LIFELONG
Zeal
How To Build Lasting Passion For God

PHILLIP SHUMAKE

“An excellent and comprehensive study! Every disciple needs to read Lifelong Zeal.”
-David Banning
DEDICATION

To my wife, Tracy. You are endlessly fantastic.  
I love you and our journey together!  
(Ruth 1:16)

To my family and friends.  
Your zeal continues to inspire me.
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MARK’S QUESTION
Mark said, “I was baptized just a few years ago, but I already feel less on fire. What can I do to get my zeal back?” At the time, I told Mark I wasn’t sure. I knew spending more time in prayer and Bible study would help him, but like many Christians, he was already doing those things. He deserved a more specific answer.

Maybe you’ve felt like Mark before. If so, take courage because God is eager to ignite lifelong zeal in every Christian. The Bible includes all the examples and instructions you need to live with a greater passion for God.

This study guide will help you:

• Build a spiritual fire that doesn’t fizzle out.
• Discover seven steps Jesus used to enhance Peter’s zeal (and yours!)
• Gain a mature understanding of zeal from over four hundred Scriptures.
• Share the good news in an even more compelling manner.
• Experience the satisfaction found in imitating Jesus’ zeal.

In 1 Peter 3:12-14, God promises you have nothing to fear in this journey, so open your Bible and get started.

*Names in this book have been changed to respect privacy.
God’s Vision

Every Christian, A Zealous Christian

“who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Titus 2:14

GOD’S VISION
God sees what could be and what should be in every person. In this lesson, you’ll examine God’s desire for His people to imitate His zeal.

DEFINING ZEAL
Zeal is far more than the ambition of youth or the burst of energy from a cup of coffee. In the Bible, zeal is a burning desire to please God.1

Formally, zeal is defined as “great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective.”2 This definition is fine for talking about zeal for sports or hobbies, but it’s not precise enough to describe what God envisions for His people.

There are five essential qualities that set a Christian’s passion apart from raw enthusiasm. The Bible directly links these traits to the concept of zeal. They are courage (1 Peter 3:13), wisdom (Rom. 10:2), energy (John 4:34), diligence (Ezra 7:23), and loving service (Rom. 12:11).

Warming Up
Describe your initial thoughts about Christian zeal:

What aspects of zeal would you like to learn more about?
These traits are consistently found in the most zealous people in the Bible, and they create a clear picture of this “burning desire” in action. By combining them, a good working definition can be formed: **Christian zeal is the courage to exercise great wisdom, great energy, and great diligence in loving service to God.**

This definition provides a detailed understanding of zeal and a biblical standard to measure yourself against. Keep it in mind as you study the Bible’s use of this powerful word.

**GOD’S ZEAL**
The prophet Isaiah connects God’s zeal with some of the Lord’s most impressive actions. Isaiah 9:7 says that God would use His zeal to establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

“There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.**” (Isa. 9:7)

Later Isaiah 59:17 describes the zeal of the Lord as all encompassing. His zeal is like a mantel, which is a large outer cloak that is very visible, and it wraps His other wonderful qualities together.

“He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing **And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.**” (Isa. 59:17)

There is no doubt that Christians serve a very zealous God. The incredible thing is that He wants you to be so much like Him! **God desires for every Christian to be a zealous Christian.** This desire is firmly established by looking at the mission, instructions, and actions of Jesus.

**THE MISSION OF JESUS**
Titus 2:14 summarizes the mission of Jesus on earth. When God described the kind of people He desires, He specifically chose the word zealos. Notice the four-part message of this amazing verse.

**He Purchased You**

“who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed…”

Jesus purchased you with His precious blood. He knew His mission would bring Him to Cavalry, but He came anyway because of the incredible value He places on your soul. He “gave Himself” to purchase you and all people.
He Purified You  
“…and to purify for Himself…”

Jesus doesn’t leave you in a sin-stained condition. He purifies you. Jesus cleanses His people like He is restoring a priceless work of art. He gives every Christian a new and pure life. In Jesus, all your sins are washed away so that you stand before the Lord sparkling and new.

He Took Possession of You  
“…a people for His own possession…”

Because of the excess of American culture, it is common for people to purchase things they never fully use. It is not so with your Lord. His mission took Him beyond payment and purification. When Jesus saved you from sin, you became one of God’s most prized possessions. He loves and admires you and wants only the best for your future.

To Produce Zeal In You  
“…zealous for good deeds.”

This was the mission of Jesus: to purchase, purify, and possess you and make you “zealous for good deeds.” Soak in this truth for a moment: Jesus’ mission was to create a zealous people. He wants you to live with a burning desire to please God.

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF JESUS

In addition to His mission, Jesus also gives Christians the direct instruction to “be zealous.” In Revelation 3:14–19, Jesus urged the lukewarm Laodiceans to stop trusting in their comfortable lifestyles, be zealous, and repent.

The Lord’s instructions are just as relevant to lukewarm Christians today as they were to the saints at Laodicea. Blinded by wealth and security, modern Christians can easily get stuck in lukewarm routines. This disgusts Jesus! With passion and great love for His sheep, Jesus commands everyone to come back to a zealous relationship with Him.

THE ACTIONS OF JESUS

Jesus is also Christians’ ultimate example. In John 2:13–22, the Lord was so “consumed” by zeal that He drove away the livestock and money changers who were turning the temple into a common house of business.

