

825 "How Can I Renew My Passion for God?"

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Some people live their Christian life to the fullest, while others drift aimlessly. Some are passionate about their faith, while others are apathetic. Some come out of church full of hope and zeal, while others who were in the same worship service come out empty. Why the difference? Could it be that many have lost their passion for God? Today we're asking the question, "How can I renew my passion for God?" I have always loved the inspired words of David in Psalm 42:1-2, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" David knew how much he needed God and how lost and alone he felt without God. Are there times in your life when you feel empty and alone? Perhaps the reason for this emptiness is that you are not as close to God as you once were. Some folks have never been close to God; they don't know what they've missed. My friend, I pray that you will look deep into your soul and ask if yourself if you have a close and loving relationship with God? Would you like one?

Have you ever been thirsty, really thirsty? The kind of thirst that demands a drink of water now? I know that I've been out hunting and walking through the forest loaded down and desperately needing a drink of water. Or I've been out mowing the lawn in the heat of the summer; my face is red, and I have to have something to drink. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). Jesus used two familiar things, hunger and thirst, to teach us how He looks at righteousness. The person who hungers for it and thirsts for righteousness is a blessed person, and God will see that he will find satisfaction.

Israel, south of the Sea of Galilee is a dry country. The people who live there know what it is like to have little water available. In the hills of Judea are numerous cisterns to collect rain water for the times when the dry seasons come along. They knew that water meant life, and they had to have a supply for drinking. Now let me ask: when was the last time you were "thirsty" for God? When were you last hungering to be close to God? When was the last time you hungered for a worship assembly in order to praise and thank Him? When was the last time reading the Bible or hearing a sermon from God's word was an immediate demand? It is so easy to forget what you need for your spirit to be healthy and right with God.

Some people take for granted that God is always there, always cares, and always available when they need Him. They have room in their lives for God when they have a hurt and need Him, but they seem to go their own way and ignore God until some real need arises. Their relationship with God is really part-time. Their lives say to God, "I want you when you can benefit me, but don't get used to being a part of my life." Such people are not close to God, because they really don't want to be unless they want something from God. That is a shallow relationship. Would you like to be married to someone who only wanted you when he or she needed you but didn't care if your needs were met? We must be careful not to let our everyday love for God grow stale.

If you want to renew a relationship with God that is vibrant and living and full of love and joy, you must grow beyond having God around only when you need Him. The Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when he was tempted by the devil. He said in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Many people cheat themselves out of real life by focusing on everything around but God. They listen to the talk shows; they go to the movies; they know their soap operas, they read newspapers and magazines; they know every sports figure; but they haven't read a single book of the Bible in years. No wonder their lives are filled with doubts and misunderstanding. By pushing the Bible away, they are pushing life away.

The Bible is no ordinary book; it is God's book and God's way of teaching and training us to live. It teaches us how to love, how to forgive and be forgiven, how to react to suffering, how to grow inside, how to discipline ourselves, how to live without hurting others, and how to make the most of our lives. The Bible gives us hope and promise; it gives us joy and peace; it uplifts; it comforts; it corrects; it trains; and it makes us new. The Word of God is what gives us new life and causes us to be born again.

Look what the apostle Peter says in the Bible about the Bible. Now this is an amazing promise! 1 Peter 1:22-25 says: Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. God's Word is the key to being "born again." No other book can forgive your past and give the promise and hope of living forever! The more you read the Bible, the more you will come to know and be close to God. The more you read the Bible, the more you will come to have the abundant life found in Christ Jesus!

So, start paying attention to God and to His Word. Our passion and feelings for God die as we remove ourselves from God. People don't intend to get away from God; they simply drift away unconsciously. The Bible says in Hebrews 2:1-3, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" A person can slowly just stop reading the Word of God, stop praying, and stop going to church. Before long he has drifted away from the God who loves him.

Desperate circumstances sometimes happen to wake us up and lead us back to God; we finally realize we have no one else. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." It is reassuring to remember that God can do things men cannot do. My friend, there is really only one true God who can hear and answer prayer; and that is the God of the Bible! I know that it's not politically correct to say things like that; but political correctness is not the measure of truth. Political correctness is often the world's way of telling people to forget God. When people listen to the world and forget God, they end up ruining their lives. We need God. We need His hope, His promises, and His laws to live good and peaceful lives. There is simply no other way.

