

ISH
Fire and Fuel
Romans 12:11-12

This morning, I want to help each of you protect the richness and joy of that which is most important to you: your love life. Everyone wants to love, and everyone wants to be loved! (Song: “Everybody, everybody wants to love. Everybody, everybody wants to be loved!”) I am no exception, and neither are you; even if you have a tough guy exterior. You want love in your life. The truth is, some of you are scared of love because of what it has done TO YOU in your life in the days gone by. But that does not mean that you do not WANT love. As you go about your quest for love (because that is what you are doing!), **I want to remind you that there is a direct link between your ability to love others and to the way that you FEEL LOVED in your life.** The people who feel loved, love better. If someone has loved you in a healthy way in your life, then you are much more likely to be able to love others in a healthy way. But we sometimes live in a LOVELESS WORLD, so how can we feel loved when the people closest to us do not seem to love us at all? That is where I want to give you some GREAT NEWS today. There is a LOVE that transcends the love that you may or may not be experiencing in your life right now. No matter who you are or what you have done, GOD LOVES YOU. He loves you so much that he died for you and took the penalty for all of the wrong that you have done. He removed every barrier between you and him so that you could experience intimacy with him in your everyday life! That is amazing. **This means that there is a DIRECT LINK between God’s love for you and your love for people. If you do not know of (or have not accepted) God’s love for you, then you will not see the difference that can make in your love for people.** But once you have accepted his love and you begin to live out of that love, then you will see how it changes everything. Life ceases to be ISH! That is what this message is all about.

Last week, we learned that the love that God leads us toward with others has to be genuine, guarded, and generous. If you were not here, please listen to the podcast! The verses we looked at were **Romans 12:9-10,13 AMP.**

9 Love is to be sincere *and* active [the real thing—without guile and hypocrisy]. Hate what is evil [detest all ungodliness, do not tolerate wickedness]; hold on tightly to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another with [authentic] brotherly affection [as members of one family], give preference to one another in honor; **13** contributing to the needs of God’s people, pursuing [the practice of] hospitality.

These verses are all about what love between Christian friends should LOOK like. We focused last week on learning about what God’s love looks like OUTWARDLY. But this morning, I want us to learn about what keeps love alive INWARDLY. **The truth is, the biggest battles that we face in love happen within our own hearts (our feelings) and – more importantly – in our own MINDS!** The two verses that are sandwiched in between the verses that we looked at last week hold the KEY to MAINTAINING a love

that is genuine, guarded, and generous. Let me ask you a question: ARE YOU STRUGGLING TO MAINTAIN A DEEP LOVE FOR SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW? (Spouse, Child, Friend, Co-worker, etc.) Maybe they seem to have “lost that loving feeling” for you, or maybe YOU are losing that loving feeling for them. Maybe you are fearful that you are about to lose a close friendship because of a disagreement that you have had. I am often deeply saddened when I see a marriage that once was vibrant and sweet degenerate into division and even hatred. This is not only sad; it is tragic, because it is so very avoidable. Both parties failed to do what should have been done to save love before it was too late. So, what should have been done? Let’s see! **Romans 12:11a AMP**

11 never lagging behind in diligence;

Last week, we learned that love loves to take the lead in coming last. God’s love lets others go FIRST! That is really good. BUT, you should make it your AIM to be the one that WORKS THE HARDEST to develop and maintain a loving heart. DON’T BE LAZY IN LOVE! (Remember how hard you worked when you were dating?) This verse tells us NOT to be “Sluggards.” This is a principle of life. Life takes work, and love is no exception. This is why Solomon wrote these words: **Proverbs 6:6-9 NIV**

6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! 7 It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, 8 yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. 9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?

