Enthusiasm Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, June 10, 2018

Main Theme – Considering enthusiasm (i.e., spiritual passion) in relation to our Christian walks.

WORSHIP & PRAYER

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Upcoming Events**
  - WM – Tuesday Evening, June 12 (6:30–8:30pm)
  - Father's Day Service – Sunday, June 17 (10:30am)
  - Potluck Supp. – Sunday AM, June 24 (Post-Service)

MORNING OFFERING

At this time, I want to call forth our ushers. Two offerings will be collected today:

-The FIRST offering goes to support the ongoing ministry/function of this assembly
-The SECOND offering goes to support a variety of missionaries (foreign/domestic)

KEY – Consider some of the following missions-themed quotes I came across:

1) "Love is the root of missions; sacrifice is the fruit of missions. —Roderick Davis

2) "If God calls you to be a missionary, don't stoop to be a king." —Jordan Grooms

3) "God uses men who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him." —Hudson Taylor

4) "If God's love is for anybody anywhere, it's for everybody everywhere." —Ed Lawlor

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- **Dismissal for Children's Church**

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Main Theme – Considering enthusiasm (i.e., spiritual passion) in relation to our Christian walks.

OPENING REMARKS

As always, it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these weekly moments of worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what the Lord has for you today! Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

We are in the midst of a multi-segment series on the topic of SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASM. Enthusiasm—as we have DEFINED it—is a sense of 'passion, zeal and eagerness' that results from divine connection: as one inspired by; moved by; stirred by; energized by the Lord.

I want to consider what has become a KEY text (as it relates to the theme of sp. enthusiasm)...

Romans 12:11 (NIV)
11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

NOTE – Noteworthy Items:

1) Zeal is something that we are to PRIORITIZE (hence Paul's commandment)
2) Zeal CAN wane, fade, decrease and diminish (can't be taken–but forfeited)
3) Zeal is something we are told to KEEP (maintain, retain, sustain & preserve)

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

NOTE – Since we are told to keep our sense of spiritual enthusiasm, there must be PRACTICAL STEPS that we can take to obey this commandment. Moreover, it also follows that there are practical steps that we can take IF & WHEN our passion begins to wane.

KEY – The point I am making is that YOU determine your level of passion!

-If you HAVE spiritual fervor – there are steps you must take to PRESERVE it
-If you have LOST your fervor – there are steps you can take to REKINDLE it

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

NOTE – Last Sunday we outlined THREE principles effective unto these ends—principles based upon 1) biblical precepts; 2) commonly found in literature on the topic; 3) borne of/tested by personal experience:

1) Care for your physical being (rest, food, etc.) [Your physical being affects your sp. being]
2) Be vigilant against sin & deal with any pet sin(s) [Sin saps enthusiasm – they can't coexist]
3) Remember your first love [go back to your sp. point of origin – when you 1st began to love]

I would like to continue by offering more principles for keeping/renewing your spiritual passion.

LET'S DELVE IN

PRINCIPLE #1

PRINCIPLE #1 – Maintain/Rediscover the Wonder of Long-Held Beliefs

NOTE – In some regards, this principle CONNECTS to the concluding point made last Sunday: Remember Your First Love. In the same way that it is easy for us to DRIFT in our passion/love for GOD, we can all-too-easily DRIFT in our passion/love for the TRUTHS that we hold dear.

ILL – I have shared before the STORY of an interaction between a group of theological students and their professor. Intrigued by the godliness, experience and particular genius of the aged-professor, the students asked him the following QUESTION: "Of all of the truths and principles you have discovered and taught over the decades, what do you think is the most significant?"

EXPECTING some deep dissertation on God's sovereignty v. free will, eschatology (i.e., study of end-time events), etc., the students were STUNNED when the professor declared the following: "Jesus loves me – this I know – for the Bible tells me so."

KEY – You see, this professor—as learned and as experienced as he was in the Lord—NEVER lost the wonder and the beauty of a long-held/fundamental belief! He never lost the wonder—OR he worked to rediscover the wonder—of even the most basic biblical truths.

Q. To what degree are you KEEPING a sense of wonder over the truths espoused in the Word?
Q. To what degree have you LOST that sense of wonder over the truths espoused in the Word?

Q. When you hear the phrase, "Jesus loves me – this I know – for the Bible tells me so" – what do you feel? Do you feel a sense of awe that moves you to a place of worship—that the God of the universe loved you enough to die for you—OR do you think to yourself, "I've heard that before"?

Q. When you hear the Pastor share John 3:16–17...

John 3:16–17 (NIV)
16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

...WHAT DO YOU FEEL? Are you moved? Do you feel anything OR have you drifted?

NOTE – The reality that people can DRIFT in the wonder they feel toward biblical truths is one that is particularly PERTINENT in my role as a Pastor. How can I help people maintain the wonder of Communion—as we celebrate it monthly? How can I help people maintain a sense of wonder over the Christmas story, Good Friday or Easter when they have heard of Jesus' Coming, Death and Resurrection literally hundreds of times?

Q. Do you know how many Christians over the years have told me they dislike the Christmas or Easter service because it's "always the same message"? How am I to respond to such a RIDICULOUS point?

ILL. One Christian author makes this EXACT point when talking about the Cross of Jesus Christ:

> "Some think of the cross with the same nonchalance they feel about a bowl of oatmeal. They zone out when the preacher tells the familiar story of Jesus' death."

To combat this slow-drift away from spiritual enthusiasm/wonder to apathy, he offers this:

> Be serious about serious things. . . . It was at the cross that we fell in love with one who loved us enough to die so that we might live. It is also at the cross that we regain that passion by reliving the scenes of Jesus' final week. Take time to read again—slowly and meaningfully, as if in the crowd—the chapters containing the record of His death.

KEY – The only way to maintain and/or rediscover a sense of wonder at the Word is to STAY LONG in the Word. I can tell you that I do this, personally. When I begin to feel my passion for the Word wane, I will lock myself in a room/office and prayerfully READ. Sometimes it might take me a few chapters, many chapters or an entire Book, BUT SOMETHING HAPPENS WHEN I LINGER IN THE WORD. My calloused heart is softened, and I begin to feel again...

SUMMATIONS...

1) If you want to KEEP your passion – MAINTAIN a Wonder of Long-Held Beliefs/Truths
2) If you want to RENEW your passion – REKINDLE a Wonder of Long-Held Beliefs/Truths

PRINCIPLE #2

PRINCIPLE #2 – Project Yourself Forward to the Judgment

NOTE – i.e., Think often of that moment you shall stand before Him...

1) Scripture is clear that we shall all STAND BEFORE the Lord in judgment:

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)
10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Hebrews 9:27 (NKJV)
27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

2) Scripture is clear that the judgment of the WICKED will yield PUNISHMENT:

Matthew 25:31–33, 41–46a (NIV)
31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment

NOTE – The reality of coming judgment (i.e., assessment by the Lord God) should catalyze a sense of Sobriety in the wicked – that they might REPENT! That YOU might repent if applicable...

3) Scripture is clear that the judgment of the RIGHTEOUS will yield REWARD:

Matthew 25:34–40, 46b (NIV)
34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

46 . . . [The wicked will go away to eternal punishment], but the righteous to eternal life."

NOTE – KNOWING that such great reward is in store for the righteous, how can we NOT live and serve with an abiding sense of spiritual passion. Knowing that He sees, knows and will openly REWARD us 'there and then' should energize us to spiritual enthusiasm in the 'here and now'!

KEY – These things moved our sp. forefathers in the midst of great horror. Let them move us!

KEY – Also, even the SMALLEST of acts (acts of kindness done in His Name) matter!

Matthew 10:42 (NIV)
42 . . . if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." [Everything has eternal value...]

Q. Do you desire to MAINTAIN your passion for the Lord? Live for that day when He will say to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21b).

Q. Do you wish to RENEW your passion for the Lord? Live for that day when He will say to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21b).

SUMMATIONS...

1) If you want to KEEP your passion – Project Yourself Forward to the Judgment
2) If you want to RENEW your passion – Project Yourself Forward to the Judgment

PRINCIPLE #3

PRINCIPLE #3 – Be Willing to Frequently Ask the Tough Questions

2 Corinthians 13:5a (NIV)
5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.

NOTE – There is a PLACE in Christianity for ongoing assessment, reflection and examination. We are to examine ourselves—prayerfully and before the Lord—continually, making sure of our spiritual condition and directionality.

KEY – IF you are willing to examine yourself before the Lord and in light of His Word regularly, the odds of you are drifting are small. IF you are unwilling to do this, deviation is absolutely assured (particularly over the long haul). This is the unfortunate experience of far too many Christians!

Thus said, QUESTIONS are a great tool for self-diagnosis, introspection and examination! They provide a launching point for you to really delve into your spiritual condition. We must have the courage to ask some tough questions of ourselves (answering honestly and before God in kind), if we are going to KEEP or REKINDLE our passion for the Lord.

Allow me to put forth a few that I entertain regularly:

1) What am I Most Passionate About?

People possess passion (i.e., enthusiasm) for a great number of things. As was noted last week and the week before, people can have a passion for a particular HOBBY, FIELD OF STUDY, SPORT, etc. All of these are well and good in their place.

Moreover, people can and should possess a passion (i.e., enthusiasm) in a number of biblically-mandated areas: a) Service to Christ; b) Great Commission; c) Prayer; d) Study of the Word; e) Work; f) Love for Others, etc.

Q. But what are you MOST passionate about? There must only be one answer...

Luke 14:26 (NIV)
"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 22:37a (NIV)
"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

2) Am I Satisfied With My Current Level of Passion for God?

Q. On a scale of 1–10 (1 = cold; 5 = lukewarm; 10 = hot), how would you rate your current passion for the Lord? Is it trending up or down (very rarely staying the same)? To what degree are you OK with where it is? To what degree is the Lord (ouch)?

Q. How many would agree that Paul was a man after God's own heart? But was he satisfied? NO! He was always pushing for more and more and more!

Philippians 3:10–14 (NIV)
10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

3) What Needs to Change In Order to Increase My Passion for God?

KEY – This question can lead to so MANY possible answers, I can't even begin to explore potential results. But if you want to go deeper in the Lord, ask this question of Him. I assure you He is willing to let you know—PARTICULARLY—what changes must be made.

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)
3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

NOTE – Such soul-searching questions can be difficult to ask. Moreover, the process by which God reveals the answer and precipitates change can also be very painful. Growing in the Lord—like growing in any area of life—is never quick or easy. But it is WORTH IT...

SUMMATIONS...

1) If you want to KEEP your passion – Be Willing to Ask Some Tough Questions
2) If you want to RENEW your passion – Be Willing to Ask Some Tough Questions

CONCLUSIONS

Thus far, an array of practical steps have been put forth to KEEP/RENEW your passion:

1) Care for your physical being (rest, food, etc.)
2) Be vigilant against sin & deal with any pet sin(s)
3) Remember your first love [go back to your origin]
4) Maintain/Renew your wonder of long-held beliefs
5) Project yourself forward to your time of Judgment
6) Be willing to ask—before God—some tough Q's

More to come following our Fathers' Day Service NEXT WEEK!