

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS “Relighting Our Passion for Jesus”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus’ initial comments to the church in Ephesus are very complimentary. Jesus says, “I know your works, your labor, and your love.” Here was a working congregation that loved the Lord and that was laboring in His vineyard. Jesus then said to this congregation that would not put up with evil. They would not allow immorality and sin to be in their midst, and thus they stood firm on their stance **for** right and **against** wrong. This congregation was a congregation that tested those who said that they were apostles, and found them to be wrong because they were false apostles. This congregation was conservative, Bible based, and working. Yet there was one thing that was wrong. Jesus said in Revelation 2:4, “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” How sad it is that this faithful, conservative, Bible-minded congregation had lost its zeal and passion for God and for holy things. The same thing can happen to us if we are not careful. If we do not watch out, we, too, can lose our passion for God and for holy things, and we can lose our zeal and our drive to serve the Lord. If that happens, what do we do to relight our spiritual passion for Jesus? If our flame goes out, and if we no longer have the zeal and the passion that we once did, how do we get back to having a fire for God and a zeal for holy things?

Philippians 3:12-15 gives us a four-fold pattern for relighting our spiritual passion for Jesus. First, we must have a holy dissatisfaction with ourselves. If we are really going to have a passion for God, along with a zeal and a desire for holy things, then we must have a holy dissatisfaction with ourselves. Notice what Paul says in Philippians 3:12. Paul said, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” Paul admitted that he had “not already attained,” and that he “was not there yet.” He had not “arrived.” He was not everything that he knew he needed to be as a Christian. How amazing it is that one of the greatest men of God had not yet arrived in his Christian life. Here is a man who had suffered many things for the cause of Christ (1 Cor. 11). Here is a man who even had been caught up to the third Heaven, and who had seen unspeakable things (2 Cor. 12:1ff.). Here is a man who said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). This is a man of God who had suffered many things. Yet is amazing that Paul would say, “I have not yet attained; I have not achieved everything that I need in my Christian life.” Paul had a holy dissatisfaction with himself.

In order for each of us to relight our spiritual passion, and in order for us to have a zeal for God and everything that is right, we must learn that the status quo will never work in Christianity. We can never think that we have reached our plateau as a Christian, or that we have “arrived” as a child of God. We need to always be striving to grow in our Christian walk. Do you remember the words of 2 Peter 3:18? Peter discussed Christian growth when he said, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him

be the glory both now and forever.” Peter was saying that we must grow. The word “grow” in that passage carries with it the idea of continuation. It is something that we must always do. We must never stop growing. Instead, we must always be trying to follow God’s will. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:2, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” Just like a baby on the bottle must drink the milk in order to grow and thrive, we as Christians must have that same appetite for God’s Word. We have not yet achieved everything we need to achieve. We must not be satisfied with the status quo. Instead, we must strive every day to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. Paul wanted to know the Lord more fully. He said in Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection.” We ought to have that same attitude today so that we want to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. We should want to know Him better each and every day of our lives. Having a holy dissatisfaction with ourselves means several things from a practical standpoint. It means that we must never say that we know the Bible well enough. We should never come to the conclusion that we have know God’s Word well enough, or that we have studied the Bible enough, so that we can quit studying. The Bible teaches us that we must not act like that. The text of 2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The King James Version says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God.” This means that we must put forth every effort to show ourselves approved unto God. We must search the Scriptures and know what God’s will is. The text of 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Are we ready to give an answer for the hope we have? Are we really prepared in our knowledge of the Bible? As we study the Bible, and as we search the Scriptures, we always find that there are areas in which we can improve. There may be things that we do not know as well as we think we do. Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer.” Christians must never say, “We know the Bible as well as we need to.”

We should never say that we pray enough. We ought to always strive to be a more prayerful people. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that Christians out to “pray without ceasing.” There should never be a time in our lives when we cannot pray or when we cannot come to the throne of God and ask for grace and help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). The psalmist said in Psalm 86:3, “I cry unto You all day long.” Oh, how we need to be like the psalmist so that we are never a people who say that we have prayed enough, but instead are always striving to have a better relationship with God through prayer. I think of the words of Jesus in Luke 18:1—“Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” Christians should never be satisfied with their ability to help others.

