

“Keep the Fire Roaring”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Series: Recharge - Plug into the Power of the Spirit Week 7

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In February 2017 Billy Donnelly, of Addictions Victorious, asked Michelle and I to speak at a recovery house in Philadelphia. This house, called “The Joy of Living”, helps people struggling with addiction. They provide room and board, facilitate addiction meetings, and require sober living. Billy runs weekly meetings for several of these houses. One thing he has noticed is many of those in recovery feel family has given up on them. They feel they have hurt family members so badly in their addiction, they couldn’t possibly be loved. Michelle and I lost a son to an overdose in 2016, and Billy wanted us to share how we handled it. There were four main things we wanted to share.

1. Jimmy hurt our family many times over the years.
2. Despite the hurt, we never stopped loving him.
3. His death hurt us terribly. We have learned to live with it but will never get over it.
4. And even in a situation where there has been a complete relationship breakdown, the Father above is always there and full of love.

After our presentation we answered questions, and just talked. I pray we provided hope to the people who attended that day. On our side, we saw Jimmy in so many faces, and maybe came to understand him better.

Michelle and I talked on the car ride home. We could see the good of the recovery house environment. But we also saw monotony in their lives. Living in the Frankford/Kensington area, most of them didn’t have transportation available to get them to the coffeehouse our ministry runs in Bensalem every month. I believe it was the Holy Spirit who then prompted her to say, “We should bring a coffeehouse to them.”

This past Friday night we celebrated the 5th anniversary of the Recovery Café which was conceived that night. Every month we go to St Mark’s Church in Frankford. We serve coffee, soda, and baked goods. We invite an artist to lead worship. We share a short message, and we fellowship. Listening to the Spirit, and acting on it, allowed us to expand the reach of the ministry we have been so involved in. We went to Philadelphia that cold February night to provide a charge to the residents in a recovery house. But that night, the Holy Spirit recharged us.

As we finish up this sermon series, let’s look back at what we’ve learned.

- The Power of the Holy Spirit – We have His power inside us.
- The Spirit is a person, a part of the Trinity – He’s not a thing.
- Presence vs Presents - The Presence is greater than any Presents.
- Listen to the Spirit – It doesn’t do us any good to have the spirit within us if we don’t listen to Him.
- Use your gifts to share the Spirit –Learn what your gifts are through GPS, or through trial and error, or both. Then take those gifts you’ve been given and share them with others.

Today’s command is “Keep the Fire Roaring.”

Paul writes, ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

When should we rejoice? Just one day a week at worship service? No, Always! How often do we pray? Just at meals, or bedtime, or when we are in pain? No. Continually! How and when should we give thanks? Just when things are going well? No! in ALL circumstances! Why? - for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

He goes on. ¹⁹ Do not douse the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil. ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. - 1 Thessalonians 5:19-24

Do not douse the Spirit. Remember, the Spirit is the one who is with us always. It is the Spirit who is helping us, leading us, strengthening us every day. He gives us the spark to get the fire going. The fire is what helps us continue rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. If you douse the Spirit, and put out the fire, you run the risk of distancing yourself from God. What signs are there to look out for to protect ourselves? Three came to mind

1. **Boredom** – Is it becoming routine for you? We all need variety in our lives. If we do the same thing over and over, anything can lose its appeal. You might love a vacation spot. But if you go there year after year, you will most likely someday get tired of it. The same thing can happen with your spiritual life. Do you go to the same service every week? We have four to choose from. Do you sit in your same spot every week? (Guilty). I read an article a couple of years ago about one of the struggles worship leaders have. It's important for members of the congregation to know the worship songs, so they can participate. But practicing and performing the same songs week after week can become boring for the worship team. They must find a balance between new and known songs.
2. **Bitterness** – When bad things happen, we can become bitter. Many times, Christians forget we are not promised an easy life. In fact, we are told differently. Paul writes to Timothy, and says, ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, - 2 Timothy 3:12. We live in an imperfect world and have difficulties thrown our way regularly, often even as we serve God. What God does promise us is he is there for us in our troubles and helps us through them. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. - Philippians 4:13
3. **Burnout** – Sometimes we do so much we find we have become empty inside. We have extinguished the fire. We know we are supposed to serve. It is one of the things Jesus taught us. ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Matthew 20:28. So how can we lose our spiritual fire by doing the things we are told to do? It's not the things we are doing, but the things we aren't doing. If we aren't filled with the spirit ourselves, how can we share it with others? I once read, "I fill up with the Spirit for myself. The overflow is what I share with others." – Unknown. I liken it to the instructions we receive prior to takeoff on an airplane. If the cabin depressurizes and the oxygen masks drop down, put yours on first, then help others with theirs. It's the same with the Holy Spirit. If you aren't filled with it, you won't be able to share with others.

