

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WEEK # 6

IGNITE!



Re-Discovering the Christian
Passionate Life

In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us, he brings knowledge of Christ. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance. Because of Christ, we give off a sweet scent rising to God, which is recognized by those on the way of salvation—an aroma redolent with life. But those on the way to destruction treat us more like the stench from a rotting corpse.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 (MSG)

It doesn't always seem like I'm living in a perpetual victory parade. In fact, most days it seems like I'm barely making it through. The pressure of schedules, family, friends, work, and the expectations I live with create such a pressure that most of the time it seems I'm lucky to get home with my soul intact, much less marching home in victory.

Why is it we allow life to fill us with such anxiety? God wants us to live with a sense of victory in Jesus, yet we feel so beaten down spiritually that we really aren't what God describes.

And yet, we are the presence of Christ in the world. That is not to discount the omnipresence of God, but He has chosen to make His identity known through us. We carry the very presence of God in our lives that Paul here likens to an aroma. The scent that is uncontained by walls but can permeate its environment. To some the aroma is an alluring enticement to come discover the satisfaction God offers in life. To others it will be the scent of lost hope, defeat, and love that they don't believe they can ever experience.

What kind of an aroma do you project? How does your life show victory in how you live? Why or why not?

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

We live in a world full of temptations. Every ad, every movie, every TV show is filled with the offers of something that would “tempt” us to do, have, or be a part of something that all too easily draws us away from the life God desires for us. It is even more frustrating when we realize that the urges we struggle with in temptation are not from the things around us, but the issues inside us.

As James 1:13-15 tells us, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” The simple fact is that temptation comes from the ugliness of our own desires. Its roots found in our nature of wanting what we want before we consider what God wants. But just as God designs a way out, so too does He provide the ability to conquer temptation and the birth of sin in our lives through it. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

Is there a temptation that has a hold on your heart and life? Do you see God’s way of escape? Why is it hard to use the escape at times? How does God’s grace strengthen the fight?

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Romans 8:26-28 (MSG)

Hope is indeed one of God’s greatest gifts. This passage reminds us of God’s infallible nature in the way He will work for us and through us in the times we feel most distant from Him.

Each of us has experienced a time when God seemed to have turned His back on us, seems to have “left the building.” The darkness that envelopes us and clouds our way, our hope, our understanding eclipses the presence of God we are familiar with. These challenges can easily defeat us if we don’t keep sight of the promises of God, even when it seems we can’t see His involvement.

I appreciate the words from The Message Bible above as they draw out God’s ability to work when we can’t see. The way God will intercede for us through His Spirit, to express our heartfelt struggles to the Father. There is not a single event in our lives that God is not a part of if you are a believer in the salvation He has offered through His son Jesus. His Spirit fills us, and the promise He will never leave us resounds through the darkened times of trials to give us hope. Hope that keeps us steady, unmoved by the waves of life that could cause us to drift. Be patient and allow God to work all things for His good in your life as you live for His glory. God will never leave you alone.

Take some time to write out some of the memories of how God has worked in your life in the past. Do you know anyone who needs to hear some of those stories?

So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

*“As I live and breathe,” God says,
“every knee will bow before me;
Every tongue will tell the honest truth
that I and only I am God.”*

So tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

Forget about deciding what's right for each other. Here's what you need to be concerned about: that you don't get in the way of someone else, making life more difficult than it already is. I'm convinced—Jesus convinced me!—that everything as it is in itself is holy. We, of course, by the way we treat it or talk about it, can contaminate it. Romans 14:10-14 (MSG)

Comparison is one of the biggest dangers of the average Christian's life. Of course even the statement the “average Christian life” suggests that there are comparisons taking place. The tendency is to measure ourselves against someone else rather than to look to the standard God has set. It is always easy to find someone who is struggling with something we consider worse than our own struggle. But our spiritual life is unique to ourselves. We will all bow before the Father at the judgment and the standard is not on a curve. The question is not how have we lived in comparison to someone else, it is how have we lived in appreciation for the grace God has given us?

When you consider what a Christian life looks like, who do you picture? Who would picture you?