We never need to think to ourselves that we have been as benevolent or helpful toward others as we could be. In fact, we ought to strive to look for opportunities to reach out to those who are in need. That is part of what Christianity is about in regard to its practical nature. James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” The word “visit” does not mean that we are to go to someone’s house, sit down, and have a nice conversation. The idea is that we care for, or take care of, and provide for the needs of those who are widows and orphans. Galatians 6:10 sums it up this way: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We need to take advantage of opportunities to help others. We never should say, “I helped so-and-so last week, so I’m not going to look for any opportunities to help others this week.” We never need to say that we have done enough work in the Lord’s kingdom. We do not need to get the “retirement mentality.” I am persuaded that some in the church today—who perhaps have been Christians for many years—have gotten that idea. It is like

they have retired from a certain job and they do not have to do anything else. Some seem to have that same mentality when it comes to the church. "I've been in the church for fifty years, and now it's time for me to let the young whippersnappers do it!" That is not the way we need to think. We do not need to develop the retirement mentality. We need to always be looking for opportunities to work in the kingdom of our Lord. I am reminded of the words of 1 Corinthians 15:58 where Paul said, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." We need to be "always abounding." Listen to the language that Paul used. We do not need to sit down and let someone else do it. Rather, we must be "always abounding" in our work for God. Revelation 14:13 tells us why: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." What we do for God and the church now will help us as we live our Christian lives, but it also will be a blessing in eternity. Think of the words of Jesus in John 9:4. Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."

We never need to say to ourselves as Christians that we have done enough evangelism. Sometimes we may get discouraged and say, "I've talked to enough people about evangelism," or "I've tried a lot but it's just not working, so I'm going to quit talking to people about the Lord." No, we need to have a holy dissatisfaction with ourselves when it comes to evangelism. We need to always be striving to find areas of improvement in our lives, especially when it comes to talking to friends and neighbors about the Gospel. Think about what Jesus said in Mark 16:15—"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." He repeated these sentiments in Matthew 28:18 as well. Paul taught us that we must always strive for opportunities to spread the message of Jesus. In Colossians 1:28, Paul wrote, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." We have been called out of this world of darkness and sin in order to proclaim the praises of God (1 Pet. 2:9). To really relight our spiritual passion for Christ, we must have a holy dissatisfaction of self. We must never say, "I am where I need to be as a Christian." Rather, we should always be looking for areas of improvement.

A second step in relighting our spiritual passion for Jesus is to have a wholehearted devotion to the Lord. If we are really going to be on fire for the Lord, and if we are really going to have a zeal and a passion for God and holy things, then we must have a wholehearted devotion to the cause of Christ. Notice what Paul said in Philippians 3:13 when he wrote, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead." Paul had one goal. He had a wholehearted devotion. He had one thing in mind: he was striving to truly seek the kingdom first. Thus, the emphasis was upon the One Whom he was striving to serve. Throughout the Bible, there is a lot said about having a wholehearted devotion. And there is a lot said about the emphasis placed on one person or one goal. Think about Deuteronomy 6:4-5—"The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Think about Mark 10 as Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler. The man comes to Christ to ask what he has to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." The man said, "This have I done since my childhood." Jesus said, "One thing you lack. Take all that you have, sell it, and give the money to the poor." That man did not have a wholehearted devotion. Think about Luke 10:42, where Jesus spoke of Mary, Martha's sister. He said, "Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." The "good part" was studying and knowing God's Word. They did not need to be worrying about serving and doing all these things. There was one thing that was needful—sitting at the Master's feet and listening to His words. In John 9, as the blind man was being questioned by the Phar-

