

Back to the Future  
October 20, 2013

When I was a teenager, I worked on a landscaping crew out in the Gaithersburg area several summers in a row. I pushed a power mower many of those days. I remember cutting under and around a split rail fence that ran along the highway. It wasn't just walking the mower. I had to swivel the mower to cut near and around the fence post, then swerve back to reach under the rail all the way to the next fence post. The post would stop me and I'd have to back up, pull the mower from under the rail, and start the whole thing over repeating the process. When I got to the end, I started down the other side. Altogether the distance was a little over one half mile. Yet, I rather enjoyed it. I was young, had plenty of energy, and was working by myself, at my own pace. Even though I had on long pants and steel-toed work boots and had no hat or sun glasses, I wasn't too hot. I look back on that as a good memory. That work beat some of the other jobs we had to do on that crew. I felt like I could mow grass all day and pretty much enjoy it.

In the last couple of years my enthusiasm for mowing grass has waned a lot. I sweat more than I used to. My muscles ache more than they used to. I sneeze more than ever before, as I've gradually grown more bothered by the dust and cut grass. I'm already thinking of the day when I might get a riding mower or just pay someone else to do it.

My enthusiasm for mowing the grass has dropped off considerably. That is true for other things as well. I have unfinished projects and hobbies lying around the basement. You all know what I'm talking about. You have unfinished hobby projects, sewing projects, building projects, yard projects. You have lost your enthusiasm for these things. You did them for awhile and now you don't. Your enthusiasm, your zeal for them has waned.

It doesn't matter how enthused we are for something today, tomorrow our enthusiasm may shrink. In the same way, there is always the danger of losing our enthusiasm for serving Jesus. Paul, an early missionary writes to encourage our service.

**Romans 12:11-12 (NIV)** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Thinking about your spiritual enthusiasm, has your get up and go got up and gone? Do you have an iron-poor tired spirit when it comes to serving the Lord Jesus?

It is okay to admit it. Lightning won't strike you. Your friends won't turn away. Your church will not excommunicate you.

But don't allow this situation to continue. Paul encourages us to...

**Romans 12:12 (NIV)** Never be lacking in zeal.

This is zeal for serving Jesus. You've had this zeal at other times. Maybe today you aren't feeling it. In fact, maybe it has been awhile since you were feeling it. Maybe the pressures of life have got you down. Maybe relationship problems have hurt your spirit.

Maybe your poor health has made it hard to be zealous in your service for Him. Maybe your riches and comforts have distracted you.

These things can even affect you on Sundays. Some of you don't have any responsibilities here on Sundays. You show up, participate in the Bible study, engage in worship of Jesus in this hour, greet people, catch up with each other, and maybe go to lunch together. It is a genuine joy, every week, for you to be here.

Others have responsibilities on some Sundays. Maybe you serve in the nursery one Sunday a month, or as an usher once or twice a month. You run the media computer or help with children's worship once a month. And sometimes on the Sundays you do that, you aren't as enthused as you could be. You wish you didn't have any responsibilities. You just want to come and fellowship and worship.

Still others of us have responsibilities every Sunday. We teach Bible study, we lead music, sing in the choir, play an instrument, preach, make sure the nursery is staffed, make sure someone is doing the slides, ushering, counting, etc. For these folks there is the tendency for many Sundays to become routine, boring, and even a pain. It isn't hard for our enthusiasm to wane when we are always responsible for something.

Well all of us have lots of responsibilities out there in the world all week long. Maintaining our zeal for serving Jesus out there takes work. It takes focus. It takes prayer. We have to be intentional about doing so, or we easily lose our enthusiasm.

All of us have the problem of maintaining our enthusiasm for serving Jesus out there, every day of the week. You can serve Jesus through your chores, your housework, your yard work. You can serve Jesus on your job, in school, in your neighborhood. You can serve Jesus in every one of your relationships with other people.

We CAN serve Jesus in all of these ways. But the truth is, we get tired of these things. We get tired of chores, tired of repairs, tired of serving, tired of the effort in relationships. We lose our enthusiasm for serving Jesus in these things. We still do them. The trash still needs to go out. The clothes still need to be cleaned. We still have to go to our job. But we do them because they need doing, and not as a way of serving Jesus. We lose our spiritual focus. We lose our zeal.

