

SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASM

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INTRODUCTION

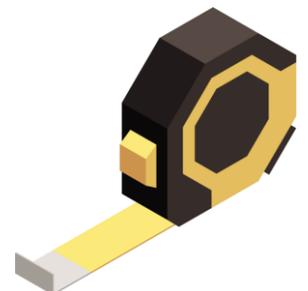
I have several reasons for sharing this lecture. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit would encourage all of us, but I pray also that we would be instructed in the things of the Word of God. The Bible has much to say in the way of Biblical instruction to godly leadership. But I realize also that the family of God needs to be encouraged. So I am going to talk about how to keep that spiritual enthusiasm in your ministry .

When a person will trust Jesus Christ to be their personal Savior, God places a fire down in their heart. But after a while many times that fire begins to burn very low. The Bible teaches, that we need to fan the flame so that the fire may be large again. It is my prayer that the Spirit of God would fan that flame within our hearts. I want to encourage you to turn with me to 2 Timothy 1:3-7. God used the Apostle Paul to disciple a young man named Timothy. Everyone needs an encourager in their life. Let us begin with verse number three:

"I thank God whom I serve for my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers, night and day, greatly desiring to see thee. Being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy. When I call to remembrance the unseen faith that is in thee which dwelt first in thy grandmother, Lois, and thy mother, Eunice, and I am persuaded that is in you also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

I. THE GREATEST DANGER — TRYING TO MEASURE WHAT GOD IS DOING IN YOUR MINISTRY

Let me talk to you about one of the greatest dangers in your ministry. It is the danger of trying to measure all that God is doing with your ministry. You and I do not have the ability to measure what God is doing. If I were to come to you, and I were to pose this question: "How are things going in your ministry?" you would begin to tell me all of the things that you sense God is doing.



Solomon told us many years ago in the book of Ecclesiastes that God's business is past our finding out. You may know some of the things God is doing in your ministry, but you do not know all God is doing in your ministry.

II. INVEST YOURSELF IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Let me introduce the book of Timothy and illustrate this truth. Let us talk a little bit about Paul's first missionary journey. The Bible teaches that he preached in the city of Iconia and Lystra. When he was in the city of Lystra they stoned him and left him for dead. God had mercy on Paul and raised him up. I am sure if someone would have asked him "How was your ministry in Lystra?" he would have to say "Not very good, they almost killed me." But we come back two years later to that same city. The Bible says there was a young man, and everyone spoke well of him. The Bible speaks of this in Acts 16:1-3. That day when Paul preached in the city of Lystra God saved a young man named Timothy. Jesus Christ greatly changed Timothy's life. It is believed that Timothy was approximately fifteen years old when he became a Christian. When he was about eighteen years old, Paul asked him to travel with him. Now remember, Paul was the greatest missionary statesman that ever lived. You have heard of Dr. Billy Graham. Could you imagine being asked to travel with Billy Graham when you were only eighteen years old? But the Bible says that Timothy was asked to travel with the great Apostle Paul. He traveled with him doing evangelistic services for approximately ten years.

Now in Paul's ministry there was a particular city that he loved more than any other city. That city happened to be the city of Ephesus. Paul said "We need to put a very strong church in the city of Ephesus." He said "We will need a very strong preacher." So he chose as the preacher young Timothy. It is believed now that Timothy was approximately thirty years of age. And he becomes the pastor of the great church in Ephesus.

Now remember, 2 Timothy is the very last letter that the Apostle Paul ever wrote. He is writing from a Roman prison to encourage a young preacher. He knows that if Timothy is going to do a good job, he must be encouraged. So this passage makes it very clear that Timothy's experiences, served as preparation for this ministry. And Paul encouraged him concerning the genuineness of his relationship with God. In the text that we read just a moment ago Paul was seeking to encourage Timothy by telling him that the Spirit of God within him would give him all the power that was needed for his ministry. So Paul is not writing because of his own concern, but he is writing to express his concern for Timothy and also for the success of the Gospel ministry. Paul is attempting to fortify Timothy for his accomplishment because soon Paul would be gone.

Many of you men and women are very young in age. God has given Abraham Bible a great vision, and He has given him a great love for you men and women, but he sees himself as investing his life in you for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. He desires to see Jesus Christ give you steadfastness in your ministry. He wants you to have a courageous enthusiasm.

III. FOUR THINGS NEEDED FOR SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASM

If you are going to stay enthusiastic in your service for Jesus Christ I believe the Bible teaches there are four things that you must have in your ministry. Now these are the four things that Paul gave to Timothy. And if Timothy needed it two thousand years ago, I believe that you and I will need it today.