When are you more likely to compare your life to someone else?

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

*“Wake up, O sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Ephesians 5:13-17 (NIV)

Sixty seconds every minute, 60 minutes every hour, 24 hours every day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and you have how long to live?

Life moves fast and in the world we live in today, it changes and moves at an incredible pace. The rhythm and movement of each day swells over us like a wave in the ocean.

“Make the most of every opportunity.”

Auto pilot may be a great setting for an airplane, but for a life it leads to missed opportunities and frustrated dreams. As God lives around us every day, we are often in remote control and miss the vitality of God's work. Jim Elliot, a missionary who died in his outreach efforts, once said, “Wherever you are be all there.” We miss so much of life by not being where we are. Distracted by the minutiae of our lives we blind ourselves to what is happening.

For the next week, take time to see how God is working in your life and around you. Be alert for the blessings and ministry that is all around you as God touches your life.

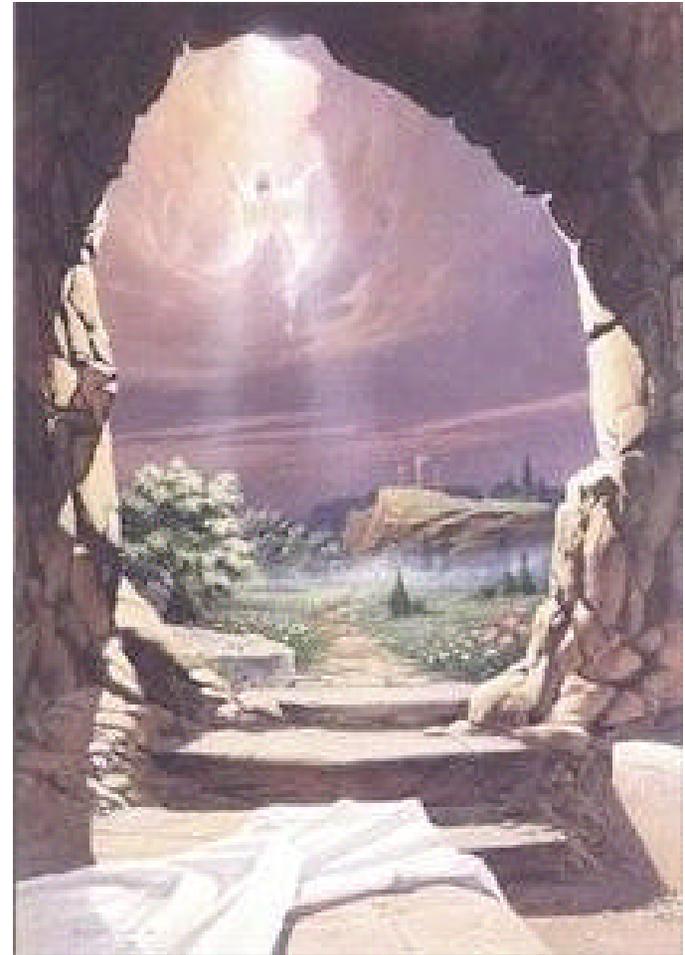
Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

Hebrews 12:1-3 (MSG)

How did Jesus keep going? Through the emotional upheaval of knowing His impending death in the face of His friends deserting Him, the violence of His arrest and ensuing beatings, the frustration of people won't listen or think, and the horrifically painful death on the cross. How could someone endure the isolation and loneliness of His final hours?

He never lost sight of where He was headed. The exhilaration and the joy made it all worthwhile. We've all had to endure something for a reward that made it worth it. Two a day workouts for a football championship, surgery for the return of a healthy body, drills in a dentist's office for healthy teeth, are some of the things that many of us have experienced in our lives, but none of them comes close to what Jesus has endured, but the joy before Him made the cross worthwhile. And we are that joy. Jesus died for us. For our ability to have the promise of eternal life through the sacrifice He offered made it all worthwhile. You and me, we were the ones in Jesus' mind when he was enduring the cross. We were why Jesus was able to endure all He did. His love for us.

Considering the things Christ endured for you, what is there you can't endure for Him?



He is Risen!

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