

Turning Up the Heat

I lived in Central Florida for more than 24 years. It is a land of flip-flops, swimsuits and water parks that stay open 365 days a year. The average temperature in Orlando in January is 71. In the summer, a humid 95 degrees is fine with me.

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But I have friends in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rochester, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who endured the record-breaking polar vortex of 2014. Cold temperatures such as it produced had not been seen in more than two decades. It was minus 40 degrees in Minnesota in early January. The mercury hit minus 13 in Milwaukee. It was so cold in Chicago (minus 16) that the polar bear at the Lincoln Park Zoo was moved indoors!

When this deep freeze hit, I was reading the book of Romans, and verse 11 of chapter 12 jumped off the page. The apostle Paul told his followers that in order to please God, they needed to be "fervent in spirit." The Greek word for fervent (zeó) means "to boil with heat." The message is clear. As Christians, we have a responsibility to stay hot for God no matter how cold our spiritual environment is.

But how do you stay on fire for the Lord? How can you raise your spiritual temperature at a time when many people's faith today has gone from lukewarm to freezing? Do you want God to set your heart on fire? Would you like to have a life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit?

It is possible to have that kind of spiritual revival. But it doesn't just happen. There are some steps you must take to

warm your heart, prepare it for a holy visitation and increase your spiritual hunger.

Get Back in the Word

Spiritual zeal is kindled in your heart when you hear God speak through the pages of the Bible. I'm not talking about casually reading daily devotionals with your eyes halfway open or halfheartedly skimming Bible verses on your phone. When you desperately dig into the Scriptures to find truth, you will say, as did the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was ... explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

The Word will set your heart ablaze. In fact, you cannot expect a life-changing encounter with God unless you open your Bible and seek Him in its pages. God invested a lot time and energy to give us His Word, and many people gave their lives so that you could have a copy of the Bible today. God has watched over His Word for centuries to preserve its message. It is His love letter to you. Please do not ignore it!

Stoke the Furnace of Private Prayer

Fires don't last long if you don't regularly pile wood on the flames. You should guard your quiet time with God as if your life depended on it. You cannot survive spiritually without regular communion with the Lord. Oswald Chambers put it bluntly: "Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian, not the thing that makes him alive, but the evidence that he is alive."

Maybe you have been away from God for some time. Maybe you have been in a spiritual desert because of failure or pain. Maybe you have not had personal communion with God for a while. Wherever you are in your walk with God, you can begin afresh right now by approaching Him and starting over. Just make an appointment with Him and keep it.

Praise God With Reckless Abandon

Sometimes the chill of discouragement, fear and anxiety can form icicles in our souls. The only way to melt the ice is to rejoice in the Lord. Are you going through an extended period of heaviness or disappointment? Psalm 47:1 says: "O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy."

When you praise God with exuberance, new strength will arise. Make a decision that this year you will praise God in a more vocal, uninhibited way than ever before. Read through the book of Psalms and note how often this ancient hymnbook commands us to praise God with all our hearts. If you need help praising God, play a recording by one of your favorite Christian artists and sing along.

Break Free From Bad Habits

Paul told the Thessalonians, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). Are you doing anything that is extinguishing the Holy Spirit's flames in your life? Many Christians remain perpetually immature, unable to grow spiritually because they won't let go of lustful habits or addictions. If you choose to live in bondage by allowing habitual sin to take residence in your soul, then your heart will never be hot for God. Make a decision to repent and turn 180 degrees away from whatever is dampening your spiritual passion. You do not have to remain a slave to an unhealthy habit.

Get Rid of Your Resentments

Jesus said in the last days "most people's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). Don't be a part of that cooling trend. Nothing puts out the flame of God's love faster than bitterness. Don't allow unforgiveness to freeze your soul. Guard your heart and deal with offenses quickly. You cannot know or enjoy God's forgiveness if you haven't forgiven the people who hurt you.

Run With Those Who Burn

Fires go out when the embers are far apart. But when you pull the coals close together, the flames return. This is why we should never live the Christian life in seclusion. God called us to be in community with one another (John 17:20-21; Acts 2:42). Many Christians today have developed the mistaken notion that church is optional, so they have no serious Christian friends, no mentors, no pastors and no supportive relationships. They have created a do-it-yourself version of Christianity that is not biblical.

You will never grow hot for God apart from other believers. God has called us to encourage one another, pray for one another and bear one another's burdens. If you are not in a Bible-believing church, find one. If you were hurt by a previous church and don't trust Christians, be willing to take a risk and open your heart again to God's people.