A. The first thing that we all need is affection

The Bible makes it clear that Paul loved Timothy. He referred to him as "my dearly beloved son." It speaks about a love from which one gains strength and encouragement. I pastor a wonderful church in the United States. One of the great joys in pastoring that church is feeling so loved by the people. I often times receive letters or notes of encouragement from someone that loves me. I know first of all that God loves me and He demonstrated that love at the cross. The greatest portrait of love in the Bible is seen at Calvary's Cross. There may be many things that I will question in life, but I will never question whether God loves me or not. But Timothy could say "Paul loves me also." Unless somewhere in your ministry you are being loved by others, you will become very discouraged in your ministry.

B. Intercession

But there is a second thing that you are going to need in your ministry. We all need intercession. We need someone that is praying for us. Paul said these words to young Timothy. He said “I am praying for you without ceasing.” He said “Often times when I am praying for you I begin to weep before God the Father.” He says “I have a pure conscience before God.” A pure conscience gave power to Paul’s prayer. So Paul made a commitment to pray for Timothy. I know that you understand that 1 Timothy is a letter.

Can you imagine the day that Timothy received this letter in the mail from Rome? It became a very personal and precious letter to his life. If Timothy were alive today, and he was coming to this type of Bible conference, I believe he would bring that letter with him. People would say “Timothy, have you heard from Paul lately?” He would say “Yes, I have a letter right here especially to me.” He would say “Look, Paul is praying for me every day. Not only is he praying for me, but he loves me very much. I am very encouraged to receive this letter from him.”

A lady in America called me the other day. She said “God woke me up very early in the morning to pray for you.” She said “The reason I am calling you: are you okay?” I said “I am doing fine. Why do you ask?” She said “Because I prayed for you for four hours this morning.” She said “I felt within my heart that you were in much trouble.” I said “No, I know of no trouble.” Why does God ask people to pray for us? The Bible teaches us that our war takes place in the heavenlies. Paul said “We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers.” Could it be that God asked her to pray in order to intercept the trouble in the heavenlies? I believe I could have been in trouble had someone not prayed.

Every one of you are servants of God, you need to have a prayer ministry that undergirds your ministry. You need to ask people to pray for particular things in your ministry. I would never come to your country to minister the Word of God without knowing that I had hundreds praying for me in the United States. There has also been much prayer in Romania about my service here. We need those that will be praying for us. Paul, with a very tender heart, talked to God on Timothy’s behalf. So I need affection, I need intercession, but there is something else I need.

C. I also need devotion

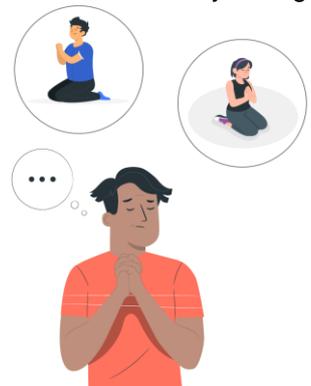
I need someone that will encourage me for the things that I do. Every now and then I need someone to pat me on the back and say “That was a good job.” Remember, we are talking about spiritual enthusiasm in service. If no one is praying for you and no one is loving you and no one is encouraging you, you may be doing your ministry, but you will not be doing that ministry enthusiastically. Paul said “When I think about your life, Timothy, I am reminded that you have a very sincere faith.” He says “You are a real Christian, Timothy.” He said “I saw this faith in your mother, I saw this faith in your grandmother, and now I see this faith in you.”

I long to see you,
that I may be filled
with joy. (2 Tim 1:4)

What our country needs to see is more real Christians. They need to see lives that have been really changed by the power of Jesus Christ. I have heard people say “I had rather see a sermon than hear a sermon.” That will only happen when you and I display genuine faith. All of you have heard of Ghandi from India. Ghandi made this statement one day: He said “I thought about becoming a Christian, but one day I met one, and decided if Christians are I like that I don’t want to be one.” He probably did not meet a real Christian that day.

Paul said “Timothy, I am persuaded that this faith is in you.” He was saying “I have observed your life and your walk with God, and there is no doubt whatsoever in my heart and mind that you are a true follower of Jesus Christ.”

I had a friend in America that was an atheist. He said “I have never put my faith in Jesus Christ.” He said “But if I ever become a Christian, then I want to be a Christian like you.” Paul said “When I observe your life, Timothy, I am able to commend your devotion to Jesus Christ.” I believe this gave him a very humble spirit, but this should be true of all servants of Jesus Christ. As a result of being a good example of a Christian, God used Timothy in a very great way. And God desires to use each of us in a very great way. All of our lives should make a great difference for the Kingdom of God.



D. God's Provision

There is a fourth thing that he needed in his life. He needed God's provision. I can love you, I can pray for you, and I can commend you for the good works that you do, but only God can give you the provisions for your ministry. You cannot come to a conference like this and get what you need for ministry. We can encourage you and instruct you in your ministry, but only Jesus can give you what you really need.