isees because they wanted to know how the miracle had occurred that allowed him to see, the blind man said, "One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Oh, how we need to be the same kind of people today so that we have a single focus and outlook in this life. Psalm 27:4 says, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Oh, how we need that same passion and desire today. Let's put everything else aside. Let's put everything else on the back burner. And let's make sure that we have a wholehearted devotion to God and to holy things. In 2 Corinthians 13:11 we are told to "be of one mind." We need to be like those in Acts 4:32, who "were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." How we today need that type of wholehearted devotion to God and to His cause. Many of us may have a lack of holy dissatisfaction with ourselves because we have a lack of devotion to the cause of Christ. Why is that we may not have this holy dissatisfaction with ourselves? It may be because we do not have a wholehearted devotion to the Lord and to His cause. Think soberly about the words of Matthew 6:33 as they relate to having a wholehearted devotion. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Do you really have the kingdom, God, and Jesus and your relationship with Him as your goal in life? Is that really what you are living for? We cannot be devoted to too many things in this life because if we do so, then we are going to be so divided that we cannot really focus on God and the things that are right. In Mark 12:30, we are told, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." We are to be workers in the kingdom. We are not to be "double-minded" people (Jas. 1:8). Paul, as he thought about this principle, said in 1 Corinthians 7:35, "And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction." That is what it means to have a wholehearted devotion to God. We should have one goal in life—to serve God. We must make sure that we get to Heaven "without distraction." We cannot be divided among many things. Rather, we must serve God.

A third step in relighting our spiritual passion for Jesus is that we must have an upward direction in life. Not only must we have a holy dissatisfaction with self and a wholehearted devotion to the Lord, but we also must have an upward direction in life. That is what our lives must be all about—looking up to Heaven itself. Think again about the words of Paul. As he continues in Philippians 3, he tells us about this upward direction when he says, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vss. 13-14). Notice his words. Paul says that we must have an "upward direction." Thus, he said that he put other things behind him so that he could reach forward to those things that were ahead. In order to have an upward direction in life, there are three steps that a person must take. (1) We must be willing to look up toward Heaven rather than down toward this world. If we look down, we will grow sad and depressed. Colossians 3:1 puts it this way: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." Paul said, "Look up! Do not look at this world, but stay focused on Heaven." How can we truly have an upward direction in life? We must be constantly reminded of the joy and beauty of Heaven. John said in Revelation 21:4 that in heaven there would be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Romans 8:18 says that this world does not even begin to compare with the beauty that Heaven can offer. Thus, we have to look up and make sure that we have our eyes toward Heaven and that it is our goal. (2) We must be willing to let go. There are some encouraging words in Philippians 3:13-14 where Paul said,

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” If we are really going to have an upward direction in life, we not only have to look up, but we also cannot look back. We must let go of the past. How many people do you know who live their lives in the past? Sometimes we get focused on the things that we have done in the past, and we allow them to keep us from really serving God. You know what really helps us let go of our sins and our past? It is knowing that God has let go of our past, too, and that He has forgiven us of our sins. That helps us let go of the past. Micah 7:18-19 says, “He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” The psalmist said in Psalm 103:10-12,

“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” In Hebrews 8:12, God said, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” It helps us to let go of our past lives to know that we have obeyed the Gospel, and to know that God will not hold our past sins against us. We can know that if God lets go of our past, then we need to put it behind us and move on. We look up, we let go, and then, (3), we lay aside. The Bible teaches us in Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” As Christians, we not only have to look up and let go, but we also must lay aside anything that might hinder us from running the race. People who are running races do not wear the heaviest clothes. Instead, they wear lightweight clothes and shoes. They wear things that will help them move as fast as possible. The idea here is that sin is the weight that causes us not to run the race as we should. We must “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us.” Maybe you do not have the passion for Jesus that you ought to have because there is sin in your life. I can guarantee you that if there is sin in your life that has not been taken care of, you will never reach the place where you need to be as a Christian. Lay aside your sin by repenting of that sin, making it right before God, and running with endurance the race that has been set before you.

