

How to keep the Fire Burning without Getting Burned By Bob Young

Your fire needs a safe place

A fireplace is a safe place to have a fire—a place where you can put logs together, where they help heat each other, combining their efforts, and all that happens safely. Christians also need a place where their passion can burn brightly, where passion is encouraged, where the passion of one person can enflame the passion of another. That is one purpose of the church. The church is God's gift to passionate Christians. He gave us the church to be for us a safe place to burn. If your passion is prayer, you need a group where there are people whose passion is prayer. If your passion is talking to others about Christ, you need others around you who share this passion.

When a fire burns out of control and without boundaries, it is dangerous.

Your fire must be focused

People who become passionate want to get involved in lots of things. In their excitement for Christ, they see what should have been done yesterday and what should be done today. They notice when others do not do what needs to be done, and out of their passion they try to do what others should be doing. The church compounds the problem by inviting passionate people to every activity. After all, the church is a volunteer organization, and volunteers with passion get a lot done.

The problem is that when passion is spread thin, it has little impact—it makes very little difference anywhere. One tries to make a difference, gives one's best, and works one's hardest, only to discover that people are largely unaffected and unchanged. If you have a common flashlight or a burning match, it is not difficult to look at it. It makes little light. Now put a reflector in the flashlight and focus the energy in one direction. The light is sharp and bright. As children we sang, "This little light of mine." We must focus our limited light to have big impact. If passion is a God-given desire to make a difference somewhere, then choose the somewhere with care and make the greatest difference that you can.

Wrestle with weariness—your fire must be maintained

Here is a basic truth: **Fire consumes!** When you throw a log in the fire it may burn brightly, it may produce a lot of heat, but in the process the log is consumed and turns to ashes. Whether we like it or not, the passion of God within us is like a fire, but as God uses us to make a difference in this world we are consumed. David wrote in Psalm 119:139, *"My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore your words."* Passion, like fire, consumes. As Christians we 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 views this passage as an expression of the fourth commandment: *"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy; six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."* The command is founded on the fact that God created the world in six days, and he rested on the seventh day and made it a holy day. This is God's prescription that keeps us from breaking under the weight of weariness. MacDonald suggests six habits that help us maintain our energy and focus, our passion in ministry.

FIND YOUR RHYTHM. Rhythm means that we are called to maintain a pace and rhythm in life that is sustainable over the long haul. Any person who has been involved in a strenuous physical activity such as running knows that setting that right pace and rhythm is essential. If the rhythm is broken, the activity becomes difficult. Each of us must do those things that are essential to life, eating, sleeping,

working, playing. This truth is affirmed in scripture in the fact that the Lord made the seventh day a day of rest. God knew our need for the rhythm of work and rest in our lives.

REEVALUATE. Reevaluation is the practice of stopping and recognizing the value of our accomplishments, as the Lord at the end of each of the six creation days stopped to review what he had done. He beheld that it was good. God stopped to reflect on the value of what he was doing, not just once a week, but at the end of every day. This is an important discipline. Many Christians share the experience: they give their best but one criticism of their work outweighs ten affirmations that the Lord is using them. The way our mind works, we remember the criticism too long and we forget the affirmation too quickly. Weariness, tiredness of spirit does not set in as quickly when we focus on the accomplishments of our work. I save cards of encouragement, I write down the comments and positive responses to my work. To keep weariness from setting in, I must focus on what I am accomplishing.

REST. Passionate Christians often forget they need to rest. Christianity can be addictive; ministry can be addictive. When we are doing what our heart desires most to do, when we know we are being used of God, when we see all the needs out there that need our attention, we sometimes get so involved in ministry that we forget about our need for rest. Remember that passion, like fire, consumes. If in our commitment to ministry we ignore our own needs, eventually we will pay the price.

REMEMBER. Remember that God made you and gave you your passion for his work. Sometimes when we are doing our heart desires, being used of God, something happens. We get so involved in ministry and helping others that we forget about God. Forget about God and the power for ministry starts ebbing away. We feel drained because the source of power is God. When we forget the source of our passion, we are in danger of losing our passion. Develop the practice of remembering God, drawing near to God.

RENOUNCE. People who minister in their area of passion risk becoming weary. The need is to **focus one's energies**. There are many opportunities to get involved in various activities, the world tells us we have not lived until we have experienced this or that; the Joneses tempt us to buy this or buy that. Passionate Christians renounce some things because they distract from fully serving the Lord according to their passion. Jesus says there is a cost to putting one's hands to the plow, and the one who looks back is not worthy to be his disciple.

RE-CREATION. Recreation is not mere entertainment. Entertainment can be mindless. Recreation involves recreating, rebuilding. Christians must find fresh fuel for their passion. This comes from fellowship with others of like passion. This comes from education in the area where God has given us a desire to serve. This involves reading books and listening to tapes. This involves listening to God and praying to God. God wants us to fan into flame the gifts he has given us.

God gives us passion in our hearts, something that can burn steady and long so we can influence others for Christ. Do you know how to safely contain your fire so it is useful? Is your fire focused? Do you know how to maintain your fire in times of weariness? Find your rhythm, reevaluate, rest, remember God, renounce distractions, and recreate continually.