

FIRST LOVE: CULTIVATING BURNING HEARTS PART 2

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Announcements or celebrations

- **Camp Volunteers** – we have a PRAISE REPORT & NEED! CAMP REGISTRATION CLOSED – we need more volunteers before opening up the remaining spots.
 - Praise God that so many want to come to camp!
 - Praise God for the camp being open!
 - But we need YOU.
 - <https://mysouthland.com/camps>

Church-wide Requests: PRAY TOGETHER.

CAMP (Mt 22:37-40): Love God – Love people: hospitality, generosity, serving & empathy

- Praise God for answering our prayers last year!
- Pray for God to raise up enough volunteers to lead the kids
- Pray for a couple more medics
- Pray that our church would a BURNING HEARTS for Jesus that would far exceed our love of self and this world!

Recap: last week we started talking about the importance of FIRST LOVE (start in the center!)

- **“when we embrace the mission without first embracing Jesus, we miss the point!”**
- **We can OBEY without LOVE. But we CANNOT LOVE without OBEYING!**
- The LOVE that Jesus wants us to have for him is likened to an engaged couple!
 - Time, likes, relationship, money... they think about each other... yearn for each other... plan around being together... can talk for hours... this is FIRST LOVE.
- That is a MAIN picture given us of the relationship Jesus wants to have with us in Scripture!

Having pastored people over a decade... I have talked to so many believers who have reported...

- prayer is a chore.. or non-existent in their lives...
- the Bible is boring...
- worship can be “ok” but they don’t feel DRAWN to worship – it feels like a discipline each time...
- devotions? Oh no! busyness... anxiety... stress... or other needs seem to always get in the way!
- Or they force themselves... they do it, they read, they pray... check the boxes and then get on with life and do the things that truly bring them life...
- We worry about our kids... and our families... and friends...
- We keep talking about the Great Commission and we are REMINDED OF ALL THE THINGS WE AREN’T DOING... so we feel more stress... more anxiety... feel paralyzed... hopeless...
- We seek to FILL OURSELVES UP and DISTRACT OURSELVES with media or work or ANYTHING...
- The picture of a couple in love, is far from our experience.

What is the issue? **If FIRST LOVE is so important, why does it seem to allude so many of us?**

As Dana Chandler writes, “the degree of our passion for him is relative to the degree of His passion for us that we have experienced.”

A. Burning Hearts for Jesus ignite from Encounters with Jesus

1 John 4:19 (ESV) We love him, because he first loved us.

Moses – Exodus 3... he sees a burning bush and when he approaches... the Lord is the FIRE... and doesn't consume but speaks to Moses and declares who he is... Moses' response? “He hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

- Moses goes on to confront Pharaoh and tell EVERYONE about, “I AM” the Name of God.
- God uses Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea and through the wilderness towards the Promised Land...

The Israelites at Mt Sinai – they saw glory of God fall on the Mountain... thunder and lightning... the mountain trembled... the voice of Elohim blasted like a trumpet... there was smoke and the Lord descended on Mt Sinai in FIRE....

- **Exodus 19:4-6** yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”
- **Exodus 20:18-20** Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”

The Apostle Paul... who wrote much of the New Testament... never actually walked with Jesus when he was alive on the earth... he was a religious leader...trained in the Scriptures... he knew the Scripture! Front to back! He was a zealot! BUT HE MISSED THE POINT.

- **Acts 9:3-6** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”
- A few verses later the **Lord reveals himself in a vision to Ananias** – why? So he would GO TO PAUL – he was terrified!
- **Acts 9:17-18** So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

- **Philippians 3:4-8** though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
- **For the sake of KNOWING CHRIST** – Paul had experienced the LOVE OF CHRIST which lit a fire on him that transformed him!

This shouldn't surprise us either! This has always been the way GOD HAS LED HIS PEOPLE.

- He says, "resist temptation" he resisted temptation!
- He says, "crucify the flesh" he crucified his flesh!
- He says, "persevere to the end" he persevered to the end!
- He says, "obey the Commands" he obey the commandments!
- He modeled the way of prayer, sacrifice, loving others, loving God first!

Stefan – FOUR KEY ENCOUNTERS – Summer 1988 (met me in the Word), 1991 (called me from Isaiah 6), January 28 2003 (first time He spoke to me & birth of son, Austin), August 27 2004 (the second He spoke and called me to "come as I am") that STARTED ME ON MY JOURNEY

PRACTICE: YOU- Write down the encounter you had with Jesus that led you to choose Him over your own life? What did He do to YOUR HEART? Was it saving from sin? Accepting you as you were? That He was GOD? Were you fascinated by Him? Were you in awe? Curious?

B. Once we Experience Jesus, we Respond to Jesus

Unknown quote: "many people are open to the 'come just as you are' love of Jesus, but remain closed to the demands of Jesus."

