

Keep your Spiritual Fervour

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[0 : 00] again. Well, Lord, we thank you for that psalm that we have been singing.

We thank you for the hope that it brings to us, the reminder, the reminder that better days are ahead, a reminder that joy will shine from your face and that your people will know bliss.

Lord, for those this evening who feel that everything is dark, that their lives are dishevelled, mixed up, chaotic, Lord, would you grant such people peace and grant them hope.

And all of our lives are like that at some point, for there are always stresses and there are always strains.

And we live in a world where nobody wants really to accept that that is true. Nobody wants to accept that sin has done immense damage in the human condition and in the human experience.

[1 : 39] Sometimes we don't have answers. Sometimes by our own human ingenuity, we don't have answers.

We don't have resolutions. And so oftentimes your people are left wondering what is going on and why certain things happen to them.

And you don't always give us answers quickly. But Lord, we thank you that you nevertheless hold out hope for us. And through faith, we can persevere.

And through faith, we can see your purposes. And through faith, we're able to give you thanks for every providence that you have taken us through, for all the different trials that you bring your people through, for the different ways that you have brought them into difficulties that they're able to, that they have come out of and they're able to look back and say, you strengthened their faith and you strengthened their character.

And you made them to change their lives because the lives they were leading, these lives were not good for them, nor did they bring you glory.

[3 : 00] Lord, we thank you for the way that you change us piece by piece, gradually, each according to the measure of faith in them and the measure of ability to withstand different ways of handling.

Lord, we thank you that you know us. And you shepherd us according to our needs. Lord, when we look back over our lives, we will see that it is true to say that the Lord's my shepherd, I shall not want, is a real picture.

You have taken us in so many ways. And even in the darkest days, you have been with us and you have made yourself known to us, revealed yourself to us through your word, through the Holy Spirit's guidance and prompting.

You have directed our steps and we pray that we might live thankful and productive lives. Lord, we pray for our land.

We pray that you would bring prosperity to our land. Material prosperity, yes. We pray for that. We pray for all those who are negotiating Brexit.

[4 : 10] We pray for all parliamentarians. We ask that you would bring them blessing. We pray that you would give them wisdom. We pray that you would control their decisions.

We pray that you would reverse unrighteous decisions. But we pray for spiritual prosperity more than material prosperity. We pray that you would bring revival throughout our land.

Revival in the church first and then that reformation that this land so desperately needs. Revival in the church first and then that we pray for the people. We pray that you would indeed hear the prayers of your people as they have been offered up over years, decades, over generations.

We pray that you would not forsake this land, nor turn your back upon this land, but that you would bless us. We pray you would bless the Queen and the Royal Family. We thank you for the example that our Queen has been setting in recent years, speaking more plainly about her faith.

And we pray that many would hear this and many would regard it and wonder at the way you have sustained her and the way she relies upon the Lord. May she speak more clearly and more volubly about that faith.

[5 : 25] May her witness have influence. May her witness.

Pray for opportunities to speak to our neighbours and friends and colleagues. Give us wisdom. Give us that ability to speak so that we would not know that experience of walking away from a conversation thinking of that guilty silence where we should have spoken but did not.

Help us to speak out for our Lord and help us to believe that your power is there behind the words that we are speaking. Help us to have this conviction that your Holy Spirit really is with us and he really can use us and he really can influence other people.

So Lord, grant us the gift, the power, the strength of evangelism. Help us to believe that great commission that when we are told to go, you will also be with us even to the end of the age.

Lord, we forget that. We think we are on our own. We think we are doing it in our own strength, by our own skill and power. But it is not so. So we pray that you would direct and you would help. We pray for these parts of the world that know trouble.

[6 : 59] We think of the Middle East. We think of Israel and Palestine. We think of what's going on there. And we pray, Lord, that you would bring peace there and that you would bring justice in these situations.

We pray for countries that know persecution, that the church knows persecution. Lord, we again, we pray for righteous government. We pray for freedom. We pray that your church would flourish. And we thank you for the witness of the persecuted church to us, such an example to us. We are so weak and so frail and yet in the face of persecution, your Christian people appear to be so strong and so joyful.

And we ask, Lord, that we might know that strength and that joy and that clarity of witness. So bless your church in these places and make the church grow and continue to grow and bring glory to your name.

Bless us now as we turn to your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, please turn with me to Romans chapter 12.

[8 : 04] Romans chapter 12 and verse 11. Do not be slothful in zeal.

Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Especially the words, be fervent in spirit.

Now, this is a kind of unusual sermon for me, a different kind of approach in terms of the genesis of the sermon because for some reason I was researching this kind of verse and I came across a blog.

And this blog was by a lady whose name I forget, a Christian blog. And her translation of these words, be fervent in spirit, was be aglow with the spirit.

Be aglow with the spirit. And other translations have keep your spiritual fervor. Be aglow with the spirit is not a wrong translation.

[9 : 19] It's just unusual, I would think, for us. But in this blog, this lady was making reference to that passage I read about in the book of Exodus where Moses' face was shining.

Moses would go into the presence of God. God would speak to him directly. And Moses' face was shining. And we know in other places that the face of people have shone.

And Stephen's face shone. As he was being martyred, as he was being stoned, his face was like the face of an angel. We know that Jesus was transfigured on what we call the Mount of Transfiguration.

His whole body was glowing. There was that transparency to him as his divinity was being revealed to his disciples.

Undoubtedly, God can impact on your face. The presence of God can impact on your body. This lady was stressing that the world reads our faces.

[10 : 30] The world reads the way we appear. And of course, no one's going to disagree with that. Yale University did a study on this. I hope you won't find this offensive or sexist, but attractive women had 30% higher chance of employment.

And attractive women have 30%, sorry, not necessarily 30%, but attractive women receive less harsh treatments in the courts. I don't know quite who was deciding who was attractive and who wasn't, but they did a study on that.

This lady's point was this, we should glow for Jesus, because people are reading our faces. Now, I have no doubt that there's an element of truth in that.

If you are living or experiencing, perhaps I should say, if you're experiencing joy, if you are experiencing peace in your life, if there's calm in your experience, probably that's going to show in your face.

Probably if that's the normal tenor of your existence, your face is going to show that. If you're full of stress, if you're full of anxiety, if you're living an unhealthy lifestyle, your face, your body, it's going to show all these kinds of marks.

[11 : 58] We know sadness makes a difference to the face. Joseph was in prison. He was cupbearer. Sorry, there was a cupbearer there with him.

There was a baker there with him. Their faces were sad. Nehemiah was sad before the king, remember? He'd never been sad in his presence before.

What was making him sad? Well, just the state of Jerusalem back in his own land. The king noticed that sadness. People do read our faces.

Proverbs says, a happy heart makes the face cheerful. So, should we translate this, be aglow with the Spirit?

Should the emphasis be on the physical nature or the physical impact of our faith? Probably. Probably not.

[13 : 00] We probably shouldn't worry about our faces, which is a relief. We shouldn't worry about our face. Moses, in that passage, didn't know that his face was shining.

He went into the presence of God. He came out not knowing that his face was shining.

Self-conscious glowing is probably just as big a problem as having no kind of glow at all.

Now, I think we're all aware of the self-conscious glow. Those Christians who deliberately fake a smile, who are always pretending that everything is wonderful, who never give vent at all to their anxieties, they're always finding they never tell you that they have issues.

The smile is fixed. Not sure that's helpful. Spurgeon said this. There's a danger, or something like this. There's a danger when you are tempted to pretend to be holy so that others know you're holy. There's a danger to preachers when they want to preach so that others know that they're good preachers. He takes that all the way down the line to Sunday school teachers who can do certain things that we can act certain ways just because people are looking.

[14 : 22] So, I don't want to translate this, you know, glow with the spirit. But I think the translation we have is a translation that makes us think. You know, be fervent in spirit.

Or keep your spiritual fervor, which I think is what the NIV has. And that spiritual fervor will show itself, I think, in different ways. But what is it? What's fervor?

What is fervor? Or fervency? Well, it's about zeal. It's about boiling with heat, actually.

Is the basic understanding. Fervency is about boiling with heat. So, it's about being hot. Being hot spiritually.

Now, there's different personality types, isn't there? There's introverts and extroverts. And we all express ourselves in different ways. Some people can be passionate, absolutely passionate about something.

[15 : 30] Absolutely fervent. Boiling with fervency. And yet, you would never know it. I remember hearing a preacher speak or somebody been interviewed or talking.

And they were one of these kind of individuals that had no bodily movements. There was no expressions. No waving of hands. No smiles. And the language was this.