However, this is far from His only expression of zeal. Jesus shows true lifelong zeal in everything from His fervent prayers to His unending love for the lost. Above all, His zeal is evident in His relentless pursuit of the Father’s will, even to the point of death (John 6:35–40, Matt. 26:42).
First John 2:6 instructs, “the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” Because the Bible describes Jesus as living with such great zeal, His followers must seek to do the same.

**ZEALOUS CHRISTIANS**

Thankfully, God not only desires for you to be zealous, but He also fully equips you in Christ! The lessons that follow will help you develop a Christ-like zeal that honors God, enhances your influence, and brings blessings into your life and the lives of those around you.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

**Every Christian, A Zealous Christian:** This is God’s extraordinary vision for your future! It is not just what *could* be. It is what *should* be. With His help, you can develop the lifelong zeal Jesus gave His life to ignite.

**THINK**

1. What do you learn about God’s zeal from the following passages?

   Isaiah 37:32

   Isaiah 42:13

   Isaiah 63:15

   Ezekiel 5:13

   Joel 2:18

2. When God exercises His zeal, it always produces beneficial results. What benefits do you believe will result from personally developing greater zeal?

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**For Only A Few?**

Do you think most Christians today exercise the same level of zeal found in New Testament role models? Why?

**Facing The Facts**

Imagine observing the event of John 2 as a faithful Jew. A young man storms into the temple with a scourge of cords making demands. Some might say, “I see why he’s upset, but I don’t like his approach.” How does seeing this side of Jesus’ character impact you?
3. Zealous people in the Bible often have very little in common outside of their love for God. Describe the differences seen in:

- Esther
- Josiah
- John the Baptist
- Mary, mother of Jesus

Age:

Wealth:

Background:

Marriage:

4. Considering John 2:13-22, what does it mean to be consumed by zeal?

Jesus doesn’t just call the temple a “building.” He calls it “My Father’s house.” What effect does this personal connection have on His zeal?

During this visit to the temple, Jesus shows His great concern for purity in worship and His great disgust over the greed and dishonesty of the money changers. What did He show zeal for when He visited the temple as a child? (Luke 2:46)

**PRAY**

Knowing God’s desire for all Christians to be zealous, you may feel guilty about your current level of devotion to God. Don’t become paralyzed by this guilt. Instead, choose to repent and move forward.

Take this time to pray expressing your thankfulness for the zeal of the Lord, and expressing your repentance for any lukewarm tendencies that have crept into your character.

**LIVE**

Memorize Titus 2:14. This is a small, but powerful step in devoting yourself to be one of the zealous people Jesus came to create.
A METAPHOR TO REMEMBER
God often uses metaphors to compare complex spiritual concepts to familiar ideas. For example, John 10, describes Jesus as the Great Shepherd, and Christians as His sheep. Because metaphors build on people’s existing understanding of concepts, they are a rich and memorable way to convey a lot of information.

To describe Christian zeal, God uses the metaphor of intense heat. In this lesson, you’ll explore the significance of this metaphor and develop an overview of the components needed to build a spiritual fire.

ZELOS
In lesson one, zeal was defined as a burning desire to please God. This is because the English word zeal is the translation of the Greek word zēlos. According to Strong’s Greek Dictionary, this literally means: “to be hot, or heat.” Therefore, the word zeal carries the idea of a desire on fire, and zeal can accurately be called a spiritual fire.
While fire may seem like an odd metaphor to some, God has actually used fire extensively in His interactions with humanity. For example, consider the flaming sword guarding Eden or the tongues of fire above the apostles at Pentecost. Perhaps most impressive, God revealed His very presence with fire in the burning bush and in a pillar of fire guiding the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex. 3:4, 13:21).

Because the idea of a spiritual fire has been abused in some false doctrines, it may be tempting to dismiss this metaphor, but you should not. The idea of a spiritual fire is not just a random metaphor or a convenient catch phrase. This metaphor was created by God’s selection of the word zēlos, and when you embrace it, you’ll discover that it provides an appropriate and useful framework for understanding zeal.

THE BASICS OF YOUR SPIRITUAL FIRE
To get the most out of God’s metaphor, you need a basic understanding of the physical principles of fire. These principles are easily understood by considering the fire triangle. The fire triangle is a widely used illustration that depicts the three core components every fire requires: heat, fuel, and air. When all three of these components are together in sufficient quantities, a chain reaction takes place, and a fire will naturally ignite. If any of these elements are taken away, the fire will just as naturally die out.

The combination of heat, fuel and air is God’s formula for fire. Similarly, the spiritual fire of your zeal also depends on bringing together the right source of heat, the right kind of fuel, and the right kind of environment.

With these three elements in place, your zeal will ignite. Therefore, it’s vital for Christians to identify the specific Bible concepts that serve as their heat source, fuel source, and environment for zeal. With these, every Christian can build a spiritual fire that will fulfill God’s vision.
for a zealous people, and that will bring greater passion to their walk with God.

**GOD: THE ULTIMATE HEAT SOURCE**

God’s great love for man and for justice makes Him the ultimate heat source for every Christian. His desire to save man burns so deeply that Jesus died for the world, while man was still lost in sin (Rom. 5:6–11). For those who reject His love, Hebrews 12:29 boldly declares, “our God is a consuming fire.”

Only the passion and fire of God can adequately stir your zeal. Lifelong zeal cannot be built upon self-serving desires or even the passion of others. Lasting zeal is always deeply connected to God and His perfect love. Drawing closer to Him will ignite and intensify your spiritual fire.

**THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST: THE PERFECT FUEL**

Lifelong zeal is fueled in your heart when you put on the character of Christ. Just as you build up a campfire with additional logs, every trait of Christ you adopt will expand and enhance your zeal.