Consider the Mt Sinai story! The people experienced the GLORY OF GOD!! WOW! And how did they respond? Moses delayed... they got impatient with waiting... so they BUILT A GOLDEN CALF!

- They couldn't WAIT ON THE LORD and instead made a god in their own image!
- **My question:** Do we do that? Have we experienced the glory of God? How have we RESPONDED to Him?

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ... And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Samuel Whitefield writes, “Can you imagine being at Mt. Sinai and refusing to gaze at the mountain and listen to the Lord’s audible voice? Can you imagine putting on headphones and enjoying entertainment instead of gazing at the LIVING GOD in FIRE on the mountain and listening to His THUNDEROUS voice? BUT is this not what we do when we prioritize media, and diversions over seeking communion with the Spirit and asking Him to reveal God to us?”

Whitefield writes further, ... “if we have been given access by the Spirit to behold the glory of God in a measure beyond what Israel experienced at Sinai, how is that we find Netflix more attractive?”

BUT – we have a choice to RESPOND to GLORY....

We have been given AN INVITATION TO: “come, to the table” the Banquet of Jesus!

- Jesus was revealed as the FULLNESS of God
- His Holy Spirit now testifies to us the GLORY OF GOD!
- He pursues us!
- He loves us!
- He meets us where we are at!
- And he is not HIDDEN! We see him in ALL creation!
- We see Him through the Cross!
- We see Him in the Word!

Genesis 25:29-34 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

- Do we do the same thing? We have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God! We have the fullness of God in Christ Jesus available to ALL who choose Him.
- Do we trade our birthright for the momentary pleasures of this world? (Entertainment, me-time, hobbies, relationships, money, free time...)
 - CAVEAT: things and people are not the problem – the priority of our HEARTS can be the problem

POINT: I don’t think our biggest problem in the West is **RIGHT BELIEFS!** I believe it is lack of **KNOWING GOD!** I think our culture struggles more with a **COLD HEART** towards Jesus, rather than **BELIEVING** in Jesus.

FUN CHALLENGE: (ONLINE IS MORE IN DEPTH THAN IN SERVICE): Is the FIRE in your heart related to the priorities of TIME & MONEY in your life?

- **Burning Heart:** Scale of 1-10: How would you rate your Passion for Jesus? Can this be seen in the way that you LOVE people? Are you discipling people to Jesus? Does your heart burn for Jesus? You are drawn into Prayer? The Word? Worship?
- **Money:** After your bills are paid. How much money do you give to spreading the Gospel through church or missions? How much money do you spend on hobbies and entertainment?
- **Money:** do you spend more money on others? Are you willing to sacrifice what you want for what someone else needs? Can you see this in your life?
- **Time:** Estimate how much time you spend on media – including phone and TV?
- **Time:** Estimate how much time you spend on hobbies?
- **Time:** Estimate how much time you spend in the Word & Prayer?
- **Time:** how much time do you spend on loving people in need and discipling others?
- **Correlation:** do you think the answers are causing you to BURN MORE or LESS for Jesus?

THIS IS NOT MEANT TO DISCOURAGE OR CONDEMN ANYONE – NO! But... these kinds of exercises are IMPORTANT for all of us! We should be examining our hearts regularly! We should be ensuring our priorities are right! TOO MUCH IS AT STAKE.

- Jesus' Mission is at stake
- The next generation is at stake
- The lost are at stake
- WE are at stake!

Jesus will light the FIRES in our HEARTS with his all-consuming Presence! But we will have to tend to that “burning heart” to keep the flames burning!

C. **COMMITMENT:** let's take a moment to COMMIT ourselves to the pursuit of KNOWING GOD and LOVING HIM ABOVE ALL ELSE!

- Confess anything you have put before him as sin
- **Pentecost is Next Weekend!** Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and lite a fire in your heart – then commit to pursuing Him this week!
 - Idea: YouVersion: 5 day Pentecost Reading Plan
 - Set aside time every day to pray and worship
- Commit, in writing, to follow Jesus and seek Him with your whole life. (count the cost.)

MARANATHA!! Come soon Lord!

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SC CHURCH WIDE PRAYER REQUESTS 2022

Cruise Ship → → → → → Battleship

1. **Great Command** (Mt 22:37-40): Love God – Love people: hospitality, generosity, serving & empathy
2. **Great Commission** (Mt 28:18-20): Disciple family, friends, neighbors & beyond
3. **Word & Truth** (1Pet 3:15): Know the Gospel, grow in discernment, speak the truth in love
4. **Persecuted Church** (2 Cor 4:7-10): Religious freedom, freedom of speech, spiritual fortitude, wisdom
5. **Church Renewal:** Directors for India & the Chinese worldwide, make many global disciple makers (The Way)
6. **Leadership:** Wisdom and direction in the search for Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor