

6. BURN TO BURN BRIGHT, BUT NOT TO EXTERMINATE

A close-up photograph of a fire burning brightly in a stone fireplace. The fire is intense, with a core of white and yellow light. Numerous bright orange and red sparks are flying upwards from the fire, creating a dynamic and energetic scene. The background is dark, making the fire stand out prominently.

*For the peace to be lasting the
hardship will be harder.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

BURN TO BURN BRIGHT, BUT NOT TO EXTERMINATE

Zechariah 13:9: "I will put them into fire. I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my Name and I will answer them. I will say they are My people and they will say the Lord is our God."

Currently we are in a fire we did not ask for. I have said before, when pieces of our lives start falling off, we should take a moment and ask ourselves which of those pieces we really want to pick up and put back into place. I've heard many people I have been in contact with saying that life so far during the lockdown is very different. Mentally, socially, spiritually and even vocationally, people have been challenged to change.

COVID-19 made us aware of many things that are non-essentials in our lives. Some of these non-essentials have been forcefully removed from us and we are starting to learn to live without them. Sports events have been cancelled, amusement parks and theatres have been closed. Restaurants have been closed. There's no clubbing, no sale of alcohol, no spending money on non-necessities, even church has been cancelled. No bars are open. Vape shops are closed. Salons where you can dye your hair or do your nails are now closed as well. There is no more exercising at gyms. Even certain essential services like counseling, have ceased. Because of this, some people might ask: "Where can I go? I need to speak to somebody." But even these essential services have closed down.

**IF WE HAVE LEARNT ANYTHING
FROM THIS PANDEMIC IT IS THAT
THERE ARE MANY NON-ESENTIALS
IN OUR LIVES THAT WE CAN LIVE
WITHOUT.**

Because of all these things coming to an end, some people started being bored at home. They had to find alternative ways to fill the hours of their days. Personally for me, this meant cooking better meals, getting up early, sitting and eating at the table as a family, preaching more sermons and spending more time in God's Word daily. I even asked myself, if lockdown becomes part of our world reality for the future, whether I should not invest in educating myself in a line of work that is an essential service. If this was to happen again, I could then still do God's work and not be stuck at home, helplessly.

What did you think of so far? How did you re-evaluate your life, or how did your life change? What is this unexpected fire that we did not ask for, currently burning? Have you had similar thoughts as mine? Did you change your behaviour during the lockdown? Did your routine change? Perhaps you find yourself spending more time in the garden, or reading the Bible more, or praying more, doing family church and worship, or doing online evangelism? Did you perhaps start thinking of how you need to rather forgive the person you haven't forgiven yet, because the time of the end might be at hand? Have you maybe thought that you should be less independent and more God dependent? Perhaps your thoughts have changed to realise that this is the time when character growth should take place and growth should not be stunted? Perhaps you have realised that right now is the time for you to stand up and volunteer to give your life to God – to live for Him or to die for Him?

All these adjustments we go through, whether mentally or spiritually or physically, are hard. They may even be irritating. Let us call these changes the burn. The burn to purge through fire is a concept the Bible speaks of.

**WHAT GOOD CHANGES DID THE
COVID PANDEMIC BRING INTO
YOUR LIFE THAT IS WORTH
HOLDING ON TO?**

The verse that we've started off with, speaks about how God will purify us like gold and silver through the fiery experiences we go through. To purge or burn away that which is unwanted in the life of a Christian.

In gym life, the way you get rid of fat, is to burn it away. (Not with a lazer.) Exercise heats up the body so that the fat literally melts and burns away and is sweat out by the body in the form of toxins. We need to burn away the fat and toxins of sin in our lives by becoming hot. God already allowed the environment around us to become warmer, to become hotter, to allow this burn to start.

When a fire burns, it is suppose to burn the dross away forever. When we get rid of things that used to be a big part of our lives, we will have to take time to mourn the changes that are taking place. The mourning may cause anger within us. It might cause irritation. We might go through the stages of grief, denial, sadness, anger and fear. Eventually we will come to a place of acceptance.

It is recommended that we need to let go of the unnecessary. We should use this time to purge our lives, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions and let go of the things that do not fit the image of God. Have you ever done spring cleaning where you go through your wardrobe and throw out the clothes that are torn or don't fit anymore? As much as we throw away the things that do not fit our bodies anymore, we should also throw away the things in our lives that do not fit the image of God. We should allow the fire to do what it must. When this pandemic is over, we should not go back to our comfort zone and do the things we once did.

**FAT IS BURNT AWAY WHEN THE
BODY HEATS UP, SIMILARLY SIN IS
BURNT AWAY WHEN THE
ENVIRONMENT AROUND US
BECOMES METAPHORICALLY HOT.**

The Bible calls us to die to sin. The sin of loving pleasure more than loving God. When you are dead, there is no going back to the old ways. We should not say after a while: "I have changed my mind, I don't want these changes." We need to destroy the old ways within us.

I often think of the stories in the Bible, especially the exodus of Israel from Egypt. I've wondered about the punishment God bestowed on Egypt in the form of the ten plagues. Was that only for the punishment of the Egyptians? I believe the plagues were there to help Israel to purge themselves of the love they had grown into for Egypt and its ways.

If you look at the ten plagues; water that turned to blood, frogs, lice, flies, cattle that died, boils, hail, locusts that consumed the crops, darkness over the earth and the death of the first-born sons, every single one slowly but surely destroyed Egypt, the land which the Israelites have grown so accustomed to living in. When the ten plagues were finished, there was nothing really left to return to. When God set them free, He not only set them free from Farao, He also set them free from a life of being stuck in a place that was doing them no good.

There are many things in our lives that are doing us no good. Unless God destroys them supernaturally, we will have a tendency to want to go back to them. Just like Israel complained in the desert saying: "Were we not better off in Egypt?" The truth of this story is that unfortunately for them, even though they wanted to return, there was nothing left for them to return to. We need to make a choice in our lives to destroy the pathways that allow us to go back to our old ways of life.

**THERE ARE THINGS IN OUR LIVES
THAT AREN'T DOING US ANY
GOOD, SOMETIMES GOD WILL
ALLOW THESE THINGS TO BE
REMOVE THROUGH HARDSHIP.**

A story is told of a general who went into war. When the troops arrived at the place of the enemy they had sailed to, he decided to burn their ships on the shores. His soldiers were enraged, but the reason the general did this was because he realised that his soldiers' hearts were in two places. Their hearts were there to fight and to win, but there hearts were also back home. The soldiers thought if the war didn't go their way, they could retreat and go back home, get back onto the ships and sail back to the peace and calmness of home.

Many of us today need to burn the ships in our lives. Many of us, when we get discouraged with the intensifying heat of life's battles, go back to our old ways of life because we haven't burnt the ships. We need to leave the old behind and look forward. Luke 9:62 says: "The worker that puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is not worthy of the calling with which God has called us." Do not hold on to that which the fire has burnt. Let it go. When something burns, we should not try and save it or look back at it.

Remember the story of Lot's wife? When Sodom and Gomorrah got destroyed, Lot's wife looked back. Israel looked back to Egypt, longing in their hearts to return to the old ways of life. Both Israel and Lot's wife paid a very dear price for this. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt and Israel, the generation that looked back, was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

Whatever bad habits we have, and the fear of moving into the future, should be put aside. We should not fall back into our comfort zones. It is truly a time for us right now, to say goodbye to who we were. Learn today to inhale the future and exhale the past. Don't look back. Look forward.

**WE NEED TO "BURN THE SHIPS".
MEANING SOMETIMES BAD THINGS
NEED TO BE COMPLETELY
DESTROYED SO WE CAN GO BACK
TO THEM.**

This applies to our thinking as well. Psychology tells us if we are used to being pessimistic and complaining and having negative thoughts, a pathway forms within the brain. These different pathways are called neuro-pathways. When we practice pessimism and complaining and negative thinking, it becomes a habit. By repeating it over and over, a literal connection, a literal path, forms in our brains. This habit becomes stronger and stronger by repetition. If we keep on going back onto those paths of negative thinking, we will never be cleansed of the dead wood, the dross, that is clinging onto us and holding us back. We need to look forward by thinking new thoughts. We need to practice thinking the new thoughts over and over again in order to burn the pathways of pessimism and negative thinking.

When the negative thoughts come back, we need to say: "Sorry, I burnt that path, I can no longer go back onto it." When self and selfish ways are burnt away we can truly be on fire for God.

Trees are often used in biblical prophecy to represent God's people. In the book of Revelation God says, "*He is holding back the winds of strife from blowing upon the trees until His people are sealed.*" Right now, God does not allow the full force of trial and tragedy to come upon us. He allows smaller things to come in order to help us to burn away the dead wood that is within us. If we are God's trees, God wants us to be perfect trees, therefore the trials of life are going to help us to burn away the dead wood.

Talking about trees and logs and wood, have you ever noticed how a piece of wood burns? If you do not apply firefighters to wood and you just use one match to try and burn the log or the wood, it won't burn. It needs a lot of fuel.

**GOD IS NOT YET ALLOWING THE
FULL FORCE OF TRIALS TO COME
UPON US, HE IS ALLOWING
SMALLER TRIALS TO PREPARE US.**

A lot of fire needs to be created that is big enough to heat up the wood. Sometimes it takes long for the wood to heat up. We are told that in order for wood to be heated sufficiently in order for it to light up, it will have to be heated to 150 degrees Celsius. Then it first starts to smoke before it ignites.

Science tells us when all the particles within the wood have burnt away, only char remains. Like the charcoal we buy in the shops. The smoke will disappear and the dead pieces of the wood will be burnt away. The carbon char will then combine with oxygen and will continue to burn steadily at a much slower and steady pace. That is why charcoal used in a barbecue or in a braai can stay hot for much longer.

God calls us to burn away the dead wood in our characters and personalities so that only the char, the good wood, remains. When all the dross of life is burnt away and only the purity (char) of Christ remains, we too will stay hot for longer. God needs faithful, consistent flames that do not go out quickly.

Another interesting fact about burning trees and wood is as they heat up, the rising carbon atoms as well as the atoms of other material in them, emit light. The heat that is formed within the fire, produces light, an effect that is called incandescence. This is what causes the visible flame. (The same kind of reaction creates light in a light bulb.) The colour of the flame varies, depending on how hot it is. Colour variations within the flame is caused by uneven temperatures. Typically, the hottest part of the flame at the base, glows blue and the cooler parts at the top, glow orange or yellow.

**GOD CALLS US TO BURN AWAY
THE DEAD WOOD IN OUR
CHARACTERS AND PERSONALITIES
SO THAT ONLY THE CHAR, THE
GOOD WOOD, REMAINS.**

God wants us to be warm, not lukewarm. He declares that He will spit all those who are lukewarm out of His mouth. He wants us to burn hot, to burn dark blue flames. The hotter the flame, the bluer the light. God's trials help us to burn a deep blue, lasting flame for God. A bright light. Are you burning a deep blue flame for God today, or are you a bit cooler, perhaps burning a more yellow flame?

I believe if we let the flame of life do its work, we will be on fire like the disciples were after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus described their feelings and said: *"Did not our hearts burn within us?"* Talking about how the fire of God had ignited in their hearts when He spoke to them. For the peace in our lives to be lasting, our hardships sometimes have to be a little bit harder.

Which Christians through the ages burnt the brightest? Maybe the martyrs, people who have died for Christ, people who have endured trials and hardships? To me, they are the people whose lights are still burning today. They formed deep, dark blue lights.

When the dead wood of life is gone, we truly will be on fire for God. A warm, long burning, deep blue fire. Let your light shine before men today. Allow the trials of life to let your light shine brighter. Do what will set you on fire for God.

There is something else that happens within us when we burn. God allows us to burn now, to go through trials right now, so that we do not have to burn later. God allows trials into our lives as a form of a controlled fire. We, in this time of our lives, will have to pass through a time of Jacob's trouble.

**WHEN THE DEAD WOOD OF LIFE IS
GONE, WE TRULY WILL BE ON FIRE
FOR GOD. A WARM, LONG
BURNING, DEEP BLUE FIRE.**

Malachi 4:1 declares that the Lord Almighty said: *“The day is coming when all the proud and evil people will burn like straw. In that day they will burn up, there will be nothing left of them.”*

Matthew 3:12 says: *“He has His winnowing shovel with Him to thresh out all the grain. He will gather His wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.”*

We need to burn our chaff now, so that when God's winnowing fork comes and wants to cast the chaff into the fire, there will be no chaff left to burn. God allows us to burn now, so that the fire of hell will have no power over us.

God is like a firefighter, fighting the fire of sin in our lives. How will He **extinguish** sin and keep us safe from Satan's fires? Well, let me tell you what firefighters do. Firefighters study the nature of the fire so that they know where it is heading to. In order for them to extinguish the fire, they go ahead of the fire and light a controlled fire in front of the big fire that is approaching. When the actual fire arrives, there is nothing left to burn, because the fire cannot burn something that is already burnt.

God says we have to go through the crucible, the trials of life, in order to burn away the dead wood, the dross, the things that do not belong in our characters. When God's searching eye comes in the last days, looking for those who must be cast into that eternal fire, we will be pure and holy with nothing left that needs to be removed or burnt. Let the dead wood burn off now. We may try to prevent fiery trials in our lives. When there is a forest fire, we try to avoid this fire. We try to put it out because of the destruction that it brings. But what will happen if we do not let the forest fire burn?

**WHEN YOU GO THROUGH THE
TRIALS OF LIFE, IT BURNS AWAY
THE DEAD WOOD, THE DROSS, THE
THINGS THAT DO NOT BELONG IN
YOUR CHARACTER.**

Lots of dry wood collect which would be okay when it is wet. But later, when the wood eventually burns and with the extreme amounts that are collected on the forest surface, it burns so hot that it destroys everything – not only the forest, but the topsoil and the life in the soil and all the plants. At the end of it, only a desert remains. A little bit of fire at the right time can thus stop everything from burning to the ground, including the soil itself.

Will you choose to allow controlled fires to burn in your life, or will you wait for it all to go to ruin? Will you wait for that intense fire to come that will destroy you? We are not there yet. The destructive fire is still a little distance away. Therefore you need to allow the smaller trials of life to do its work now. Don't stubbornly cling to the parts of you that are bad. Get rid of everything within yourself that is not perfect. Shed those things that are no longer worthy of your life. Cast them off, do not let the heat intimidate you, thinking that it will destroy you. Eventually, when the fiery eye of God comes to search for the dead wood to burn, there will be nothing left but a golden, pure Christian character.

This fire that we are going through now, will not only set us on fire to shine our lights to the world around us, but it will save our lives, both for now and from the fiery furnace that is to come upon those who will not accept God and His trials in their lives. May God give us mercy right now, to endure the heat and not to be intimidated by it.

**WILL YOU CHOOSE TO ALLOW
CONTROLLED FIRES TO BURN IN
YOUR LIFE, OR WILL YOU WAIT
FOR IT ALL TO GO TO RUIN?**

Podcast



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