About some issue. He says, I'm passionate about this. But take away even that expression of passion. I'm passionate about this. I'm passionate about this.

And he really was. He was willing to think about it. Willing to talk about it. Willing to discuss it. Willing to plan. But his bodily movements made, you know, gave no show to that.

So, we're careful about how we read people. That can be true for Christians just as it is for other people. But to be boiling hot.

[16 : 29] To be told to be fervent in spirit. To be told to be boiling hot. How do you keep yourselves spiritually hot?

That's the question. How do you keep your fervor? Well, four points. And tonight we kind of jump over the scripture in many ways.

And I make no apologies for making reference to this lady's blog again. To keep your spiritual fervor, she said, you need mastery over four areas in your life.

And I find these interesting and challenging. You need mastery, first of all, over sin. It seems such a strange place to start, doesn't it?

You need mastery over sin in your life. Why? Because sin impacts. Sin causes distress to God's people.

[17 : 37] The very beginning when Cain didn't offer the right sacrifice, and it wasn't accepted, his face was downcast. And God says, why are you downcast?

Why are you sad? Do the right thing and your sacrifice will be accepted. You will be accepted. Now we're not saying here salvation by efforts.

I'm not talking about salvation by works. But a Christian is in a relationship with God. And I imagine most of us are Christians this evening. If you're not a Christian, then you cannot know real peace.

You cannot know real joy. And so I would say to you, sin actually is your master at the moment.

Whether you're conscious of it or not, sin is your master. And you'll not know this fervency of spirit that Paul is speaking about.

The first thing you need to do is to confess your sin. And make sure that you confess your sin to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that your sins are forgiven. But when you go on from that conversion experience, from putting your faith in Jesus, still there is this command to Christians to keep that spiritual fervor.

[18 : 49] Now the reality is, for Christians, that sin is a burden to us. Because as Isaiah says, sin separates us from our God.

Now it doesn't mean to say, when we sin or backslide, that we're not Christians, that God is not our Father. It doesn't mean that. But it does mean that we lose the sense of God's blessing.

We are blessed, but we lose the sense of it. We lose our joy. And sometimes our sin can be so damaging, so ongoing, that the Lord needs to discipline us.

He needs to take steps, as it were, to take us in hand, just as you would a child. A child whom you love, whom you want to raise correctly, you'll take them in hand, and you'll discipline them.

You'll bring them up in a way that's best for them. Sin destroys your joy. Sin destroys this spiritual fervor.

[19 : 54] In Romans 6, Paul says, you know, he's dealing with these questions, you know, you know, we believe in justification by faith. Does this mean to say that we can, we can sin with abandon?

And Paul says, we died to sin. We cannot live in it any longer. We're saved from sin. How can you live in it any longer?

How do you keep your spiritual fervor? Well, one of the things you need to be honest about is sin in your life. You need to deal with it. You need to put it away.

Let me preach that. Let me preach it without saying, follow me. Let's not pretend that any of us are any different from one another.

We're all struggling with this. What we're talking about is known sin. We're talking about sin that is, that is sort of persistent perhaps. We're talking about that sin that we just will not deal with.

[20 : 55] That is going to impact your spiritual fervor. You're going to lose spiritual heat and power and strength. So, master that.

Secondly, master your intimacy with God. Your intimacy with God. When Moses went in to the presence of God, the impact of being in God's presence made his face shine.

But when he came out of the presence of God and when he communicated to the people, the radiance would begin to fade. And that's why he put the veil over his face so that the people wouldn't see the radiance fading.

And they wouldn't think that, you know, this information that he had wasn't so important. The radiance fade.

But as he went back into God's presence and spoke with God again, the radiance came back. Now, we're not talking about radiant faces, I don't think.

[22 : 07] But it's worth asking the question, when was the last time you basked in the sunshine of his presence? When was the last time you spent a long time in the presence of God?

I think it was John Piper who said, talking to young people, being brought, especially students, in the 21st century, he's saying one or two minutes of a quiet time and of prayer is not going to work in

the 21st century.

It's not enough. You need to spend time in the presence of God. And his approach to intimacy, I suppose, I remember him saying that, or reading of what he said about, you know, you read the Bible.

You have your quiet time and, you know, you read big chunks of the Bible. And if you're anything like him, you want to study it. And he said, you've got to do the two things.

You've got to read big portions, but then when you come across something you don't understand that needs study, well, you spend time studying it. And that way, you are in the presence of God.

