

Gut Check: Are You Fervent? – Romans 12:11

Rom 12:9-11; Becky and I have some friends who run a ministry called Expeditions

Unlimited out of WI, taking youth groups, sports teams, adults, whoever . . .

On outdoor trips of various sorts throughout North America

And while Lynn is one of the sweetest, calmest people around – Steve is the craziest, most enthusiastic and driven guy I know

So much so, that he gets me to do things I would *never* do on my own, and behave in ways so far outside of my comfort zone, I surprise even myself

And the reason, is that he's fervent; About everything

In fact, one time, on a dog sledding trip in Alaska with his daughter about 15 years ago, his sled tipped over in some brush, and a branch poked out his eye

And so driven, so fervent is Steve – that he told his daughter to stay away, took one of the mitts off his hand, put it over his empty eye socket . . .

Pulled his face mask back down over it, and mushed another few hours to get help

The guy's fervent; Passionately enthusiastic; "Glowingly hot"

It's a quality that characterizes *most* leaders, and a quality of Jesus himself

He was fervent, zealous (**Intro**)

- The question is, does it characterize you? Oh, I'm not talking about having a life-of-the-party personality like Steve, I'm talking about your life and walk w/ Jesus Christ I'm talking about your attitude toward the things of God I'm talking about your love for others; I'm talking about your view of life in general Are you fervent? Are you fired up? Are you zealous? And ardent? And devoted?

B/c the Bible says we *should* be; Look at Rom 12:9-11

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. [11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

It's a list of do's and don'ts that apply to everybody; But this one seems to be the wind in our sails; Like it was for Apollos, in sharing the gospel

Acts 18:25 says – *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit [as in passionately exuberant], he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus; He was fervent; Fired up*

- And the point is, we should be too; Every single one of us; After all . . . We've found the pearl of greatest price; We've been delivered from the domain of darkness; We've been given life forever and life to full We've been brought *near* by the blood of Christ; We've been *relieved* from our guilt; And we've been *freed* from our sin In light of all that, how can you be anything *but* fervent? How can you be anything *but* passionately enthusiastic about Jesus?

And yet we are sometimes, aren't we? We *are* anything but

Which is why it begs for a gut check on our part – an honest assessment

And here's the first criteria

You know you're fervent if you pray constantly (Rom 12:12)

Look at the very next verse in Rom 12, v12 – *be constant in prayer*; Do you see it?

And 1 Thess 5:17 says – *pray without ceasing*

Be constant in prayer, and pray without ceasing

What, you mean live in a monastery and walk around humming all day?

What then? What does it *mean* to pray constantly?

Especially in a life of soccer practice, music lessons, and work travel?

➤ And the answer I think, is 3-fold

1. Make Jesus the constant companion of your thoughts
2. Get alone and make him the *only* companion of your thoughts
3. Get with others and make him the *focus* of your thoughts

I think that's what it means to pray constantly

Make him the constant companion of *your* thoughts, by making him a party to every conversation; And the go-to for every decision; And the overseer of every word And the collaborator on every idea; That's the first part

Second, get *alone* with him, on a daily basis, to make him the *only* party to your conversation; The *only* collaborator; Your *only* companion So that you can pour out your soul to him in private, and listen as well

Which for me, is the hardest part; B/c it takes dedicated time and effort; And the result is delayed, if it's known at all (**Mt 6:6**)

But that didn't stop Jesus from saying – *When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret [pray privately]. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Make him your *only* companion, make him your *constant* companion, and third – get with others who do the same*****

Just like the early church; Starting with the apostles

After witnessing the ascension of Jesus, the Bible says they gathered in the upper room, to pray; **Acts 1:14** – *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer*

And later on, after Peter was freed from prison, it says in **Acts 12:12** – *He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.*

Part of praying constantly, is praying together

- None of which you'll do, unless you think it's worth it; Unless you believe that the time it takes and the effort it requires, is fruitful; Like it says in **1 Jn 3:22** *Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him;* Including praying constantly And **1 Jn 5:14-15** – *If we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him;* It's fruitful And **James 5:16** – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.* And **Prov 15:29** – *The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*

Let me ask you something – Does your prayer life reflect a firm *belief* in those verses, or a silent *disbelief*? Or, to put it another way . . .

Are you a functional *atheist* when it comes to prayer, or a fervent believer?

Do you actually do it, or just pay lip service?*****

Do a gut check; B/c if you don't pray constantly, you're not fervent

2nd . . .

You know you're fervent if you worship passionately (Ps 150)

That's the 2nd criteria by which to assess yourself; Ps 150

At the end of a book that's all *about* worship, and intended to *help* us worship, and give *expression* to our worship – we find this

Ps 150 – *Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! [2] Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! [3] Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! [4] Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! [5] Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! [6] Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!*

That's passionate worship; Engaging with, and dwelling on, and expressing – the greatness and beauty and goodness of God (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p177)

➤ And notice, it's not to be done in some *lifeless* sort of way, where you stand stoic and mutter something you don't feel

Or act like it's a funeral instead of a resurrection; Or keep it to yourself instead of joining with the assembly; *That's* not biblical worship; That's not passionate

Passionate worship includes praise, and honor, and adoration

Passionate worship *exalts* the one who rose; And *glorifies* the God above

And far from a funeral dirge, it includes *cymbals*; And far from stoic, it involves our bodies – *Praise him with tambourine and dance* it says (4)

Which at the very least, should include your hands lifted high or your knees bent low
That's *passionate* worship; That's *fervent* worship; Worship that's equal to God's *excellent greatness* (2)

➤ Which raises the standard so high, we could *never* overdo it; We'll never exceed God's worth, to receive our worship; Ever