When we get like that, when our zeal for serving Jesus in these things slacks off, something has changed. Jesus hasn't changed. His promises haven't changed. The Holy Spirit is still in you. The work you are doing hasn't changed. The only things that have changed are your motivation for the work and your attitude in the work.

***When we lose our spiritual zeal, we have changed our person of interest.***

The focus isn't on Jesus, but on us. When you lose your zeal for serving Jesus, you have lost sight of Jesus. Your heart and mind are not on Jesus. Your heart and mind are on you. You feel sorry for yourself. You are focused on your pains, your aches, your hungers, your emotional hurts. You are thinking about self, not Jesus. So of course your zeal has cooled. You aren't focused on the right person to maintain your zeal.

Paul more than any of us was tempted to think about himself. He had suffered much persecution and physical pain as a missionary. Certainly the temptation was there at times to forget the whole thing. Yet he writes in one of his letters...

**Colossians 3:1 (NIV)** Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Keep your focus on Jesus in order to maintain your spiritual zeal.

Secondly, ***When we lose our spiritual zeal, we have changed our hope.***

The Christian hope is eternal life with Jesus. When we were saved, we looked forward to that event. We looked forward in time to experiencing forgiveness of our sins. We looked forward to being free from temptation. We looked forward to being in Jesus' presence. At one time our hope was the fulfillment of these promises.

I know you still believe in those, but do you daily look forward to them? Or do you take them for granted? Is your immediate hope, the thing you are really hoping for today something on earth? You are hoping for a good cup of coffee, playing a video game, trying a new recipe, watching the latest episode of our favorite TV show, or just sitting back and putting your feet up awhile? Is the hope that keeps you going today, for that's what hope does, is the hope that keeps you going today the return of Jesus? Or are you really just hoping for something far less?

Instead of having our eyes on eternity, we have our eyes on a different time. We have our eyes on retirement, or the vacation, or Christmas, or the weekend, or maybe just the end of the day. We are focused on earth, not heaven. Do you need to get your focus back on the future?

One of the greatest zeal stealers for many of us is our success. **One of the greatest distractions to serving Jesus is our prosperity.** Our lives are full of riches and comforts. We have so much of the good things that life can offer. Having them carries added temptation to center our lives on them. Our hope is more of the same. All we live for is to enjoy the good things we have. We aren't living for Jesus.

We have to constantly guard ourselves against the seduction of the very riches and comforts that we work so hard for. Ask Jesus to show you how to enjoy your good things without them taking His place in your heart.

**Another distraction to serving Jesus is our suffering.** When our enthusiasm for serving Jesus is strong, we can better deal with trials and temptations. When our enthusiasm is weak, and we begin to suffer in some way, we start looking for a way to escape the pain, even sinful ways. Instead of being patient we gripe and grumble and complain.

In contrast with this way of dealing with suffering, Paul encouraged us to...

**Romans 12:12 (NIV)** Be patient in affliction.

When we are focused on Jesus, we naturally turn to Him for strength and patience to deal with whatever we are facing. That is why the three things of verse are connected.

**Romans 12:12 (NIV)** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

There is no command to start your day with prayer. There is a strong suggestion to do so. This passage shows the importance of starting your day in prayer. Go to Jesus in prayer and set the focus of your day on Him. Remember what He has done for you and worship Him, stirring up your zeal for serving Him this day. Walk through the day in your mind, pointing out the hard parts where you will need strength, wisdom, and patience. Seek these things from Him. The meaning of this passage suggests we start the day in prayer.

Jesus sets us an example in this. He spent more time in prayer than any of us. Surely if He needed prayer like this, we need it much, much more. We have a lot to learn from Him. So...

**Romans 12:11-12 (NIV)** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

[]

The life Jesus calls us to live is a very different life than the life lived by other people. Those of another faith or no faith do not have the promise of eternal life, paid for freely by God. Only Christianity offers certainty now that your sins are forgiven and you will inherit eternal life.

These promises are not based on how good you've been, how nice or loving you are. They are not based on your good deeds, your religious zeal, or anything else that you might have accomplished with your life.

Instead these promises are based on Jesus, God's own Son. These promises are based on His Holy life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection from the dead by God.

The promise of forgiveness and eternal life He offers to you because of what He did, not what you did. So there is no doubt. There is no wonder if you are good enough. You are not good enough. You never have been and never will be.

But Jesus is good enough. Today, trust in His perfection for your forgiveness. Receive Him now. Pray to receive Him as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as Lord.