

Wanted: A Burning Heart!

by Wesley Duewel

A burning heart is necessary for Christian leaders to impact the world for Christ and to set others ablaze with love for God.

Scripture: Luke 11:13, Acts 2:1

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Passion for God"

Description

Wesley Duewel emphasizes the necessity of having a burning heart filled with love for God and compassion for others as essential for Christian leaders. He cites the urgent need for leaders who are ablaze with the Holy Spirit to impact a world filled with indifference and materialism. Duewel references historical figures like John Wesley and Samuel Chadwick, who exemplified this fiery passion, and stresses that a passionless Christianity cannot effectively combat the challenges of the world. He calls for a divine baptism of fire to awaken the church and ignite a fervent desire for souls. Ultimately, he urges believers to seek God's holy fire to transform their hearts and lives for His glory.

Transcript

No alternative to the Holy Spirit is available for the Christian leader. He must have a heart ablaze with love to God and love for people. Dr. George W. Peters said, "God, the Church, and the world are looking for men with burning hearts - hearts filled with love of God; filled with compassion for the ills of the Church and the world; filled with passion for the glory of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the salvation of the lost."

He adds, "God's answer to a world of indifference, materialism, coldness, and mockery is burning Christian hearts in pulpits, in pews, in Sunday schools, in Bible institutes, and in Christian colleges and seminaries."

If you as a leader lack a burning heart, few of your people will be known for their burning hearts, and they will make little impact on the world about them. Our communities are little impressed by our programs and manifold activities. It takes more than a busy church, a friendly church, or even an evangelical church to impact a community for Christ. It must be a church ablaze, led by leaders who are ablaze for God.

Samuel Chadwick, late president of Cliff College in Britain, was "a burning bush." From the time he was filled with the Spirit "miracles of grace were wrought through the influence of a life that was now on fire for God." Francis W. Dixon tells how "the power of his preaching and the moral influence of his church

members were so great that the chief constable of the neighborhood publicly expressed his gratitude for the way in which the whole town had been cleaned up by the influence of men and women who had been set on fire with the love of God."

John Wesley, evangel of the burning heart, was reportedly asked by a fellow minister how to gain an audience. He replied, "If the preacher will burn, others will come to see the fire."

One of Wesley's biographers called him a man "out of breath pursuing souls." On the grave of Adam Clarke, early Methodist scholar and protégé of Wesley, are the words, "In living for others, I am burned away."

A century ago T. DeWitt Talmage wrote, "We want in this age above all wants, fire - God's holy fire, burning in the hearts of men, stirring their brains, impelling their emotions, thrilling in their tongues, glowing in their countenances, vibrating in their actions, expanding their intellectual power and fusing all their knowledge, logic, and rhetoric into a burning stream. Let this baptism descend, and thousands of us who, up to this day, have been but commonplace or weak ministers, such as might easily pass from the memory of mankind, would then become mighty." This is still true.

It is also true in the world about us. Some years ago a soldier in Poland told Dr. Harold John Ockenga: "In Poland, it's a race between Christianity and Communism. Whichever makes its message a flame of fire will win."

A passionless Christianity will not put out the fires of hell. The best way to fight a raging forest fire is with fire. A passionless leader will never set the people ablaze. A passionless youth leader will never set the youth ablaze for Christ. Until we are ablaze we cannot speak to the hearts of our people. Bishop Ralph Spaulding Cushman prayed:

"Set us afire, Lord, stir us, we pray!

While the world perishes, we go

our way

Purposeless, passionless day after day!

Set us afire, Lord, stir us, we pray!"

There is no greater need in our churches and schools today. It is not enough to be evangelical in faith and heart; we must be utterly possessed by Christ, utterly impassioned by His love and grace, utterly ablaze with His power and glory. Every earthly part of our being, in the words of the great hymn, must glow with God's fire divine. The wood is not enough, the altar is not enough, the sacrifice is not enough - we need the fire! Fire of God, descend upon us anew! Set us ablaze, Lord, set us ablaze!

If we are to be an irresistible force for God where He has placed us, we need the Spirit's baptism of fire. If we are to awaken our sleeping church, we need the holy flame that came upon each waiting believer in the Upper Room to descend upon us today. You need it and I need it.

In a stirring article, "Burn On, Fire of God," T. A. Hegre wrote: "It is fire we need: fire to stir our cold and flat emotions, fire to drive us to do something for those who are going into Christless graves. Untold millions today are dying untold because we as Christians have no fire. We need fire - the fire of the Holy Ghost."

We do not need wildfire; wildfire does not glorify our holy Christ. It is holy fire, the fire with which the Holy Spirit baptizes us. We need the fire and zeal of the early Church when almost every Christian was ready, if need be, to be a martyr for Christ.

In a hard-hitting sermon, John R. Rice rebuked our lack of fire. "Listen, it is not sinners that are hard. The trouble is it is the preachers that are hard. It is the Sunday school teachers; it is the Baptist deacons and Methodist stewards and Presbyterian elders that are hard. I find it easier to win a soul and get a drunkard or harlot converted than it is to get a preacher on fire for souls."

George Whitefield was mightily used by God as he and John Wesley turned England upside down for Christ and saved, by God's grace, the British Isles from a duplicate of the French Revolution. It was said of him, "From the time he began, as a lad, to preach to the very hour of his death, he knew no abatement of passion. To the end of his remarkable career his soul was a furnace of burning zeal for the salvation of men."

His soul a burning furnace! Ah! There is the secret. Our tragic problem is that we are trying to lead God's people with hearts that have never been truly set ablaze, or hearts that have lost their flame. Elijah prayed until the fire fell on Mt. Carmel. Then the backslidden people leaped to their feet exclaiming, "The Lord - He is God! The Lord - He is God!" (1 Kgs. 18:39).

Can the Shekinah fire that set the desert bush ablaze set our hearts aflame until we are burning bushes for God? (Ex. 3:1-3). The Shekinah fire on Mt. Sinai suffused the whole being of Moses till his face radiated the glory of God (Ex. 34:29-30). Can we draw near enough to God until that Shekinah fire begins to transfigure our vessels of clay and our people see glimpses of the glory of God upon us and in us?

Can the Shekinah fire that Ezekiel saw depart stage by stage from Israel return to us today? (Ezek. chaps. 10-11). It returned on the 120 in the Upper Room (Acts 2:1-21). If it took ten days of seeking God's face on our part, it would be more than worth it if we too could be set ablaze for God.

It is not to be earned, worked up, or simulated. Only God can baptize with fire. Only God can send Shekinah. Only God can meet your need and mine. We have labored too long without it. We have come far short of God's glory without it. We have left our people too largely unmoved without it.

We cannot light this fire. In ourselves we cannot produce it. But we can humble ourselves before God in total integrity and honesty, confessing our need. We can seek God's face until His holy searchlight shows us what in our hearts and lives prevents our infilling and empowering.

God's holy fire only descends upon prepared, obedient, hungry hearts. Perhaps the need that underlies all needs is that we are not hungry enough, not thirsty enough, not whole-souled enough in our desire. "If ye then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

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