

Transformed

Transformed with Zeal

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” -Romans 12:11

This time we'd surely caught him red-handed. Our troublesome local veterinary officer from the Ministry of Agriculture had, among other things, been stealing medicine from our little ten-foot tin-roofed shipping container we used for a vet clinic in the remote Ethiopian bush. So far, we'd never caught him; the medicine was there when he came, and gone when he left. Repeatedly.

But this time, Garisho whispered to me that he'd just seen him do it. Or so I thought.

Full of righteous zeal for animal health and justice, I fervently lit up with the best scold in Amharic I've ever personally been privileged to hear. From anyone. Words were just rolling from my lips in tsunamis. I never guessed I was that fluent. It was glorious, unforgettable! Pure awesome. Normally I'd be rehearsing a day ahead to figure out how I would say something in stumbling second-grade Amharic. But this! This was without warning, spur of the moment adrenaline-packed, zeal-fueled, fervent fluency!

Garisho and the vet officer watched wide-eyed until I ran down, like a clock coming unwound. Hey, even at lower altitudes you eventually run out of oxygen; even righteous anger has to pause for a gasp of air. I could tell they were impressed with my tsunami; I peered at them standing still as mice in the shade of the tin roof. What did I expect? Maybe the veterinary officer would fall to his knees and cry out with tears of repentance, promising to replace four-fold everything he'd taken.

Didn't happen. Instead, in the postlude of my outburst it was Garisho's soft voice I heard. "Uh, Dr. Fred, you misunderstood. It wasn't him." Ooof. Double Ooof. I had just wasted my most fluent, fervent moment in the entire Amharic-speaking universe. I humbly apologized.

Mr. Troublesome was subdued, abashed but gracious; and amazingly after that, God turned my mistake for good. For one thing, even though falsely accused in that instance, he never subsequently stole again; and from then on, we found ourselves as friends instead of contestants. He invited me to his wedding; I visited when he was sick.

God worked a miracle to help me love my ex-enemy. He had turned my misplaced zeal, somehow, into friendship.

I'm always amazed at how the Lord uses our mistakes, when surely, He should use our strengths, right?! It's kinda hard to be proud of myself when I blow it, and He turns it for good. It's like I miss my shot, badly; and He takes the offensive rebound for a slam dunk.

Keep your spiritual fervor... Picture a red-hot ember of charcoal tumbling away from the fire. It loses its glowing heat and grows cold, colorless.

So how do we keep our spiritual fervor? I love the story of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28. Why don't you pause and read it now?

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Apollos was a learned Jew with a “thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.” That probably means he had memorized the entire Old Testament—as a child. He spoke with fervor, with passionate intensity—but though he had only been with John the Baptist, he spoke accurately about Jesus! That’s impressive. I spoke with fervor; but I was inaccurate.

More than that-- he was teachable when Priscilla and Aquilla explained things more fully to him. He was zealous as he vigorously proved that Jesus was the Messiah. He knew apologetics. His faith was firm.

The more we get into Scripture and really learn it—the more the Holy Spirit teaches us. Some of my most fervent sermons have been after getting excited about what the Lord is showing me by His Spirit through passages I’ve read and memorized. The Word keeps us spiritually fervent.

To my shame, I think I used to have an unconscious assumption that the main reason I attended Bible studies was to impart my awesome theological understanding to others—who surely didn’t know as much about it as I. So wrong!

As I’ve gotten older, I repeatedly find that after I have meditated on the passage, prayerfully mining every bit of wisdom to be found... I go to the Bible study ready to impart... only to discover I learn even more from others—from how the Lord spoke to them in the same passage! Things that in all my grand wisdom had never occurred to me. So cool. Fellowship with believers and being humbly teachable helps keep us spiritually fervent.

May the Lord grant that each of us follows the pattern of Apollos. May He enable us to never lose our zeal but keep our spiritual fervor, serving Him. And remember, our God is so great He can even use our mistakes!

- 1) How do you go about “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor”?**
- 2) What’s working for you getting into the Word every day? What’s not working?**
- 3) Where are you finding encouragement in fellowship?**
- 4) In addition to pondering the Word of God and fellowship, what keeps you close to the Source Fire, glowing with spiritual fervency?**



One month after vet school graduation (WSU, 1983), Fred Van Gorkom went to Ethiopia with Christian Veterinary Mission. While working in veterinary projects, famine relief, refugee and discipleship ministries he met Vicki, also a veterinarian (OSU, 1982). They married in 1986, returning immediately to remote southwestern Ethiopia where they raised their four children while doing community development and church planting. In 2008, they moved to CVM Seattle where they serve to help mobilize others for the privilege of international missions. Email: fvangorkom@cvm.org