



Kindling the Fires of Revival

by Rev. Matthew Lee Smith

While a teen in rural Wisconsin, I enjoyed burning leaves each spring and fall. I remember the smoke rising from the burning leaves and thinking that any minute the flames would leap into the air!

As a Pastor I have sought to “build a fire” in myself and my congregation. I have tried many different ways, but most simply sputtered and went cold.

A few years ago God began leading me and our flock on an exciting journey. While not yet complete, I see the smoke of the Spirit of God in the hearts of our people, and I’m sure that the fires of revival will break forth and leap into the air of our community!

The problem for many servants of God is how to walk intimately and passionately with God. They struggle with how to bring other believers into that relationship also. Over the past several years, I have been developing, modifying, and enhancing a daily, systematic approach to walking with God which is both simple and effective. Included in this approach is:

SETTING A REGULAR APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

The experience of walking with God has differing results. Just as in any relationship, openness and honesty are keys to intimacy with God. That intimacy is built upon the promise of rising early (Psalm 108:2-3; 110:47; 143:8; Mark 1:35).

ACKNOWLEDGING HIS LORDSHIP

You start your day, praying and telling God how much you “ADORE” Him. As you acknowledge His Lordship over your life, you are giving Him control of the next 24 hours (Thomas in John 20:28 is an example of this).

REAFFIRMING YOUR DEDICATION

Every morning you reaffirm the dedication of your body to Him as a living sacrifice. We have found this reaffirmation to be refreshing to our daily purpose as we pray Romans 12:1-2 back to God each morning.

OBLIGATING YOURSELF TO DO GOD'S WILL

In a prayer of adoration you obligate yourself to God's will today, taking a lesson from Jesus in John 4:34 by telling God, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work" (NKJV). Many of us take Jesus' words literally and eat after we have devotions, being reminded by Job's words from so long ago: "I have not departed from the command of his lips: I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread" (Job 23:12, NIV).

REPENTING OF ANY KNOWN SIN

We ask Him to work in our heart so that we may repent of any and all known sin. As I ask him to "search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24 NKJV), I have found that He is faithful to remind me of words, thoughts and actions which have not brought Him glory and are sin.

A phenomenal thing happens when this process is applied in the souls of people. Just as one enjoys the refreshment that comes from a shower, so too, you are clean from the filth of sin through confession. You then enjoy the refreshment of God and enter into His presence with thanksgiving, praise and blessing of His name! (Psalm 100:4). I have come to see anew what David meant when he said, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19, NKJV).

ACTIVELY LISTENING TO GOD

"For most Americans, the Bible is the most influential book in the course of human history, the book they love to quote and the book they would most likely turn to in time of trouble. In fact, according to a new survey by the Barna Research Group, Americans swear by their Bible. They just don't read it" (Los Angeles Times. August 10th, 1996. D7.). The problem with many people is that "Bible reading is boring!" They don't know HOW to read their Bible. I had to face this myself.

God sensed my frustration for He began to answer the desires of my soul. In 1990, Dr. Russell Gabler was preaching at our church. He mentioned that for years he had been reading the Bible cover-to-cover every year.

Within days I was creating a daily schedule to read through the Bible in one year. We now call this schedule the Intermediate Level: "Through The Bible in One Year." I started reading through the New King James Version in 1991 and began to see many things in the scripture for the first time. I asked if anyone would like to "test drive" the new reading schedule with me. One of my deacons and a few others joined in.

Near the end of the first year of reading, I remembered Dr. Gabler saying that he had read a different version every year. In 1992 I read through the New International Version. Yet, I lacked the passion I needed to read consistently every day. I deeply wanted to desire to read every day.

Any method of reading the Bible has to be simple and has to keep the reader's attention. God used 2 Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (NASB) to speak to my heart.

Upon reflection that morning, God seemed to say to me, "If all Scripture is inspired for these four things, don't you think you should be looking for these four things every day?" That day I spent some time developing four simple questions, one for each of the "profitables" mentioned in the verse.

The result was a "journal page" for each day of the week. I then asked people in the congregation again to "test drive" the new journal.

A few days later, I was amazed at the insights the questions brought to me. In the months ahead, God continued to impress upon me the value of prayer. Questions came and insights into how to pray were "highlighted." By reading two to three chapters each morning, God begins to "highlight" certain verses. God begins to remind you of the person to whom you spoke harshly yesterday and you bow your head and confess that sin to God. After a time of prayer, you turn to your note pad and scribble yourself a note. "Ask Daniel to forgive me for speaking harshly to him."

Later in your reading, you notice another verse. God seems to remind you of the importance of memorizing His word. You pause and pray, "Lord, I'd like to memorize your Word, but I have so much trouble. Would you help me? I'll start with this very verse." Writing it down on a separate sheet of paper, you set it beside your Bible and finish reading.

IT FUELS THE PASSION AND ENFLAMES THE FIRE FOR GOD

Pastor Art Valdez of Grace Fellowship allowed us to come on a Sunday morning and share with his people about "The Word in Worship Daily Devotional Journal." Eight weeks later he writes, "One of our Deacon's wives said that she began holding her devotions at 5:00 am. Her husband holds his at 4:00 am. They have enjoyed fellowship and friendship with each other as a result like never before! We are seeing people in our church give more in terms of service, finances and worship, to the Lord here than I can remember in a long time."

In my own life I have found God constantly challenging me to deeper and longer commitments alone with Him. In the fall of 1995, while reading about Dr. Charles Fineberg's habit of reading his Bible four times per year cover-to-cover, God prompted me to do the

same. Later that year I created a reading schedule which we have modified and now call Mature Level: "Enjoying His Word Daily." We have also created an Advanced Level: "Growing Stronger in God's Daily Word Daily."

Others, including my ten year old daughter Hannah, are reading through the New Testament every quarter, two-three chapters every day. In fact at PRBC, we start every new convert on this reading schedule. We call this the Beginner Level: "Know Your New Testament." Peter was so correct when he wrote: "As newborn babes: you are to desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow up by it" (2 Peter 2:2, author's translation).

AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE!

Hundreds of men, women and teens are doing just that across the United States every morning. I must confess, I am a little more than overwhelmed at the response. As we have spoken to AWANA conferences and churches, we have seen the tremendous thirst for a simple, clear, day-by-day system of prayer and reading of God's word.

People deeply desire to know God and enjoy Him forever! They are willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish that goal. When they find that it is simple and interesting, they are self-motivated and enthusiastic to continue.

Jesus has promised. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:7-8 NKJV). What we are seeing is the fulfillment of His words in the lives of those who love Him and are abiding in Him.

We are thrilled about the response, and pray God will continue to bless the spreading of His Word through The Word in Worship Daily Devotional Journal. If we can be of any assistance to your church, or to your regional, please don't hesitate to contact us.