God has a church for you. But make sure you are in a church that is on fire for God—because a dead church could put out what is left of your flame! If your church compromises God's Word or ignores the Great Commission, you should find a new church home.

Start Using Your Spiritual Gifts

Real spiritual passion is ignited when you serve others. Every Christian has a spiritual gift—and you are no exception. You must face your fears and stretch your faith as you begin to step out, but soon you will find there is no greater joy than being an instrument of the Holy Spirit to bless people. And when the oil of His anointing flows through you, your spiritual temperature will go up.

Pursue a Fiery Mentor

I love to hang around zealous, passionate Christians because their heat directly affects mine. I sometimes ask these

firebrands to lay hands on me and pray. Sometimes I make appointments with them so I can glean from their wisdom and experience. You can be sure that when Elisha saw Elijah go to heaven in a fiery chariot, he was affected by the heat. Get as close as possible to those who are burning for God and you will be ignited.

Boldly Share Your Faith

There is nothing more exciting than leading a person to faith in Christ. Yet according to one poll, 95 percent of Christians have never led one soul to salvation. I guarantee that if you step out of your timidity and share the gospel with a neighbor, a co-worker, a server at a restaurant or a stranger on the subway, your spiritual temperature will instantly rise 30 degrees—and you will want to share with someone else.

Jesus told us not to hide our faith. He said in Matthew 5:14-15: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”

I encourage you to take your flame out from under the basket and let it blaze before men. This cold, dark world needs the light of Christ. And that light comes from fervent Christians who have reached the boiling point of spiritual passion.

Don't Block the Spirit's Flow

A few years ago, the Lord challenged me about my level of spiritual hunger. He showed me that even though I had repeatedly sung the words, “Lord, I want more of You,” I wasn't as passionate for Him as I thought I was.

In 1999, my church sponsored a conference on the Holy Spirit. At the close of one service, I was lying on the floor near the altar asking God for another touch of His power. Several people were kneeling at the communion rail and praying quietly

for one another.

Suddenly I began to have a vision. In my mind, I could see a large pipeline, at least 8 feet in diameter. I was looking at it from the inside, and I could see a shallow stream of golden liquid flowing at the bottom. The oil in the giant pipe was only a few inches deep.

I began a conversation with the Lord.

“What are You showing me?” I asked.

“This is the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life,” He answered.

It was not an encouraging picture; it was pitiful! The capacity of the pipeline was huge—enough to convey a gushing river of oil. Yet only a trickle was evident. Then I noticed something else. Several large valves lined the sides of the pipe, and each was shut.

I wanted to ask the Lord why there was so little oil in my life. Instead I asked: “What are those valves, and why are they closed?”

His answer stunned me: “Those represent the times when you said no to Me. Why should I increase the level of anointing if you aren’t available to use it?”

The words stung. When had I said no to God? I was overcome with emotion and began to repent. Then I recalled different excuses I had made and limitations I had placed on how He could use me.

I had told God I didn’t want to be in front of crowds because I wasn’t a good speaker. I had told Him that if I couldn’t preach like a famous TV minister, then I didn’t want to speak at all. I had told Him I didn’t want to address certain issues or go certain places. I had placed so many cumbersome conditions on my obedience.

After a while I began to see something else in my spirit. It was a huge crowd of African men, assembled as if they were in a large arena. And I saw myself preaching to them.

Nobody had ever asked me to minister in Africa, but I knew at that moment I needed to surrender my will to the Lord. All I could think to say to Him was the prayer of Isaiah: "Here am I. Send me!" (Is. 6:8). I told God I would go anywhere and say anything He asked. I laid my insecurities, fears and inhibitions on the altar.

Three years later, I stood at a pulpit inside a sports arena in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. As I addressed a crowd of 7,000 pastors who had assembled there for a training conference, I remembered seeing their faces in that vision. And I realized God had opened a new valve in my life as I lay on the floor that day in 1999—because I had said yes, He had increased the flow of His oil so it could reach thousands.

Many of us have a habit of asking for more of God's power and anointing. But what do we use it for? He doesn't send it just to make us feel good.

We love to go to the altar for a touch from God. We love the goose bumps, the shaking, the emotion of the moment. We love to fall on the floor and experience one filling after another. But I am afraid some of us are soaking up the anointing and not giving it away. The focus of our charismatic experience has become inward and selfish. We get up from the floor and live as we want to.

Pentecost is not a party. If we truly want to be empowered, then we must offer God an unqualified yes. We must crucify every no. We must become a conduit to reach others, not a reservoir without an outlet.

Search your heart today and see if there are any closed valves in your pipeline. As you surrender them, the locked channels will open, and His oil will flow out to a world that craves a

sign that He is real.

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