On one hand, this is great news because the many positive traits of Christ present limitless ways to enhance your zeal. You can easily spend a lifetime growing more like Him. On the other hand, Jesus demonstrates so many wonderful qualities that determining where to begin can be overwhelming! Thankfully, five traits repeatedly stand out in Bible passages addressing zeal, and each one is shown to be essential for fueling your spiritual fire:

- Courage—without it, zeal becomes paralyzed
- Energy—without it, zeal becomes worthless
- Diligence—without it, zeal becomes disappointing
- Wisdom—without it, zeal becomes deadly
- Loving Service—without it, zeal becomes selfish

If you will incorporate just these five character traits into your faith, your zeal will be fueled for phenomenal growth.
PURITY: THE OPTIMUM ENVIRONMENT
It is hard to build a roaring fire during a downpour. In the same way, it is hard to build lifelong zeal when sin, evil influences, and bad choices extinguish your spiritual fire. What Christians really need is an environment that is conducive to both nurturing and challenging their zeal. This is found by pursuing purity in the face of the corruption all around. Jesus warned the disciples about the powerful influence the world exerts, and He called them to prepare for these threats. For example, Matthew 10:16 says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Just as you cannot control the weather, you cannot completely control your environment. But if you want to keep the flames of your zeal burning brightly, then you must seek purity in the areas you can influence, especially the purity of your heart (Mal. 3:3, 1 John 2:15).

THE BOTTOM LINE
God’s metaphor for zeal makes remembering and applying the basics easy. Your spiritual fire depends on:
- God—Your Ultimate Heat Source
- Christ’s Character—Your Perfect Fuel
- Purity—Your Optimum Environment

Because you know the three components that create zeal, you can examine yourself and build a stronger, brighter spiritual fire.

THINK
1. Self-Examination: Which component does your zeal most need?
   A.) I need to draw closer to God. I know my zeal would be greater if I were more in touch with His love and His will.
   B.) I need to build a more Christlike character. My zeal is held back because I am lacking in courage, energy, wisdom, diligence, and/or loving service.
   C.) I need to improve my environment. I am missing positive influences that promote greater zeal, or I am struggling with negative influences that smother it.
2. God: Your Ultimate Heat Source. What attributes of God most excite you? Can you recall a time when you told someone else about this particular aspect of God’s nature?

3. The Character of Christ: Your Perfect Fuel. What character traits of Christ have you developed that now make a tremendous difference in the way you live?

How do you think this trait impacts your zeal?

4. Purity: Your Optimum Environment. What positive influences in your environment have helped your zeal grow the most?

What negative influences currently threaten your zeal? What can you do to minimize their impact on you in the future?

**PRAY**
In Psalm 51:10 David comes face to face with the impurity in his heart. He asks God, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Use these thoughts as a starting point to petition God for a clean heart, burning with His love.

**LIVE**
Write out Titus 2:14 from memory. If you can’t, then memorize it right now. It will keep you focused on the spiritual fire God desires to create within you.
HOW JESUS STARTS A SPIRITUAL FIRE
Learning to combine the right heat, fuel, and environment to create lifelong zeal is straightforward and helpful. But even more helpful is learning how Jesus used these components to build a spiritual fire in others. In this lesson, you’ll explore the step-by-step process Jesus used to build lifelong zeal in Peter and His other followers.

THE POWER OF A PROCESS
When Jesus built zeal in others, He didn’t act randomly. He followed a recognizable process that produced lasting results. His process was so effective at building up the apostles’ zeal that they were able to replicate it in many others.

The steps Jesus took are easy to remember because they are directly related to the common steps used to build a physical fire.

If you’ve ever enjoyed a campfire, think for a moment about how it was built and used. What was the first
thing you did to get started? Once the fire was lit, how did you use it? You likely used a process similar to this:

- Prepare A Place
- Get A Lighter or Match
- Arrange Your Firewood
- Shield It From The Wind or Rain
- Cook Some S'mores—Yum!
- Share Its Heat
- Stir The Coals

The Bible shows Jesus using these same steps in a spiritual context to build Peter’s zeal, and they will work for you too!

- Step 1: Prepare Your Zeal
- Step 2: Ignite Your Zeal
- Step 3: Fuel Your Zeal
- Step 4: Protect Your Zeal
- Step 5: Use Your Zeal
- Step 6: Spread Your Zeal
- Step 7: Tend Your Zeal

Examining each stage from Peter’s experience will give you an overview of the path ahead.

**STEP ONE: PREPARE YOUR ZEAL**

If you plan to build a campfire, the first step is always to select and prepare a good spot. You often have to brush away fallen leaves or clean up trash that has been left by other campers. In the same way, Jesus’ first step was to prepare Peter’s heart.

The law of Moses did a lot to get Peter and the other Jews ready for the Lord. It gave them clear moral boundaries and encouraged them to purify their hearts. It required accountability for sin, and it limited their contact with the ungodly nations around them. In addition to the old law, God sent John the Baptist ahead of Christ to further prepare the hearts of the Jewish people (Gal. 3:24, Luke 1:17).

As it did with Peter, your zeal begins as you purify your heart and eliminate the evil influences in your environment. As Titus 2:14 said, it is a purified people who will become zealous for good deeds.

**STEP TWO: IGNITE YOUR ZEAL**

Peter’s next step was to draw near to God through Jesus. When Andrew said, “We have found the Messiah,” Peter knew this was a bold claim. Yet Peter’s first
encounter with Jesus did not disappoint. Jesus gave Peter a new name, and a few days later, Jesus performed His first miracle for the disciples (John 1:35–2:11).

In Matthew 4:17–22, Jesus invited Peter to follow Him. In faith, Peter left his nets behind and followed Jesus. This began a three-and-half-year journey that led him closer to the Father. This nearness to God ignited Peter’s heart with zeal. Over time he grew continually closer to God as he witnessed God’s power in very personal ways, such as when Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–17).

As you draw closer to God through Jesus, God’s love also grows within your heart until a flash point is reached and your zeal is ignited.

**STEP THREE: FUEL YOUR ZEAL**

While Peter’s enthusiasm in the beginning is admirable, Jesus knew Peter’s zeal was far from mature. Christ began working on Peter’s character, adding each of the five essential fuels mentioned in lesson two.

For example, Jesus taught Peter to have greater **courage** as he walked on the stormy sea (Matt. 14:26). Jesus taught Peter to have greater **wisdom** when He rebuked Peter for trying to prevent Jesus’ death (Matt. 16:23, 26:51–52). Jesus even taught Peter to have greater **diligence** when He called Peter to follow, even to the point of death (John 21:19).

Your zeal can’t expand unless you learn to live with these important qualities of Christ. Zeal must be fueled so that it can mature.

**STEP FOUR: PROTECT YOUR ZEAL**

While still molding Peter’s character, Jesus also began to prepare him for the challenges ahead. In Luke 22:31–34, Jesus warned Peter that Satan would soon bombard him with temptations. Although Peter felt ready, the Lord was aware of the great threat these temptations posed.

**Zeal Must Mature**

Several trends in the religious world today directly appeal to an immature zeal. Christians must not rush to imitate these unauthorized practices. Instead they should follow the guidance of Jesus to develop a more mature zeal. Mature Christian zeal is not jumping up and down during worship like it is a rock concert. Rather, true zeal is seen in the courage of men like Elijah who risk their reputation, even their life, to speak the truth about biblical righteousness.

Contrast the behavior of Elijah and the Baal worshippers in 1 Kings 18:17–39. What qualities of immature zeal do you see in the Baal worshippers?

What do you see in Elijah that shows He is both zealous and mature?
The Bible continues to alert saints to the dangers that they face today. God knows it’s tempting for Christians to lose heart during trials, so He provides warnings and instructions to prepare His children for the storms of life. This way, even when they stumble, their zeal is not extinguished.

**STEP FIVE: USE YOUR ZEAL**

After his trials, Peter came back stronger and more committed than ever. In Acts 2, he boldly proclaimed the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit, and thousands were saved! His zeal was put to good use and produced wonderful fruits.

Like Peter, sometimes your greatest accomplishments will come only after you’ve learned from your greatest failures. God can use your zeal to do incredible things when you continue to walk with Him.

**STEP SIX: SPREAD YOUR ZEAL**

For Peter, Pentecost was only the beginning. Acts 10:33–36 describes Peter sharing the gospel with Gentiles! God used the ever-growing zeal of Peter to kindle the fire of faith in countless others. Today God continues to use zealous people to do incredible things that bring His light to the entire world.

**STEP SEVEN: TEND YOUR ZEAL**

By the end of the New Testament, the impatient and insecure Peter was transformed into a true rock of faith. He continued to be a pivotal influence in Jerusalem and throughout the ancient world. His final epistles are filled with the hard-won lessons of his lifelong zeal. In 1 and 2 Peter, he taught Christians how to stir, manage, and expand their zeal for God’s glory even in the most difficult circumstances.

When he wrote those letters, Peter’s zeal was like the red-hot coals at the very center of a fire. He was able to share his zeal with others and was ready for any action God called him to take. What an amazing point to reach! What a wonderful process Jesus demonstrates in Peter!

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

The best way for Christians to build lifelong zeal is to align themselves with the process Jesus established. By focusing on longevity rather than a temporary outburst, Jesus creates a spiritual fire within His followers that stands the test of time. It worked for Peter, and it still works for Christians today!

**THINK**

1. Which of these seven steps do you believe is the most difficult? Why?
2. Peter saw God’s love at work on a daily basis. He even saw Jesus heal his mother-in-law. What moments in your life have been pivotal in helping you recognize the unending love God has for you?

3. In addition to preaching, what other actions did Peter perform with zeal?
   - Acts 3:1–10
   - Acts 4:23–31
   - Acts 5:1–16

4. Which of the seven steps do you feel you are currently taking? What elements from previous steps could you go back and improve?

5. Peter was not alone in this process. What role do fellow Christians play in helping you advance from step to step?

**REFLECT**
Summarize this lesson in your own words.

**PRAY**
The process Jesus used to build Peter’s zeal is not completed overnight. Philippians 1:6 says “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Stop and thank God for helping you come this far, and ask Him to continue to help your zeal grow and mature for the rest of your life.

**LIVE**
Andrew first introduced Peter to Jesus, and it changed his life forever. This week, invite someone to discover Jesus by joining you for a Bible study, a worship service, or another event where he/she can associate with other Christians.
WHAT A DIFFERENCE

Courage is the difference between listening to Goliath mock God from the sidelines and David’s faith to fight. So often it is the difference between what God’s people should do with faith and what they actually do in fear. Everyone encounters situations where acting with courage could make a positive difference if God’s people would add this fuel to their spiritual fires.

God’s kingdom is not for those who remain cowards. Revelation 21:8 reveals that cowards can’t enter heaven, because at its core, cowardliness is a lack of faith in God. The idea that you might miss heaven because you were afraid of earthly dangers instead of trusting in God to look after you—now that is something to really fear! Thankfully, God did not create you to be timid.

He created you with a spirit full of power, love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7). You can use that power to fight the good fight. You can use that love to be a blessing to others, and you can use your self-control to choose courage.

Warming Up

Best-selling author, radio host, and financial adviser Dave Ramsey says, “Fear is not a fruit of the spirit.”

What do you think he means by this?

Why is paralyzing fear inconsistent with a strong faith in God?
In 1 Peter 3:10–16 Christians are told that God stands ready to support and strengthen those who pursue righteousness. Because you are zealous for what is good, you don’t have to fear the harms of this world. Even if you suffer temporarily, it will not be in vain. Verse 14 calls you “blessed” for this and reminds you not to fear the intimidation of others. With God on your side, the blessings of living with courage far outweigh whatever troubles you may face.

In this lesson, you’ll discover the steps God used to stir up greater courage in Gideon so that you can put them into practice and intensify your courage.

**GIDEON IS SCARED. GOD IS CONFIDENT.**

When Gideon is introduced in Scripture, he’s hiding out in a winepress trying to keep his harvest protected from the Midianites. This is the first of three times God records examples of Gideon’s fear (Judges 6:11, 27, 7:10). These examples demonstrate that no matter what your circumstances, God is able to transform moments of fear into moments of faith.

The angel of the Lord begins instilling courage in Gideon with his confident greeting. The angel says, “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.” When you doubt whether God is with you, pause and consider the other confidence-inspiring terms God uses to address His people. You are His “beloved,” His “workmanship,” and His “chosen people.” God is not about to give up on someone as valuable as you!

Courage is a call to submit your life and will to God’s plans. He knows your weaknesses, but He wants to use you anyway so His strength can be shown through your weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). God is confident you can serve as a valiant warrior, and God is never wrong!

**ACKNOWLEDGE THE REALITY AND THE RISK**

Before you rush out to do something courageous, it is fitting to acknowledge the reality of your situation. In verses 15 and 16, Gideon openly acknowledges that his low social standing makes him an unlikely leader.

Courage is not found in ignoring reality. Courage is found in confronting the brutal facts so that you have a good idea of what you’re up against. When you face reality, several things consistently come to light:

- **You remember how dependent you are on God for success.** This keeps you humble and prayerful.
- **You remember that inaction has severe consequences.** Doing nothing is not a safe choice because this only perpetuates bad situations (Matt. 25:24–30).
- **You remember that every problem provides an opportunity.**
The Midianites needed to be defeated. This was both the problem and the opportunity, because it was an opportunity for real leaders to make a real difference.

After seeing the reality, you must then acknowledge the risk. There will always be risks involved when you are called on to be courageous. You may have to endure suffering on the path to victory. Christians must come to terms with these risks and accept that there is far more to be gained by moving forward than by delaying any longer. When you accept this, you are primed for action.

**CONFIRM GOD’S WILL**

Gideon’s next move is one of his smartest. He made sure the courageous task he was undertaking was actually God’s will. Too many people have accused God of being unfaithful after they failed in some endeavor when the reality is that God never called them into that specific action.

You need to consider what the Bible says about your endeavors. There are four basic things everyone should do to confirm God’s will before taking on a courageous task.

1.) *Look into the Bible carefully.* Study to see what God says about the good work you are considering. Be sure you are doing what is pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

2.) *Pray for God’s will.* Just as Gideon offered a sacrifice, you must offer the sacrifice of your prayers and petition God for His will to be done (Rev. 8:4, James 4:15).

3.) *Seek wise counsel.* Wise servants of God can help you confirm God’s will and offer tips to help you succeed (Prov. 1:5, 12:15, 19:21).

4.) *Determine your role.* Gideon was chosen by God to lead the attack against the Midianites, and he was supported by three hundred brave soldiers. You need to identify your role, whether leadership or support, and fill that role well.

Like Gideon, when you are sure what action needs to be taken, then you can worship God with thankfulness, excited to move forward (Judges 6:24).

**START SMALL AND WATCH FOR REASSURANCE**

Next, God directed Gideon to exercise a little bit of courage in a small but significant assignment. In Judges 6:25–32, Gideon gathered a group of ten supporters and destroyed the altar of Baal in the middle of the night. The following day, the men of the city were outraged and wanted to kill Gideon.

Their anger shows that even a small act of courage will upset the status quo.
When this happens, Satan is bound to retaliate in some form. You must accept that there will always be evil-hearted people who challenge God’s servants. Thankfully, there are also good-hearted people who are ready to support and defend the righteous. In Gideon’s case, this support came from his father Joash, who calmed the angry mob and reassured Gideon.

When you add courage to your spiritual fire, good people will lend their voices to support your good deeds. Allow their encouragement and assistance to further strengthen your resolve to do what is right, regardless of what critics may threaten.

CONFIRM GOD’S WILL (YES, AGAIN!)
With the forces of the Midianites and the Amelekites gathering for war, Gideon knew he must do far more than push over a statue. In Judges 6:36–40, Gideon approached God two more times to be certain that this was a battle the Lord would fight. It may never be known if Gideon was moved more by fear or faith during these tests, but you can know God answered Gideon both times.

God honored Gideon’s request for certainty. Thus, you should never hesitate to pause briefly and confirm that your plans are in line with God’s. You don’t want to rush into battles with extreme consequences for you and others without knowing God is with you. When it becomes clear that He is, then take action!

