

Spiritual Vitality: Do Not Put out the Spirit's Fire

by Bob Young
August 2008

Have you noticed? We sing some fiery songs down at the church house. "Light my fire in my soul...fan the flame, make me whole." Or, "keep me burning for the Lord." In song, we may express our desire to experience the Spirit's fire, but we often fall short in everyday experience. We aren't quite sure what the Spirit's fire within us looks like or feels like. We hear the claims of "Spirit-filled" neighbors, but something doesn't quite click.

In this article, I share three hints for spiritual vitality, along with seven tension points to help us keep our spiritual passion alive.

Find your passion. The church is a place for the Spirit, a place of passion.

"The church is God's fireplace." Not a biblical quote, not even a reasonable paraphrase of any verse, but reflecting truth nonetheless. A fireplace is a safe place to build a fire. In a fireplace, one puts logs together, and they heat one another and encourage one another, safely. Similarly, the church is a place where Christians let their passion burn brightly, where passion is encouraged, where the passion of one person enflames the passion of another. The church is God's fireplace—a gift to passionate Christians, a place where our passions burn, and are encouraged—where the fire is lighted and the flame is fanned. The world will hardly light our spiritual fire or fan our flame. In fact, the world resists our spiritual passion. Christians need the church to ignite spiritual passion.

Passion may be ignited in Bible study, teaching, small groups, or prayer groups. Passion may find its voice in worship or singing or talking to others about Christ. Regardless of our passion, we Christians need others around us who share our passion, where we can encourage each other.

Focus your passion.

Passionate people tend to be passionate about a lot of things. A lot of churches make the problem worse because we invite every passionate person into every possible activity. After all, we are a volunteer organization, and volunteers with passion get a lot done. The problem is that when passion is spread thin, it has little impact and makes little difference anywhere. In the same way that a fire is put out by spreading the coals, persons who spread their passion too thin may fail to burn brightly. We sing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." We must focus our light to have any impact. When you discover a God-given passion, focus that passion to make the greatest difference you can.

Fan your passion. Keep the passion burning.

Here is a basic truth: Fire consumes. We know this from experience. Throw a log on the fire and it burns brightly, produces a lot of heat, but over time is consumed and turned to ashes. The passion of God within us is like a fire and as God uses us to make a difference in this world, we are consumed. Is this what David was referring to in Psalm 69:9 when he said, *"Zeal for your house consumes me"* (quoted by Jesus in John 2:17)? In Psalm 119:139 David says, *"My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore your words."* Passion, like fire, consumes. Christians must fight the weariness that results from God-given passion. The cure is suggested in Isaiah 40:30, 31: *"Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Gordon MacDonald (*Renewing Your Spiritual Passion*) suggests six habits that help us maintain our energy and focus, our passion in ministry (rhythm, re-evaluation, rest, remembering, renouncing, and re-creation). My list is similar but with seven points: a center point, three "resting" points, and three "activity" points.

Activity resumes with RECOMMITMENT. Recommit yourself to being God's instrument. Recommit yourself to doing God's will. Recommit yourself to sacrificial discipleship that answers God's call in the life of his children. And celebrate the passion and the gifts that God has given.

Activity includes REEVALUATION. Evaluation is the practice of stopping and recognizing what we have done. When God finished the creation, he stopped and looked at what he had done, and pronounced it good. Evaluation is essential because one criticism can outweigh ten affirmations that God is using us. We remember criticism a long time and we forget affirmations very quickly. Weariness often vanishes when we focus on the accomplishments and evaluate God's plan in our lives.

God gives us passion because he wants our hearts to burn steady and long so we can influence others for Christ. Do you have a fireplace—a church and a group of friends who join with you in the passion for ministry?

"Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1Thess. 5:19-22).