

Practical Steps to Maintain God's Fiery Presence in Your Life

Note: This is the first of a three-part series.

For the Christian, our first love is Jesus. When He is our first love, we influence the world around us. When you return to “first love,” God quickly honors your fresh commitment to Him.

You are responsible to pursue and walk with God—no one else can do this for you. But you must be intentional about your pursuit and relationship with God to keep your love for Jesus alive, fresh and fiery. True love is passionate—it is an unquenchable fire.

God's love for you will never extinguish. However, you can quench the fiery presence of God and His love in your life. Your ability to maintain the fire of God's love and presence in your life is vital. Your passion and intimacy with God are not automatic; you have a part to play in the process. His grace enables you to maintain the fire of his love and presence in your life.

The apostle Paul said to Timothy,

“This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you” (2 Tim. 1:6, NLT).

The pursuit of God's presence positions you to fan into flames God's passion and spiritual gifts.

John Wesley, a founder of the Methodist Church, instructed his disciples, “I remind thee of stirring up—literally, blowing up the coals into a flame—the gift of God—all the spiritual

gifts, which the grace of God has given thee.” Wesley stated we have a part to play in maintaining the fire of God in our lives. The Holy Spirit ignites the flame at new birth; we must follow Jesus faithfully and allow the Spirit to burn bright within us.

The apostle Paul and John Wesley knew that it was not enough to have gifts imparted. The recipient had a responsibility to steward the presence of God, the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

Hot Fires Need Hot Coals

As a boy, I loved camping. Now that I am older, I prefer a nice hotel room, but I still enjoy getting out in nature and recharging on a nice walk or hike. Building campfires was one of my favorite tasks when camping—especially as a Boy Scout. Who doesn’t love a roaring campfire!

Our Scout leader decided one year to take us on a winter camping trip. We lived in Ohio, and winters there can be unpredictable and extremely cold at times. We arrived at the campsite on a mild winter afternoon with just a few patches of snow on the ground. We had three-sided lean-to structures furnished with cots to sleep in—I thought to myself, “This should be fun and easy.” All of us settled in and then proceeded to gather firewood for a campfire.

Before long, we had a roaring fire with a deep bed of hot coals that warmed us in the winter night air. We roasted hot dogs and marshmallows—all was well—we were “happy campers!” We went to bed excited about hiking the next day. Little did we know that a cold front and winter storm were approaching.

In the middle of the night, the wind started to howl, the temperature dropped drastically and the snow began to fall. The others and I in my lean-to woke up freezing—we put on every bit of clothes we had and crawled back into our sleeping bags and tried to sleep. When we got up the next morning, we

discovered that a fresh blanket of snow had fallen. It was beautiful, but bitterly cold.

My lean-to was the first to wake, and we decided to restart the campfire as a priority. Normally, the next day after a roaring campfire, there would be some hot, or at least warm, coals that available to restart a fire. But everything was covered in snow and frozen. Our hands were freezing, and it was impossible to start a fire. It was not until the Scout leader came out of his lean-to and started a propane stove that we had fire to make hot food. But, had some of us stayed awake thru the night, placing fresh wood on the fire, we would have had a hot fire in the morning.

Here's the lesson: It's easier to keep a fire going by attending to it continuously. You must maintain your first love with Christ to keep God's fire burning in your life!

Maintaining the Fire

The Israelites were instructed in Leviticus to maintain the fire on the altar,

"The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must never go out. Each morning the priest will add fresh wood to the fire and arrange the burnt offering on it... Remember, the fire must be kept burning on the altar at all times. It must never go out" (Lev. 6:12-13, NLT).

God prescribed an order of worship to Moses and the Israelites that required their participation. They had to bring and offer a sacrifice, a first-born male of the herd or flock. The blood and animal parts were offered upon the altar as a sacrifice to God. Even the fire on the altar had to be placed in order and maintained. To have a hot fire, you need hot coals—you must be intentional.

The Levitical worship was a type and shadow of the sacrifice to come with Jesus, the lamb slain before the foundation of

time for humanity. Jesus, the perfect and spotless one, offered willingly for you and me. The Holy Spirit, given through His sacrifice, provides us fellowship with God and enables us to carry the fire of his love. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11b, NKJV).

With the New Covenant, sealed in the very blood of Christ, we have union with God and unhindered access to His presence by Holy Spirit. However, like the Israelites of old and their free-will sacrifice, you must offer your life willingly upon the altar of God's love and fiery presence. This invitation is open to everyone, beginning with salvation and walking in His kingdom power.

Practical Steps to Maintaining the Fire of God in Your Life

Complete Surrender

Paul gives an important first step for maintaining God's fire in your life—it is complete surrender.

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:1-2, NLT).

Notice how Paul uses language similar to the instructions given the Israelites for their worship? In fact, Paul is pleading with the reader to "give your bodies to God." No different from an Israelite intentionally giving a pure and spotless sacrifice from the flock or herd. God will not force your sacrifice—you must offer it freely.

Your surrender to Christ as a living sacrifice is voluntary,

and your life becomes a pleasant aroma before Him. You present your body as living and holy. When the Levites brought the sacrifice near, they had to wash the organs and limbs with water (Lev. 1:9). Through Christ, the Spirit and His Word, you have been washed clean—so live holy (1 Cor. 1:30). Choosing to live surrendered is the first and most vital step to maintaining the fire of God's love in your life.

You must pursue finding and knowing God. Living in ongoing encounter with Him keeps your love for God alive, fresh and fiery. Love is passionate and pursues God zealously.

Surrender and yield your emotions to God. Do not let your emotions dictate your life; rather, allow your mind and emotions to be transformed to think and act like heaven. Character is key, but so is a supernatural worldview—this only comes as you allow the Holy Spirit to transform you.

In Leviticus 9, as Moses and Aaron entered the tabernacle, God's glory appeared, and fire came forth from God's presence to consume the sacrifice (Lev. 9:23-24). Fire fell as they stayed surrendered, humble and obedient to God. They worshipped in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

How can you maintain the fire of God's presence? Ongoing encounters through a surrendered life—there is no substitute.

God will provide the fire; you must be positioned, surrendered and expectant as a living sacrifice. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead, fill and empower you daily (Rom. 8:14). Stay humble. Stay surrendered. Live in his holiness. Holiness is Christ in you; but you must let holiness have its way! The fire of His holiness burns passionately in those whose hearts and lives stay surrendered to God.

Next, I will look at other practical principles to maintaining the fire of God's presence in your life. Surrender is the foundation; all other Christian disciplines build upon the truth and necessity of complete surrender to God. Draw near to

Him today, and let the fire of His love ignite a flame of passion within you to impact your world!

Bob Sawvelle is the founding and senior leader of Passion Church in Tucson, Arizona. Passion Church is a vibrant, kingdom-minded church in the heart of Tucson that values God's love and presence. He is a Doctor of Ministry doctoral mentor for the Randy Clark Scholars cohort at United Theological Seminary (UTS), an adjunct professor teaching master's-level classes in evangelism, discipleship and church planting with the Global Awakening Theological Seminary (GATS) and an online course facilitator for Global Awakening's Christian Healing Certification Program (CHCP) and Christian Prophetic Certification Program (CPCP).