GATHER RESOURCES, BUT DEPEND ON GOD
Having sufficient resources to win will always increase your courage. When a basketball team knows they have the talent and training to win, they can play the toughest competitors with confidence. For those with plenty of resources, courage comes easily. God wanted Gideon to remember that He was the ultimate source of victory, so He narrowed Gideon’s army down to only three hundred soldiers. That way God was glorified and shown to be truly in control.

You must remember that there is no such thing as a “lack of resources” when God is on your side. As you walk in righteousness and wisdom, God will bring the resources you need. Second Corinthians 9:10–11 says, “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.”

THE BOTTOM LINE
In a short amount of time, you can build up the courage to take on huge challenges by accepting God’s call, taking the first step, and depending on His strength.
THINK
1. Read Jeremiah 26:12–15. What do you think about this level of courage?

2. James Stockdale is one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the United States Navy. He endured as a POW for seven years and has said, “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose— with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.” What gives you the greatest confidence that Christians will prevail in the end?

3. What real obstacles and risks exist to living passionately and courageously for God?

4. What is the most courageous thing you have ever done to combat sin or to promote righteousness? How does Gideon’s example encourage you to act with even greater courage in the future?

5. Initially, Gideon only needed courage for one night, and later, for only one battle. What zealous action could you accomplish if you exercised courage for just one hour? For one day? For one week? For one month?

6. The first place God called Gideon to act with courage was at home. What aspects of your home are in need of courageous changes?

REFLECT
As you examine Gideon’s process of developing greater courage, at what stage of development are you? What would it take to get to the next stage?

- I need to accept God’s call to live courageously.
- I need to assess the reality and the risks of following God courageously.
- I need to determine God’s will for my involvement in a specific problem.
- I need to take the first small step.
- I need to determine God’s will for my future involvement.
- I need to trust in God’s resources and to begin a major spiritual battle.

PRAY
Ask God to help you in confirming His will about the courageous steps you need to begin taking for Him.

LIVE
Paul was frequently lifted up and encouraged by the prayers and kindness of his Christian friends. This week, reach out and encourage those you see around you who are living with great courage in their zeal for the Lord. Look for ways you can help them achieve the goals that they are so earnestly pursuing.
OPEN DOORS ALL AROUND
In Acts 17:6, Paul and Silas are described as “men who have turned the world upside down” (ESV). The Jews of Thessalonica intended this description as an insult, but for zealous Christians, it is a rallying cry to change the world.

Every zealous Christian will impact the world in some manner. Certainly some people’s influence exceeds others, but the truth is, you are already influencing those around you for better or for worse. You must resolve to change your corner of the world for the better.

In this lesson you’ll look at the brilliant choices made by Nehemiah as he led the Jews in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Regardless of the good deeds you participate in, these choices will help you make a greater impact.

COMMITMENT: DETERMINE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Nehemiah did not set out to become popular or to

Warming Up
God’s message cannot be locked away in your heart. It burns within demanding action (Jer. 20:9).

Like Jeremiah, you must not bottle up the zeal God ignites. You must use it to magnify and glorify His holy name!
solve every problem faced by the Jews. He devoted himself to a specific task and determined to solve this specific problem. Likewise, you need to consider which problems touch your heart as deeply as the broken walls touched Nehemiah.

Author, minister, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman is attributed with saying, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

A modern-day example is Charity:Water. By focusing exclusively on providing clean water, Scott Harrison and his team have funded 6,185 water projects, providing clean water to over two-and-a-half million people in just five years! They determined to make a difference and are truly changing the world.

Like Nehemiah, you need to solve a problem that taps into your passions. These are the problems that move you to tears or drive you to fervent prayer. If the idea of solving a specific problem becomes so consuming that it can’t be pushed out of your mind, even for work or sleep, you’ve likely found an area where your zeal needs to be used (Neh. 1:4, 2:1–3). Like Nehemiah, you may have to travel great distances to help solve the problem, but when you determine to make a difference, you will truly come alive.

**COMMUNICATION: SPEAK WITH CLARITY**

One of Nehemiah’s greatest strengths was his ability to speak clearly. He took the time to investigate issues, form his thoughts, and speak directly to the needs of the moment (Neh. 2:4, 11–16).

You must fight the urge to ramble on about your passion. When Nehemiah unveiled his plan to the citizens of Jerusalem, he delivered the problem, the solution, and the reason to act immediately all in just two sentences (Neh. 2:16–17)! Clear, compelling information that encourages others to unite around a common vision is powerful!

The need for clarity increases in situations where uncertainty exists. As your zeal carries you into uncharted territory, you may have to alter your plans. On these occasions, straightforward communication will help your team adjust and prevail (Neh. 4:16–23).

**COOPERATION: INVOLVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE**

The first construction decision Nehemiah made was to use the right people. For Nehemiah, talent and manpower were not enough to warrant inclusion. Talented people with the wrong attitude and wrong motivation will not be true assets to a project (Neh. 2:20). Look for coworkers who are supportive of the project, leadership, and spiritual component of your work.
These people will:

- show initiative to succeed (2:18).
- coordinate their efforts with others (ch. 3).
- contribute to areas they care about (3:10).
- zealously go the distance (3:20).

By involving the right people, you will build a true team.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION: RISE ABOVE INTERRUPTIONS**

Projects worth pursuing always encounter challenges that threaten their progress. Nehemiah shows how to manage these obstacles whether they come from within or without.5

**Problems From Within:** Every family, church, or team eventually faces problems from within their membership. This can lead to feelings of betrayal and intense anger. You can’t allow your frustrations to control these situations. In chapter 5:1–19 Nehemiah kept his anger in check and called the people to forgive the crushing debts they owed to one another. Because of Nehemiah’s excellent example of sacrifice and godly character, they followed him. When problems arise within your team, respond thoughtfully, not with rage. If you demonstrate your willingness to sacrifice for the success of the entire team, others will respect your leadership and recommit to the mission (vv. 12–13).