We don’t have the energy of an ant when it comes to our pursuit of the things that matter. God tells us not be lazy when it comes to how we live. Laziness is ISH, and it is sure to lead to less than desirable results. Diligence is the concept of striving after something with passion and zeal. It is in direct contrast to the idea of laziness. **Proverbs 13:4 NIV**

4 A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

Diligence is required for those who want to reap the harvest down the line. I am so saddened by people who get lazy and then never TASTE the fruit of diligence. So, let me ask you: Are you working hard at love in your life? Are you working on your marriage, or are you coasting? Have you lost the will to work on your Christian relationships that may be experiencing some difficulty right now? (All relationships have those seasons.) Maybe you need to CHECK YOUR PULSE on a regular basis. Do you remember when your heart used to LEAP when you saw your spouse or friend? What does your heart do now, and WHY? Are you LOVING and LOVABLE in this relationship? Paul goes on to tell us what is required to stay diligent:

Romans 12:11b AMP

11 never lagging behind in diligence; aglow in the Spirit,

You and I must learn what it means to keep a HOT SPIRIT! Now, we all know what it means for someone to be a HOTHEAD. This is someone who gets angry at the drop of a hat and then lets everyone know about it . . . LOUDLY. We also know what it means to get all HOT AND BOTHERED! I almost made that the title of my message! Both of these terms are references to being hot in our FLESH. Now, I want to remind you that your “hot flesh” can absolutely ROB YOU BLIND when it is hot in the wrong ways and the wrong places. Fire belongs in the fireplace, not on the living room floor! Anger and lust are thieves that steal from our loved ones and ultimately destroy our relationships. Paul says instead that our greatest fire should be the passion in our SPIRITS. You see, God loves SPIRITUAL passion in his people! The word “aglow” is a word that literally means “to BOIL!” Jeremiah said that God’s word was like a fire in his bones. It was written of Jesus that “Zeal for God’s house has consumed” him. Paul said that he “fought a good fight.” All of these and more point to the fact that people who live above ISH are people of spiritual passion and faith. Sadly, there are many among us who have “lost their first love.” God describes these people of ISH in **Revelation 3:15-19 ESV**

15 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Are you PASSIONATE in your relationship with God? If not, it is time to GET HOT! “Be zealous” means, “be HOT!” Repentance requires a change of mind that is reflected by a change of action. (Remember, you have to RENEW YOUR MIND!) **So many people think when their love grows cold that they need to move onto a NEW LOVE, but this is FALSE! You just need to RENEW your MIND and then ACT!** Again, this lukewarm love (ISH) comes from COMPLACENCY! “I’m Fine!” Heat returns as we develop a SENSE OF URGENCY about our spiritual condition! You must not wait until your love life is on life support. ARE YOU COMPLACENT ABOUT YOUR LACK OF LOVE TOWARD GOD or MAN? If you stay complacent, your relationships will die a slow death that was entirely preventable! Wake up and heat up!

Now, if you are not a follower of Christ, then you need to understand that you are missing out on the KEY INGREDIENT needed for keeping love alive in your own heart when relationships look like they are hopeless and dying. You need (and want!) FIRE, but FIRE needs FUEL! The last part of Romans 12:11 and the entirety of 12:12 show us where the fuel comes for our spiritual fire. What I am about to say requires you to think with your RENEWED MIND! **Romans 12:11 AMP**

11 never lagging behind in diligence; aglow in the Spirit, *enthusiastically serving the Lord*;

Wait! I thought we were talking about our love life. So, what does that have to do with serving the Lord? Did Paul turn a corner? Yes. **He is giving us the key principle for keeping love strong: DON'T LOOK FOR YOUR PRIMARY FUEL FOR LOVE TO COME FROM THE ONE YOU ARE LOVING!** Now, it is great when you love them and they love you and you both are feeling it. But have you ever had a time when you seemed to love your spouse or friend more than they loved you? How discouraging was that? How long can you keep that up? It is time for you to change your FOCUS in love. **Remember; love DOES. So, love is all about what we DO for the sake of the ones that we love, not just about our feelings for them! We must learn to view our actions of love toward others as ACTS OF SERVICE for GOD!** This kind of love serves God.

What would it change if you were to do what you do for others without expecting or demanding anything back from them? What if you got your REWARD for love from a source other than the people you served? How would that change the game for you? I think that it makes ALL THE DIFFERENCE. **Earlier in this message, I asked you if you were working hard at love in your life. What many of you are actually doing is working hard to MAKE SOMEONE LOVE YOU in your life.** But that is very different from what I am trying to teach you today. **God wants you to learn what it means to work hard at SHOWING LOVE to others while RESTING in the love that God has for you. HE IS YOUR REWARD AND YOUR REWARDER. HE NEVER FAILS TO BLESS THOSE WHO SERVE HIM.** This is why Paul wrote these words about our service of others: **Colossians 3:23-24 NIV**