We can draw close to God by making Him a priority in our lives everyday. Every day make time for God. Spend time in Bible study and prayer. Don't simply read the word of God, study it and meditate upon it. Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." God wants to feed your spirit with his word and give you the very insights you need to prosper in every area of your life.

God also wants you to draw close to Him by opening your heart to Him in prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." Now God is not saying pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No one could do that. He is saying pray without quitting on prayer. Some folks stop praying altogether. That's what God doesn't want. Some folks think they are bothering God by praying, but God doesn't feel that way. He invites us to pray, to ask, to seek, and to knock. He is ready to answer, to give, and to help us find what we are seeking. Prayer was God's idea, so let's rid ourselves of

the notion that God is too busy for us or gets bothered by prayer. God loves you so much that He wants to hear your prayers. He wants to hear your hearts open up to Him.

If you want to have a motive to be closer to God, let me suggest that you do this one, simple exercise everyday. "What is it?" you ask. It's this: count your blessings. Remember the good blessings God has given to you. Remember that God saved you from sin, delivered you from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Remember the cross, the love Jesus showed by His suffering for you and me. Remember how God has answered your prayers. Remember how the Scriptures gave you hope and comfort. Remember the strength God has given you to deal with the challenges of life. He has been blessing you through the years. Just look how God has helped you and is helping you now.

Counting your blessings is so healthy for our spirits and attitudes. The Bible teaches in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." When we concentrate on the negative, we lose sight of God. When we concentrate on the positive, we grow more thankful to God for all the good He has done for us. Everyday we need to stop and say to God, "thank you, thank you, thank you" for all that He does for us.

Now there is one more thing about God's blessing that we must remember. God has lovingly prepared a future for us, and that gives us hope. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." As Christians we have the true and living hope in the true and living God. We have all the blessing of God in this life and heaven too! In Christ we are of all people most blessed.

Is there anything in your life that keeps you from being close to God? Is there anything in your life that robs your energy and time, so that you are so overly tired you don't have time for God? Some people day after day shut the Lord out of their lives. Hebrews 12:1-2 says: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. There may be many things in our lives that tangle us up. Some things are not sinful in and of themselves, but they so distract and rob us of time with God, that we lose sight of the Lord who loves us. We also have to think about sin. Sin, ALL sin, separates us from God. The Bible says in Isa. 59:1-2, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear." If you want to draw close to God, you have to clean the sin out of your lives. I hope that you will do that today.

It's easy to see sin as no big deal rather than seeing it for what it is. According to a radio report, a middle school in Oregon faced a unique problem. A number of the girls began to use lipstick. They would put it on in the restroom and then press their lips against the mirrors, leaving dozens of little lip prints. This went on several days. Finally the principal decided she had to do something to stop this problem. So, she called the girls to the restroom and met them there with the custodian. She explained lip prints caused a major problem for the custodian, who had to clean the mirrors every day. To demonstrate how difficult it was, she asked the custodian to clean one of the mirrors. He took out a long-handled brush, dipped it in the toilet, and scrubbed the mirror. Since that time there were no more lip prints on the mirrors. If we could only see the real filth involved in sin, we wouldn't be so attracted to it. There is a good reason why God hates sin. He doesn't call it sin for no good reason. He knows how it hurts us and ruins our lives. He knows the deception and the heartache sin brings to people. That's why God lovingly and strongly gives His commandments to us.

God loves you and wants something better for you than sin will give you. The Lord Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Our Father in heaven is in the saving, loving, helping, building, growing, and caring business. He wants us to live with joy and purpose. We can do that when we give our hearts and lives to Him. My friend, put your whole trust in the Lord Jesus. Believe in Christ and His Word. Know that He is on your side to give you life. Turn away from the ugliness of sin. Sin may give you pleasure for a moment, but it will rob you of your soul. Repentance is a command, but it is also a gift from God. It helps us get away from the wrong path and leads us to the right path. Out of love and faith, with a penitent heart, confess Christ as your Lord and the Son of God and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water, and it is the time the Bible says our sins are forgiven. It is also the time we enter into a relationship with God. I hope you'll do that today.

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747*

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org