For a full spiritual life, we strive to do more than just keep the fire burning. We want to make it a roaring fire.

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline. ⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:6-10

Paul tells us to fan the flame. God gave us a gift, which is the Holy Spirit. It is up to us to stoke the flames, build it up so God can use us in a powerful way. He directs us here on how we should share the gospel – with power, love, and self-discipline.

- Power – We aren't to share the gospel with timidity, but with strength. Bold in our faith and in our presentation.
- Love – Bashing people with the bible doesn't make people want to read it. We all want to be loved and a person who shares something through love is looked at more favorably.
- Self-discipline – Nobody respects the person who says, "Do as I say, not as I do." We show the discipline by living the life we are preaching. Some people will want to find fault in us. Sharing a message on how to follow the gospel, to walk the path of Jesus, while we live differently is a sure way to ruin a message.

As we fan the flames and build up the Spirit within us, it makes it so much easier to share the gospel with others. Evangelism is a scary word to many, mostly because it is misunderstood. Evangelism isn't about forcing people to convert to Christianity. It is simply, sharing the good news. Or as D.T. Niles put it, "Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." We can all share the gospel, just by listening and answering questions.

Al Vesce has been a friend of mine for over 40 years. He knew me years before I returned to my Christian faith in 2006. And while I believe I was a good person in those early years I knew him, I wasn't living the same way I do now. I guess he saw a difference in me after I was reborn. We went to a Phillies game one night and he asked me what changed in me. What brought about my Christian faith? I don't remember what I said, but I think it was something about finding faith in Jesus and learning more about how I wanted to live. Knowing Al's desire for learning, I invited him to come to our Friday morning men's group at Einstein's and followed up with an e-mail. The very next Friday he called me up, and when I answered he said, "Very funny Scott." I said, "What do you mean?" He told me he went to Einstein's earlier and nobody was there. I told him to recheck the e-mail because it clearly said we were starting our next study the next Friday and were taking today off. He joined us the next week and has been part of the group ever since and spends most Sunday mornings here at Woodside. All because he asked me a question and I invited him to a meeting.

So how do we keep the fire burning brightly? How do we avoid extinguishing the flame which keeps us going? Let's look at it in the same way we look at an actual fire. There are three things necessary for a fire to burn. A spark, oxygen, and fuel. Remove the spark and the fire won't be lit.

Put a blanket over the fire to keep out the oxygen and the fire will no longer burn. Remove the wood, or don't add more, and there is no fuel to keep the fire burning.

The same can be said about keeping the fire roaring inside us. How, you ask? I think all of us at Woodside should know this: Love God – Grow in Grace – Share with Others

- Love God – This is where we reach up by praising God, listening to him, and talking with him.
 - We normally think of praising God when we talk about Sunday services. But this can be done anytime, anywhere. We don't need a scheduled time to worship God.
 - Listening to God – Scripture reading. This is often where we find God's message to us. Reading the Bible regularly allows us to hear from God and learn what his plans are for us
 - Talking with God – Prayer time. It's good to set aside some scheduled time for this, but as Paul says, "pray continually". It is also a time we can listen for God. Often through what the Holy Spirit is telling us. Talking to God is how build a relationship with him.
- Grow in Grace - Where we reach into ourselves – We accomplish this through fellowship and study. Fellowship at Worship, in growth groups, serving or just spending time with other believers.
- Share With Others – Reaching Out - This is service, where we give back. We take our gifts and our passions and serve others. This can be within the church, or helping others outside the church learn about God

Take away any of these and you can find the flame within you dim. Be consistent with all 5 and you can see your flame roar.

The past two years have been difficult for all of us – individually and collectively. There was a significant impact on the Church. Virtual worship services became the option, assuming they weren't canceled completely. Fellowship was greatly reduced, and when we were able to participate, we were required to be masked and social distance from each other. Ministry wasn't eliminated, but the opportunities were limited. I saw a change in myself. I was happy we could watch the weekly service on Zoom. But Sunday services are participatory as far as I am concerned. And even when we opened again, it was difficult to sing and worship in a mask. More than a few people wondered what happened to the "Full Burgess". The flame was dimming. I became a little negative, even in the weekly sermon meeting. My prayer and scripture time began to lag. Live and unmasked worship helped me, but it wasn't until we were able to start the quarterly recovery service and the Recovery Café I began to feel the flame begin to brighten again. I look back now and see the danger I was facing in my spiritual life.

It doesn't have to be a pandemic to smother the flame. Work, negative people, busyness are just a few things which can be spiritual fire extinguishers in your life. Learn to recognize when your fire is dimming and feed yourself and the present given to you.