23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

I love that! We are not to look for our reward from the ones we are serving! I have had to learn this principle in ministry just as I (and especially my wife, Lisa) have had to learn this in marriage. **You cannot base your love on the immediate response that you get back from those that you are showing love to. That kind of love becomes desperate and demanding! It requires others to NOTICE every little thing that you do for them and then it demands that they express appreciation and delight over it. That NEVER works!** Instead, God's word teaches us to do everything we do as if we were doing it for the Lord. When I do the dishes at home, I do them for the Lord. When I serve a homeless family a meal or when I help a fellow-Christian reroof his house, I serve them as if they were Christ himself! We can see this principle fully in the words of **Hebrews 6:11-12 NLT**

11 Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. 12

Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.

Do you see it? When you show love this way, then it will protect your hot heart and your diligent soul. It will become a SELF-SUSTAINING CYCLE. Paul tells us to “work hard, stay hot, and serve the Lord.” Here is how: **Romans 12:12 NKJV**

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.

First, he shows us what to find our joy in. He tells us to REJOICE . . . in our HOPE, and to be patient . . . in the midst of trouble! This is a command to celebrate all that Christ is doing IN US now and all that he will do FOR US in these days and the days to come no matter what we may be facing now. We are to look for the joy that comes with obedience to God, and we are to stay on the lookout for ways that God is displaying his love for us IN SPITE OF what we may or may not be getting from the people that we are serving today. King David was a master at this in his day. When things were going wrong all around him, he knew how to encourage himself IN THE LORD. It has become painfully evident to me that we need to know where to find encouragement when we are actively serving people. Ministry is HARD, and it requires that we not lose heart and become discouraged. We must know WHERE TO LOOK when our spirit begins to falter and grow weary. Paul addresses this theme again in ROMANS 15:1-3 when he says that we who are strong ought to serve those who are weak, and not just please ourselves. Then he quotes a scripture about how Christ did not just please himself. Right after that, Paul says something very important about God’s Word and God’s Spirit: **Romans 15:4-6 NLT**

4 Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled. 5 May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. 6 Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These verses remind us that we can go to the Scriptures and to God himself to learn about and embrace the hope that we have in Christ. This is the way that we renew our mind. How can you renew your mind if you don’t even know the details of the hope that you have in Christ? **The Word of God is a CRUCIAL KEY in helping us stay grounded in our hope. God has given us so many promises, but many of you do not have the slightest idea of how rich you really are IN HIM!** His Word will refresh your spirit as it reminds you of all that God is doing for you and in you. His word helps you to see the GOOD THINGS that God is doing for you even as many things seem to be going wrong. His word also helps you to remember that this current season of difficulty will not last forever. His purposes are not thwarted, and his will WILL BE

DONE! He always wins, and you cannot lose! Just fix your eyes on the One who endured ultimate shame and disgrace in this life and on the cross, and you will be renewed in your mind and strengthened in your soul. He also gives you the strength to STAY PUT when you want to run away. I have found that this is often the very thing that requires the most of us in our relationship troubles. Paul just tells us to “stay put” when we are suffering from doing what is right. Have you ever heard the phrase, “No good deed goes unpunished?” That is a cynic’s view of what happens when we do good things for others. But we must trust that God’s promises outlast and overcome the immediate struggles that we face when doing his will on this earth. DON’T QUIT! Whether this is a word to you for your ministry, or your marriage, or your friendships; DON’T QUIT! Stay put. Wait for HIS promises to come to pass.

This is why his last word of counsel to us in our passage is that we are to “continue steadfastly in prayer.” Your greatest source of help is God himself. The greatest energy that you can expend is the energy that you spend on prayer. I will never forget when a great man of God wrote these words in my bible: **“Pray, Pray, Pray! That is the REAL work!”** You do not have to be in the church building to meet with God. Go to him every day. Speak with him every time you are facing a perplexing situation or undergoing some difficult hardship. He is listening, and he loves to step in and help his children. But we often go to everyone and everything else before we go to God. What is wrong with us? Stay steady in prayer. Ask God to give you wisdom or help or just strength to keep going. Run to his Word for the sound of his voice and for the direction that you need to go. He is faithful.

You need the right FUEL to stay ON FIRE in your faith. Have you found it, and are you on fire? Or, are you just ISH? Your move.

Let’s pray.