[23 : 25] You're listening to his words. Some of us are too busy, to be quite honest. Some of us have what might be called the Martha mindset, where everything that's going on round about Jesus is more important than Jesus himself.

Jesus was in the house. Martha was offering hospitality to Jesus. Martha was displaying her love to Jesus, but at the same time, Jesus was not the important center of attention that he ought to have been for Martha.

Martha. And Martha loses her joy. Martha loses her poise. And Martha gets frustrated and angry and complains to Mary and complains to Jesus about why Mary's not helping.

How many of our lives are actually like that? Fraught with anxiety. Fraught with busyness. Charles Swindle, Chuck Swindle, he says, you've really got to prepare for a certain kind of lifestyle as a Christian.

Keeping your spiritual fervor means choosing a lifestyle. And part of that means that you choose to spend time reading this book.

[24 : 52] You sit down, you've got a pen and paper or notebook, and you're there ready to receive and ready to think. He also speaks about prerequisites for enjoying God's presence.

Again, from the book of Exodus, I won't go there, but in Exodus chapter 19 where God is telling Moses how to prepare to come up the mountain and telling the people to stay at the bottom of the mountain and they're not to come close to it.

You know, I think it's Swindle who analyzes that chapter. He says, you know, when you come to the Word of God, when you come to God, you've got to be willing to obey. You've got to be sensitive to listen.

You've got to consecrate your hearts. You've got to show deep respect for God's presence. You know how God was saying, don't let them come to the mountain because I'm holy and they'll perish. and Swindle was saying, God is not our buddy. God is not our pal. Yes, Jesus is the friend that sticks closer than any brother, but God would have us respect and reverence, sufficient so that we would listen and so that we would put His Word into practice.

[26 : 13] We would do whatever God wants. When you come to the Bible, do you stand over the Bible and say, well, this can't be right and that can't be right because it just doesn't make sense and we can dispense with so much of that, even what's in the New Testament, we can dispense with so much of that because it's just not relevant or do you actually say, well, God is teaching us something here and I'm willing to hear what He'll say and I will seek to put that into practice.

It's not about perfection. It's not about being, you know, completely sinless or getting every aspect of understanding right, but if you're going to keep your spiritual fervor, then the approach is important.

You know, you might never feel that you arrive, but you're going in the right direction and I think God blesses that, God recognizes that. So, you know, take control of your intimacy with God.

You know, Paul speaks, does he not, in Ephesians, I think it is, about being filled with the Spirit. Go on being filled with the Spirit and it's not a matter of prayer.

It's not a miracle. Paul is saying, you take control of that. You be filled. That's something that you have responsibility for and it's something that, according to your choice, you can have or you don't have.

[27 : 54] Christians have baptized with the Spirit, but the ongoing experience of being filled with the Spirit is something that we're commanded to have. Being controlled, allowing yourself to be controlled by the Spirit of God.

So, we've got control of sin, we've got control of intimacy with God, we've got control of what we take in, we're in control of what was called the eye gate in Luke chapter 11.

What's one of the big problems in our generation and always has been in every generation? The things that we see. things that we see round about us.

Your eye is the lamp of your body, when your eye is healthy your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. I'm not going to explain this passage or expound it, but I think one of the things it's saying to us is this, see to it that the light within you is not darkness. darkness.

[28 : 55] And let's take it very simply. Let the light of the gospel in. Let the light of the gospel in.

You know, be careful what you're letting into your life. Let me give you three examples of people who listen to two messages.

People who started off in the light and ended up in the dark in many ways. think of Samson. I'm sure all of you know the story of Samson.

The name means sunny as in sunshine. Samson ends up in a prison because he yielded to the lust of the flesh.

Lot was a pilgrim with Abraham but he had one eye on the riches of the world, one eye on the riches of Sodom and he ends up in Sodom.

[30 : 07] And later he ends up as a drunk committing incest. he starts so well with Abraham but the choices he makes, the things he saw that he allowed to influence his life led him down a dark path.

Now, Lot is a righteous man, Lot is in heaven today. So we're not talking about things that don't affect the people of God. It's easy for these things to affect the people of God but if you're going to keep your spiritual fervor then you've got to be careful about what you're watching, what you're letting into your life.

King Saul is another example, a man who started humble but his pride led him to a witch's cave. Starts off well but ends up consulting with mediums.