If we're going to praise him *according to his excellent greatness* like it says in v2, our worship can't be a flash in the pan; Or offered up only on Sunday

Or only when we feel like it; Or when it suits our schedule; Or the songs are just right
Passionate, fervent worship should mark of our lives; Always

And not just corporately, when we're all together; But personally

B/c worship is a *whole-life* thing; An *every-day* thing; A lifestyle thing
Including once a week thing

And you know it's passionate if you can't turn it off when you're alone, and you can't contain it when you're not; You can't stay away, and you can't wait

Is that you? Are you fervent that way? Do a gut check

You know you're fervent if you serve diligently (Rom 12:11)

And I say that, b/c Rom 12:11 seems to *connect* fervency and service

Do not be slothful in zeal [don't be lazy or complacent], *be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord*. There's a connection; Serving and ministering flows from our passion
Our passion for God and our passion for people

And we should do it *diligently*; Like Samuel said in **1 Sam 12:20** – *Do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart*.

That's the fervent part; And a few verses later is the diligent part (**1 Sam 12:24**)

Fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. Diligently

Confirming that part of being fervent, or wholehearted, is serving diligently*****

➤ And the fruit of that, is all *over* the Scriptures; Some of it implied, and some explicit
Like the fact that serving in ministry is God-glorifying (Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11); And good stewardship (1 Pet 4:10); And blesses others (Gal 6:10)

And fights selfishness; And leads to maturity; And expresses love; And combats pride;
And battles laziness; And demonstrates obedience; And keeps us from sin
And fulfills our purpose (Heb 9:14); And fuels our soul (Jn 4:34); And expresses gratitude (1 Sam 12:24)

That's the *fruit* of serving diligently

The question is – Are you *doing* it? Are you? Are you *fervent in spirit* that way?

Or would your service be considered spotty? Or flaky? Or nonexistent?

➤ Let me give you **6 Characteristics of Diligent Servers**, just to take this a little further
1. They see a need and fill it

Instead of looking for the *least* common denominator, or the *least* invasive role for their life, or the *perfect* fit for their gifts – they see a need, and fill it

2. They look for opportunities

They're not reactive, but proactive; They don't wait for people or opportunities to come to them, they go looking; They don't wait for people to ask them, *they* ask

3. They waste no gift

If God has given them a particular ability or talent, like playing an instrument, or relating to kids – they're using it; Period

4. They waste no time

One of the things I've told our girls along the way, is not to waste a single month or year, doing something *other* than what God wants you to do
Time flies; And the tyranny of the ordinary will keep you from the extraordinary if you're not intentional

5. They better the ball

It's a volleyball expression to say that they *improve* whatever they put their hand to

6. They stick to it

They fulfill their commitment; And do so with a good attitude; Even if it's not fulfilling for them*****

So how about it? Do you serve diligently? Are you fervent in that respect? Do a gut check

And then last . . .

You know you're fervent if you live joyfully (Eccl 5:18-20)

Seriously; If you soak up the goodness of God in the land of the living (Ps 27:13)

Eccl 5:18-20; Solomon, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and one of the wisest men who ever lived, said . . .

Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. [19] Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. [20] For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

4 times in 3 verses, we're told that a life of joy is where it's at
And it just so happens that there are 4 reasons for it; The first one, found right here

1. Fervent followers live joyfully, b/c it's a *gift* – a gift of God; V19b – *this is the gift of God*; Even in the midst of our day-in, day-out toil
And *fervent* people, intentional people, zealous people – find a way to *receive* it; They *find* a way to rejoice in the Lord
Instead of focusing on their troubles, they count their blessings
Instead of obsessing on their losses, they relish their gains – no matter how disproportionate; They find a way
Just like Steve Higgins found a way to rejoice in his glass eye, by painting a cross on it

2. Fervent people live joyfully, b/c it's God's *will* for our lives
Jesus said so, in **Jn 15:11** – *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full*. It's God's will; It's God's desire for our lives
He doesn't want us to live in the doldrums; This world is hard enough
He wants us to be joyful; And full of it; Not in some *disingenuous* sort of way, where we're denying reality and faking it, but truly
Drawing on the joy of the Lord even *while* we grieve sometimes*****

3. Fervent followers live joyfully b/c it's God's command; It's what he *tells* us to do
Dt 26:11 – *You shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you*
1 Chron 16:10 – *Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord, rejoice!*
Ps 32:11 – *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*
And Ps 64:10 – *Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!* As in, rejoice in triumph
And the list goes on with Ps 94:12, and 105:3, and 118:24; And Is 61:10; And Hab 3:18; And Zech 2:10; Phil 3:1; And 4:4

Joy is God's command; And fervent followers find a way to obey; They *find* a way to appropriate the joy that's theirs
Refusing to be derailed by their grief, and refusing to be *defined* by their sorrow
You might get knocked *off* your bike every now and then, but don't let it keep you from the path
And don't be content to walk when God's gift, and God's will, and God's command – is to ride

4. Fervent people live joyfully b/c they rest in God's promise
They *know*, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that their sorrow *will end*; They *know*, that the thing that threatens to rob them of their joy, will pass

B/c Ps 30:5 says – *Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning*
It's a promise; And they trust it

They count on the fact, that it's only a matter of time before they'll once again, experience both *a time to weep*, and *a time to laugh*; *a time to mourn*, and *a time to dance* (Eccl 3:4) (**Summary**)

Living joyfully is a gift of God, and the will of God, and the command of God, and the promise of God; And fervent people are all about it
To the point of pursuing it, instead of just waiting for it
And the same is true of serving, and worship, and prayer; I hope you're fervent

Prayer – Impress on us these truths; To live your way, for your glory and our joy