A fourth principle for relighting our passion for Jesus is that we must have an inward determination. As a child of God, we must not only have a wholehearted devotion, and we must not only look to Heaven so that we can put our gaze there, but we also must have inward determination. We must decide that we are going to serve God in this life, and nothing else. Listen to the words of Philippians 3:14, and notice the inward determination that Paul has when he says, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” What was Paul's inward determination? It was that he “pressed forward.” Heaven was something for which he was actively striving. Heaven is to be our one and only goal. Paul was striving to go to Heaven. If we are really going to have a passion for Jesus, then we must determine not to let anything get in the way of us serving God. Jesus put it this way in Revelation 2:10, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” We must be faithful to Jesus in every way—even to the point of death. That is the only way that we are going to know that we are right with Christ. Do you have that inward determination today? Are you really determined that the most important thing in your life is going to be serving God and giving Him the glory? To do that, you must have Jesus as

your main goal. You must have Christianity as your main focus in this life. Think about what Paul said in Philippians 1:21 when he wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." As a Christian, if this is our goal, then we must remain faithful in every area. We must remain faithful in our service to God. Remember that the Bible says in Mark 10:45 that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus came as a Servant. So, we today almost be servants. We must never tire in our work for the kingdom. We are to be diligent workers in every way. Jesus described the kingdom in Matthew 20 as a vineyard. A vineyard is a place of work where fruit is produced. This is true of the church, too. We must always be hard workers in the kingdom, striving to do God's will.

But maybe you are saying to yourself today, "I want to have this passion, and I want to really serve God." But maybe you are not yet a Christian. You can become a Christian today by obeying the Gospel. You can obtain this passion for God, and you can know that your sins have been forgiven. In Acts 2, as Peter preached the Gospel and came to the climax of his sermon, the people asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (vs. 37). Peter responded by saying, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (vs. 38). They had heard the Word. So, today people also must hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Once we have heard the Word of God, listened to the message, and accepted it, then we must believe in Jesus as God's Son. In John 8:24, Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." But it not just belief that saves us. We also must be willing to repent of our past sins. We must move away from our former life. In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Peter preached in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." We must change our way of thinking and the way in which we live our lives. We also must be willing to confess Jesus as our Savior. In Romans 10:10, Paul wrote, "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." We must be willing to orally confess, and to say that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus said plainly in Matthew 10:32-33, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Thus, we must confess Jesus as God's Son. And, yes, in order for a person to have the passion of which I have spoken in the lesson today, a person must be baptized for the remission of sins. In Acts 2:38, Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Saul was told in Acts 22:16, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Jesus said it so plainly in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Are you a Christian? If not, I want to encourage you to obey the Gospel. God loves you, and I can guarantee you that you will have a life that truly has passion if you decide to follow Jesus. My hope and prayer today is that we will all strive to have a greater passion for God and for holy things. May God bless us as we strive to live a life that pleases Him.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “RELIGHTING OUR PASSION FOR JESUS”

1. What was the one thing that Jesus “had against” the church in Ephesus, according to Revelation 2:4?
2. According to Philippians 3:12-15, what is the first step in relighting our passion for Jesus?
3. According to Philippians 3:12-15, what is the second step in relighting our passion for Jesus?
4. According to Philippians 3:12-15, what is the third step in relighting our passion for Jesus?
5. According to Philippians 3:12-15, what is the fourth step in relighting our passion for Jesus?
6. What point was Paul making in Philippians 3:12 when he wrote, ““Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected...””?
7. What did Paul say, in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, had been “laid up for him” as a result of his faithfulness?
8. In this lesson, the following statement is made: “We can never think that we have reached our plateau as a Christian.” What is meant by that comment?
9. What does 2 Timothy 2:15 teach us to do?
10. What does Acts 17:11 teach us to do?
11. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul told us to “always” be doing something. What is that “something”?
12. What, according to James 1:27, is “pure and undefiled religion before God”?
13. Revelation 14:13 says that something will follow us to Heaven. What is it?
14. What did Moses tell the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and how does that apply to Christians today?
15. What did the psalmist mean by his comment in Psalm 27:4?
16. What does Hebrews 12:1 urge us to do?
17. Philippians 3:14 speaks of Paul’s “inward determination.” According to that passage, what prompted the apostle to have such an inward determination?
18. According to Micah 7:18-19 and Psalm 103:10-12, what is one of the joys of being a child of God?