These men fell because of the things that influenced them. The chorus that we used to sing in camps and fellowships, be careful little eyes what you see.

And you know if we had that ringing in our minds it would we obeyed it, it would help us a lot. It would help us a lot.

[31 : 29] Be careful little eyes what you see. We sing that with our mothers and toddlers. The kids love it. love it. So be careful with what you let in.

Gain mastery over that. And gain mastery over good works. Jesus said in Matthew 5, let your light shine before men so that they might see your works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. we were speaking at the beginning about the face shining, the face radiating, the body perhaps radiating like Jesus did as the glory of God just shone out of him.

But another way we are called to radiate surely is with regard to our good works. Doing the things that God has called us to do. Somebody has said the world cares little for your words.

It has an eagle eye for your behavior or our behavior. And that's so true and so frightening.

[32 : 51] We have to master them. Meaning we must do them. When God calls us to act let us act.

Part of these good works surely are things to do with worship, things to do with the Bible reading, things to do with raising your children in a godly home and so on.

Some of these acts will be evangelism, some of these acts will be acts of charity, some of these acts will be the kinds of things that are displayed in Romans chapter 12. Look at the way Paul talks about the way Christians are meant to behave, living sacrifices.

You're presenting your body as a living sacrifice, completely sold out to God, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual or your logical worship, your reasonable service as the authorized version used to put it.

Spiritual is not really the best word, it is reasonable. You know, God has given His Son for you and now you present your body, meaning the whole of your life, as a burnt offering, totally consumed for God.

[34 : 09] It's your reasonable service, that's what makes sense. Do not be conformed to this world. You see, my biggest problem is this, conformity to this world.

Well, when you say to me, live 24-7 for God, I think, what will that entail?

What will it mean? What will it cost? Jesus says, you don't pick up your cross, you're not worthy of me.

If you don't pick up your cross, that's taking you to crucifixion. If you don't pick that up, you cannot be my disciple. And it's not easy.

And the more the hooks of this life, and let's face it, in this country, we have a great life. I know all of us have issues, but circumstantially, you know, we live in the fifth richest country in the world. [35 : 20] we have a great life. Others looking on look with jealousy. They want to get to our country.

They want to have the kind of opportunities that we have, but for Christians, this life can be so seductive. We want just to be like our neighbors.

We want just to have the same kinds of experiences they have. One of my children sort of criticizes me for not having a more fulfilled life, more experiences, more of the things that he thinks would be normal.

There's Paul saying, don't be conformed to this world. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. And from verse 9 onwards, you know, marks of the true Christian. Let love be genuine, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection. This persistence with practical goodness.

[36 : 33] If we're going to keep fervent in spirit, we're going to have to keep serving the Lord. It just goes together. The whole verse goes together. Don't be slothful and zeal. Don't be lazy.

I was saying to your minister that when I was applying for the ministry, one of the questions put at the training of the ministry board, as it was called then, training ministry committee was called then, was, what are your weaknesses?

And my answer was, well, I'm naturally lazy, which didn't go down too well with certain people.

Quite right. Because the task of the Christian life is not to be slothful and especially not in zeal, but to have fervency of spirit serving the Lord.

Well, how is your spiritual temperature tonight? You see, the Lord's table is meant, I think, to be a spring board.

In many ways. A spring board to maintaining spiritual health and spiritual servancy. Naturally, in a supernatural way, as a Christian, you have the spirit of God.

[37 : 59] You have the zeal for God's glory that the spirit of God brings. keep it. Keep it.

Keep being fervent in spirit and don't let the spirit be grieved by our indolence, our laziness, by our sin, by our apathy.

Let the world know. Radiate the character of Jesus Christ in this world so that God will gain the glory and you will know joy.

Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer and so on. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Lord, we ask that you would help us to maintain that fervency of spirit.

Oftentimes we pray for it but we're not prepared to invest in it. Oftentimes we want to indulge our tastes even when these tastes are second best.

[39 : 31] Not necessarily wrong things but things that will stop us spending time in your presence. Things that will disturb our prayer life.

Things that will stop us serving you and doing these good works. Lord, grant that we would take stock and grant that we would take control of these areas where we can take control so that when difficult things come our way that we have no control over we are ready to handle it.

We are ready for the explosions. We're ready for the dramas. We're ready for the difficult things that come our way. And we will have poise and grace and joy in difficult times.

Lord, bless us. Forgive our many sins, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.