**Problems From Without:** Rumors, distractions, and gossip can be very discouraging to those who are zealous for good deeds. Nehemiah handled these outside attacks perfectly. He told his enemies, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” (Neh. 6:3).

When you are zealously spreading the gospel, building a godly family, and loving your neighbors, you are “doing a great work” and “cannot come down.” You can’t give your time and energy to those whose are against you. Instead, press forward! Pause only briefly to establish that you see the cruel attack and by God’s strength, will not be stopped (vv. 8–9).
COMMUNITY: ADDRESS THE PROJECT AND THE PEOPLE
Rebuilding the wall in just fifty-two days was an incredible accomplishment. But this is not where Nehemiah’s zeal stopped. The final element he addressed was the people. In chapters 7 through 13, Nehemiah partnered with Ezra to help the people reconnect with God and one another. Together, they drew the people into activities that united them as God’s people, sanctified to dwell within God’s city. These included:

- **Celebrating Victories:** Joyfully worshipping when projects were completed and prayers were answered
- **Group Study:** Reading and meditating on the Scriptures with others.
- **Family Leadership:** Urging the head of each household to fulfill his duty.
- **Personal Accountability:** Repenting of sin and restoring their financial offerings.

By spiritually enriching the lives of those you interact with, your greatest success becomes even sweeter.

THE BOTTOM LINE
Good choices will dramatically increase your influence. Choose commitment, communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and community.

THINK
1. What do you think of Nehemiah’s zeal? What most impresses you?

2. What problem do you feel most passionate about helping to solve? What level of commitment are you willing to make to reach your goal?

3. Do you provide clear directions and instructions to others? Ask someone who knows you well what one piece of advice he or she could offer to help you speak more clearly in the future.

4. How can you contribute to greater cooperation among local Christians?
5. Anger can often make a bad situation even worse. To make the right move, Nehemiah said, “I consulted with myself” (Neh. 5:6–7). What does this involve? Share a time you had to “consult with yourself” to keep your anger constructive.

6. What spiritual victories do you feel are not adequately celebrated? What can you do to change this?

REFLECT
Nehemiah was a talented leader, but his success clearly came from God’s blessings. Ask yourself, “Am I giving my greatest attention to solving problems that I am passionate about AND that God is passionate about?” If not, then look around and see what God expects Christians to do, and then lend your talents to that good work! (Nehemiah 1:5-11)

PRAY
In Nehemiah 13:14 he prays, “Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.” Then, the book ends with the words “Remember me, O my God, for good.”

Ask God to remember you for the loyal deeds you have done for Him, and to touch your heart to see the problems He still wants you to be a part of solving.

LIVE
Big problems are solved in a series of smaller steps. What are the first five things you need to do to get started in changing your corner of the world?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.
SPARKS OF PASSION
Heroes are all around. They are found in the pews of the church and the pages of Scripture. Your spiritual heroes are irrefutable proof that God helps His people do extraordinary things.

No matter how dark the world around you seems, reflecting on your heroes and the lessons from their lives will fan the flames of your heart. In this lesson, you’ll learn from spiritual heroes who have blazed an amazing trail for Christians to follow.

HEROES INSPIRE CHRISTIANS TO GO BIG!
What makes a hero? Heroes are people who demonstrate common virtues in a big way. They act with courage, generosity, kindness, etc., far above normal expectations. Heroes are those who refuse to respond with mediocrity; they respond sacrificially.

This is exactly how Zaccheus became a hero. Consider the contrast between the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–23 and Zaccheus in Luke 19:1–10.¹ The wealthy

Warming Up
Meditate on Daniel 3:16–18.

Heroes are the people of God whose fire within is greater than any fire without.

What do you admire about these three heroic young men?
young man walked away from Jesus very sad after refusing to make a big change in his priorities and lifestyle. Then in Luke 19:1–10, you read of Zaccheus, a man small in stature but who was stirred with great zeal. He publicly pledged, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.” From these two men, Christians learn that heroes go big!

Regretful or rejoicing—how will you respond to the Savior? Will you go as big as Zaccheus? If you gave away half of your clothes, you would likely still have plenty to wear. If your kids gave away half of their toys, their closets would probably still be overflowing. Middle-class Americans are so rich, many could give away half of their possessions and still live very comfortable, rich lifestyles. Will you be like the rich young ruler, or will you be like Zaccheus? Trust the Lord, and make some big changes that are good for you and for others too!

HEROES KEEP CHRISTIANS HUMBLE

When celebrities walk the red carpet, adoring fans focus on their fame, fortune, and physique. Millions of fans adore them. They receive so much attention that we call them “superstars.” But real heroes are different. While celebrities inspire admiration or even jealousy, true heroes inspire humility. The heroes who will fuel your zeal are those who draw the spotlight to God, not themselves!

The Corinthians were prone to exalting preachers like celebrities, so Paul reminded them, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Whether you reflect on your heroes’ outstanding accomplishments or their bitter weaknesses, their lives are a reminder not to think of yourself too highly. No matter what great thing you might sacrifice or accomplish, all Christians are just jars of clay, privileged to carry a priceless message.

“She has done what she could”

In Mark 14:8 Jesus defended and commended Mary for her willingness to give her very best to prepare Him for burial.