Let me remind you that none of us need any new spiritual ingredients. This should just be a time of stirring up the gift we already have. The Bible says "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee*" 2 Timothy 1:6. It has been said that the curse of the church is that we neglect the gift that God has placed within us. When Paul wrote to the church over in Corinth, he shared this wonderful truth with that church. He said, "God has placed his treasure in this earthen vessel." That means that God has placed his Holy Spirit in the believer! And that becomes the power for our service. So he said, "Stir up this gift." That means poke the fire. So Paul was mindful that Timothy had a very real faith, but he needed to fan the flame of that fire. He needed to be rekindling the embers of a dying fire.

Let me give you an illustration. I was asked to preach in the seminary where I graduated. It was a very liberal seminary. I preached with much power that morning and my professors were greatly offended. They made fun of me in the classroom. I would walk across campus and they would say, "There he is." They would say, "That man worships his Bible." They would say, "That man believes everybody needs to be saved." I needed to be encouraged. All they did was try to discourage me.



Two or three years ago my phone began to ring. Some of the students that had graduated from that seminary, got much information for their heads. But they had not allowed Jesus Christ to do a work in their hearts. They went out and began to pastor churches. They would preach the Bible but nothing would happen. They had placed much doubt on the Word of God. But I believed every word of the Bible with all of my heart and I would ask the Holy Spirit of God to use the Word of God to speak to our people. And when I would ask people to come to Jesus Christ they would come, dozens at a time. And the church began to grow and to become a very large church.

These former seminary students would call me, they would say, "Do you remember me from seminary? I used to think that you were crazy. I used to make fun of you in class. But would you please tell me, how is it you reach so many people?" And I would tell them they needed to stir up the flame. They needed to have a hot heart for Jesus Christ. They needed to never doubt the Word of God. I reminded them that God did not tell us to create a message. God called us to communicate His

message. This is not the message of the church. This is the message of Jesus Christ.

On my trip to Romania I took nine pastors with me. They were starting new mission churches in the southern part of Romania. One of the pastors that went with us was one of the men that used to make fun of me. Jesus Christ is still in the business of changing the hearts of men and women. So, be encouraged my brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ is still on His throne.

One of the great seminaries in our country, asked me to come and preach a message last year. I preached the same sermon I had preached in the liberal seminary where they made fun of me several years earlier. There was a very elderly professor sitting down in front. I found out later his name was Dr. Beaman. I found out that he had taught all of my mentors the Greek language. He was a scholar in the Word of God. After he heard me preach the same sermon, he came and greatly encouraged me. He said, "I have been very blessed today." One of the students asked Dr. Beaman this question, he said, "Did Johnny Hunt light your fire?" Dr. Beaman replied, "No, Jesus Christ lit my fire many years ago. But Johnny has fanned the flame of my heart." Only Jesus can light the fire, but he can use others to fan the flame. So I do not have the power to give you fire, only Jesus Christ can do that. But it is my hope and desire, during these next couple of days, that the Holy Spirit would fan the flame in your heart.

1. Power

In 2 Timothy 1:7, the Bible reminds us that Timothy had to function in an environment of fear. There was much heresy and challenges to his leadership. So the apostle Paul addressed the issues in his life. He said, "Timothy, God has not given you the *spirit of fear*. He has not called you to a spirit of timidity." Paul was reminding Timothy that the gospel of Jesus Christ, is not a place for a timid soul who lacks enthusiasm. Enthusiasm comes from a Greek word where we get "in God". So the Bible says, God has not given us fear. But it says God has given us power. That is the spirit of forcefulness with power. It is the character that can use authority boldly.

2. Love

But God always balances out our life. He not only gives you power but the Bible says he gives you love. So we go and we speak with courage. But we also speak with much compassion, so that love conquers the opposition. It gives you the spirit of forgiveness and refusal to seek revenge.

3. *Sound Mind*

The Bible says that God has also given us sound minds. That is speaking of self discipline. It speaks of an individual who allows the Holy Spirit to bring their life under control. It is calm and a well balanced mind. It is a sound mind that provides wise guidance.

CONCLUSION

Do you not desire to have spiritual enthusiasm in your discipling ministry ? Have you not found that there is much enthusiasm in a meeting like this? We come together with other brothers and sisters from different places in this country. And we are encouraged by what God is doing in their ministries and in their lives personally. But just in a few days we will be back out into our own personal ministries. And if you are going to make it over the long period of time, you are going to have to have affection. You are going to have to have intercession.

Let me give you an illustration of intercession. We have a prayer room in our church. We ask our people to sign up and pray for one hour per week. I go into that room and I write down all of my prayer needs. And then those that come in know how to specifically pray for me. We have people praying 21 hours a day, seven days a week. So I have people that are praying and interceding on my behalf. Thus I have those that give devotion to our ministry. I become greatly encouraged by it. And you are going to have to have prayer support too. The Bible teaches us that God has given us the provisions that we need.

We need affection, we need intercession, we need devotion, we need God's provision.

May you be richly blessed as you experience these four Biblical elements of encouragement.

Amen, amen.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

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