible to keep a fire burning on the altar at all times. Leviticus 6:13 says:

The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.

The responsibility to keep the fire burning was the priests', not God's!
 To keep a fire burning takes care and observation.
 They had to work day and night to keep it going!

When we are born again, God places His Holy Spirit in us. And He wants to baptize us in the Holy Spirit and fire. To let the fire go out is to quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 says:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

Quench means to extinguish, to put out, or to let go out through neglect. In fact, the NIV translates this verse: *Do not put out the Spirit's fire...*
 What quenches the Spirit? The other verses tell us that we quench the Spirit when we:
 Don't rejoice always
 Don't pray
 Are not thankful in everything
 Despise prophecy and the gifts of the spirit
 Give in to sin

So, what do we do to carry the fire of God? You get all five elements and the fire will happen.

Fuel + oxygen + chemical reaction + heat + ignition = fire.
 Word + God's presence + godly relationships + zeal + prayer = fire.

Zeal is important because it touches our heart for God. You can pray without zeal, read the Bible without zeal... but if they are not done with a heart after God, without zeal, there will be no fire. Paul addressed this in Romans 10:1-2

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Now – Israel had a zeal for God's word – so what was the problem? Jesus addressed this in John 5:39-40

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.

Zeal without knowledge is zeal based on outwardly conforming to God's laws without every really knowing God Himself! You can know the written word without every knowing the Living Word! But when you begin to know God personally – you will carry His fire!

Many people are apathetic or indifferent toward church today. But what was Christ's attitude towards church? John 2:17 says this about Him –

Zeal for your house will consume Me.

The Good News Version says –

My devotion to Your house, O God, burns in Me like a fire.

And people today have the audacity to say they don't care about church. Even so-called believers! So many Christians are passive about spiritual things, but Matthew 11:12 says:

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

The Amplified Version says - *...seize it by force [as a precious prize--a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion].*

God is telling us how His kingdom is advanced. Some people think – “If God is in something, it will just happen.” No, it won't! Faith without works is dead.

The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advanced. This principle of forcefully advancing is true in every area of life. It takes force to advance spiritually, mentally, physically. That's why 1 Corinthians 12:31 tells us to:

...earnestly desire and zealously cultivate the greatest and best gifts.

We need everything God has to be able to forcefully advance. We cannot do it with human zeal or effort. It requires the fire of the Holy Spirit! So acquire the fire!

So, don't wait for somebody to light a fire in you – you carry the fire!
Don't expect someone to hold your feet to the fire – you carry the fire!
Don't blame your lack of zeal on having too many irons in the fire – you carry the fire!

Even when it seems like you're standing in the line of fire – you carry the fire!
How's the world going to be on fire for Jesus if we don't carry the fire?

The key to carrying the fire is to do what Jesus said in Revelation 2:2-5

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance... You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

The Greek word for “first” in this verse is: *protos* (pro'-tos); which means “foremost (in time, place, order or importance).”

What has first place in your heart and life? What is most important to you?
What is your main priority?

The word priority means “the fact or condition of being prior; to take precedence or go before in time, place, order, rank or importance.”

Our priorities show what is important to us. And if we are going to carry the fire of God we must repent of our lack of zeal, repent of leaving our first love, and get to the place where God is first in our lives.

When we know God for who He truly is we will love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And when we love Him – guess what happens? Song of Solomon 8:5 tells us:

Love is as strong as death... it burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.

When you love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength you will be on fire for Him!

This is what changes the disciplines and duties of faith into delight!

- Reading the word can be a duty, but when you love the Lord with all your heart, you will love to hear from Him.
- Praying can be a discipline, but when you love the Lord with all your heart you will love to speak with Him.
- Witnessing can be scary, but when you love the Lord with all your heart, you want to tell others about Him!
- Giving can be a burden, but when you love the Lord with all your heart, you don't argue about percentages of giving, you say Lord I love you with all my heart and everything I have is yours!

When you begin to live and love like that – you will catch on fire for God.
And you will carry that fire to affect your world and generations to follow!