No matter what you have, make sure that your very best is given to God. Some will give just a cup of water, but the Lord will see it and reward them! (Matthew 10:42)

May you lift up your eyes and see all that you can accomplish!
HEROES RENEW CHRISTIANS’ OPTIMISM IN OTHERS
From time to time, zealous Christians will get discouraged with their fellowman. Like God looking out in the days of Noah, you may feel like “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” When it gets hard to see the good in others, your heroes are reminders that God uses imperfect people.

From Noah’s drunkenness to Sarah’s doubts, you know the sins and weaknesses of these heroes well because God did not omit them from the Bible. If God used such men and women in the past, then God can certainly use those around you as well. Remember to “judge not” but instead “hope all things.”

HEROES REMIND CHRISTIANS TO LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND
Paul’s past was complicated. On one hand, he was a hero in the eyes of the Pharisees. His circumcision, tribal lineage, reputation for strictness, and zeal for persecuting the church made him a model member of their sect. On the other hand, he considered himself the chief of sinners for the horrible way he treated the Christians he now longed to serve (1 Tim. 1:15).

In Philippians 3:4–14, Paul explains how he let go of his past. He determined that all of the external signs of his success were “rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). He also purposed to forget “what lies behind,” and reach “forward to what lies ahead.” He would not allow the mistakes of the past to prevent him from living zealously in the present.

Like Paul, you must let go of your past and pursue Jesus as the “one thing” that directs your life. When you get confused, overwhelmed, or distracted, heroes like Paul can help you refocus on what matters most. You may still have to deal with the consequences of your past choices, but you do not have to be defined by the guilt or scars of the past. Many Bible heroes left behind lives of horrible sin and went on to accomplish great things in God’s kingdom. You can do the same.

THERE ARE HEROES ALL AROUND
In Romans 1:8, Paul calls out the entire local church as a great example of faithfulness. There continue to be churches and saints across the world whose zeal burns brightly. They don’t think of themselves as heroes, but most heroes never do. For example, there are modern heroes:

• teaching and training young Christians in Bible classes and camps.
• preaching and spreading the word of God around the globe.
• caring for orphans, widows, the poor, and the sick.
• using their hospitality and talents to build up the local church.

I am overwhelmingly thankful for the everyday heroes who have touched my life! More than this, I know you are thankful for your heroes too!
THE BOTTOM LINE
No one can outshine Jesus Christ, the ultimate “author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1–2). He and all Bible heroes inspire Christians to go big, to be humble, to see the good in others, and to let go of the past.

THINK
1. Who are your favorite Bible heroes? Which of their zealous actions do you most admire? In what ways can you imitate their zeal? How do they keep you humble?

2. Zaccheus made an immediate decision to go big. What percentage of your possessions could you give up to help the poor? Perhaps a percentage of your clothes? Your tools? If sacrificing possessions is not for you, what other big step could you take?

3. Some concerns about taking a step this big are healthy but some are not. Don’t let worry or greed pull you into the path of the rich young ruler. Imagine you were standing in the street, face to face with Jesus, while crowds of people grumbled about how unworthy you were to spend the afternoon with Jesus. Would any of your concerns melt away? Would you feel more motivated? Why or Why Not?

4. Christians are defined by their relationship with Jesus Christ, not their past. (1 Corinthians 6:11) Why is it so important to “forget what lies behind?”

REFLECT
Have you told your “everyday heroes” how much they mean to you? Take the time this week to contact several of them and express your gratitude for their example.

PRAY
In Proverbs 30:8-9 Agur asks God to give him neither too little nor too much, so that he would not sin. Ask God to fill your life with the right balance of blessings so that you are zealous yet humble.

LIVE
To learn about some modern-day heroes I highly recommend Sewell Hall’s book, Hallmarks. Sewell shares incredible details about many humble and dedicated Christians who have lived with a tremendous amount of zeal.
A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, ZEALOUS FOR GOOD DEEDS.
TITUS 2:14

God is calling His people to live with zeal, but thousands of Christians are stuck in lukewarm routines. *Lifelong Zeal* will rekindle your passion for God with a spiritual fire that lasts a lifetime and beyond!

The passion and boldness of first century Christians can be part of your life. In 22 lessons you’ll learn from Bible heroes like Phinehas, Gideon, Elijah, Peter and of course, Jesus!

*Lifelong Zeal* gives you practical lessons and a clear process to…

- Enhance your zeal with greater wisdom, courage, and diligence.
- Recover from burnout, even when surrounded by discouragement.
- Identify good deeds that align with your personality and talents.
- Experience the satisfaction of following in the zealous footsteps of Jesus.

You can be the catalyst to spread zeal in your family, church, and community. So get started in this inspiring study and enjoy a renewed spark in your walk with God.

“If anyone was ever born to write a book on Lifelong Zeal, it is Phillip Shumake. We really need this material, not just where I preach, but everywhere. Somewhere in this book you will see yourself and find the help needed to rekindle your fire for the Lord and His work.” – Jim Deason

Perhaps the best tool I’ve seen for helping us face Jesus’s challenge to live with zeal except the Bible itself. It provides a wonderful visible picture of what it takes to make zeal grow in your heart and scripturally explains every step.” – Edwin Crozier

PHILLIP SHUMAKE is the evangelist for the East End Church of Christ in Lexington, Kentucky. Educated at Florida College and Middle Tennessee State University, he holds a degree in Mass Communication. Phillip has preached for ten years and now lives in Lexington with his wife, Tracy, and their two children.

Teacher’s guide, PowerPoint slides, and more available at www.LifelongZeal.com