

Romans 12:11 - All Fired Up – 13 January 2013

Now this morning, I'd like to speak to you from Romans chapter 12. So, if you have your bibles, please turn with me to Romans chapter 12 and we'll look at a verse there that reminds us about serving God with passion.

I've entitled this message 'All Fired Up'. It's about serving God. It's about working for God. Now when we think about work, Singaporeans are excellent at it, isn't it? I think Singaporeans are well-known to be a very good workforce, very productive, high output. Generally the people are conscientious, responsible and hardworking. In fact, I read at the turn of the year, that 8 in 10 Singaporeans do not clear their annual leave. I wonder if it is really true. How many of you today work for a company? You are not the boss, you are an employee. If you work for someone else, can I see by a show of hands who you are? How many of you work for a company? Just raise your hand, let me see. Wah, so many don't work, huh? (laughter). And out of all of you who have raised your hands, how many of you did not manage to clear your annual leave in 2012? Can I see by a show of hands? Quite a few of you as well. I am not sure but I do believe when it comes to work, Singaporeans are excellent workers. They are very, very hardworking.

When I was working in a hospital, I was also very, very hardworking. I trust I am still hardworking today, don't worry, alright? But while I was working in a hospital, I think I worked really hard. The average day starts at 7 am. We don't get to go home until way after 5 pm. And not only do we work on weekdays, we also work on Saturdays and Sundays because patients just need the doctors to be around to take care of their needs. Besides that, I work night duties at least once a week we would stay in the hospital the whole night through. So what happens is that if I were to have a night duty today, I start work at 7 am and I don't get to go home till at least after noon the next day. And there are days I stay beyond 36 hours so I start at 7 am today and go home at midnight the next day. And so it is no exaggeration if I say I work more than 60, 70 hours a week at least when I was in the surgical posting.

I was not only hardworking, I was passionate about my job. I really enjoyed what I was doing. I was fired up about my job. I loved to cut people up, you see. I always mention this: I love to do surgeries. I love to slit the abdomen, pull out your intestines and chop off your appendix. I love to do it. I was not only hardworking; I was really passionate about my job. Days went by, weeks went by, months went by

and I suddenly discovered I was getting exhausted. I was exhausted physically, I was exhausted mentally. But most of all, I was exhausted spiritually. See, I was so busy about my job that I became lazy when it comes to reading my bible, having meaningful prayer times. I may still come to church, I still go through the routines that are expected of Christians, but inside my heart I was dry because I was so tired spiritually. It dawned on me, at the end of my surgical posting that I was really busy professionally but I was really lazy spiritually.

I wonder if that is the case for you today. You are hard at work. We pride ourselves that we are good workers - 'I am a conscientious worker' - but you are lazy spiritually. You are not reading the bible. You are not really serving God with your heart. You are going through the motions, the rituals but you are tired. Joy is ebbing away from you and you feel life is quite mundane, routine and meaningless. Why? Because, maybe, like myself, you are busy vocationally but lazy spiritually.

04:37

I've a friend here today. My friend caused the leaves to drop (pointing at some fallen leaves on the stage). My friend is Sloth. And Sloth is trying to say 'Hi' to you, alright? But he is very slow because he is a sloth. He moves slowly. He's lazy. How many of you would like to be a sloth? Huh, sister Feilin, (referring to someone who raised her hand), you wish you could be a sloth in your work, hah? But how many of you would want to be a sloth spiritually? What do you do? Heehee. How many of you like to be a sloth? Nobody likes to be a sloth. How would you like it if your pastor preaches like a sloth? Anyone? No one? I will try preaching like a sloth. Let me go behind (the screen).

How..would..you..like..it..if..I..preach..like..a..sloth?

How..would..you..like..it.. if..this..sermon..goes..to..noon?

How..would..you..like..it..if..I..continue..preaching..in..slow..motion,

Or.I.say.to.you.'let.me.pray.about.it. Let.me.think.about.what.I.am.going.to.say.
next.'

Ok, let me get back to my usual self. My character is not a sloth character. I'm a Type A guy. But the sloth is something that really characterizes many, many Christians. 'In what ways?' you say. Well, we are slow when it comes to getting started in anything spiritually. That may be a symptom of slothfulness. Do you know you are commanded of scripture to assemble yourselves with fellow brothers and sisters and

you've been thinking about it for a long time. You say 'God, you know my heart. I want to be part of a community. I want to be part of a care group. I want to grow with Christians. God, you know my heart.

But for a long time, your intentions never get translated into actions. Let me tell you that that is a typical feature of slothfulness ~ you don't get started. Or maybe today you say 'I want to read the bible more. I want to pray more. And I've started that before but now I've slipped off.' Another sign of slothfulness is what get started but it doesn't get continued. You abort it half-way. Maybe today you are serving the Lord. You are teaching Sunday school. You are doing ministry for the kingdom but you are going through the motions. Your heart is not there. You have no passion for what you are supposed to do. Those are the signs of slothfulness that can come into our lives. Do you want to live a life like that? No. All of us recognise that Christian living is to be higher than that. We are not to be sloths. We are to be a people fired up for God. You say then 'how can we get there? How can we be a people passionate for the service of our King?'

If you think about passion and zeal and fervour, there are some characters in the bible that we can learn from. I think of this old man. He is 85 years old. And he is a man on fire for God. 85 years old, living in a time when most people lived till 70. But he lived till 85 and at the age of 85, he said 'let me have this mountain. I want to go out for war. I want to claim this mountain for myself because God promised it to me.' And you know who his enemies were? Anybody knows? His enemies were giants. Huge giants. And he says 'I am 85 but I want to go out to war'. Anybody knows who this man is? 85 years old, fighting against giants, claiming the mountain even when he is past retirement age? Who's this guy? What's his name? (Someone said 'Caleb'). Yes, Caleb. Caleb was a man full of fire and zeal. Another man I can think of full of fire and zeal is Elijah. Elijah, the bible tells us, he prayed earnestly and fervently. His prayer life was not that of a sloth. His prayer life was all fired up. Another man I can think of with passion in his soul is the Apostle Paul. The bible tells us Paul says 'I press towards the mark. I stretch out. I'm always labouring, I'm toiling. I labour more than the apostles because of the grace of God that is working in me.' Here is a man who did not live a sloth like life but a man who was all fired up. And today, he says to you, (let me show you this verse):

"Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." Romans 12:11 ESV
(English Standard Version)

10:00

This is what Paul had to say in Romans 12, verse 11: 'do not be slothful in zeal but be fervent in spirit.' It's almost as if Paul thought that we might not be able to understand this or we might miss this and so he says this in two ways ~ first negatively and then positively. He says 'don't be slothful but be fervent. So he doesn't want you to miss anything. Be on fire; be diligent in the work of God. But at the very same time, Paul is also saying something a little bit different in these two phrases: he says, first of all, 'do not be slothful in zeal'. He refers to what is on the outside. What you do with your hands, be not slothful. Don't be slow. Don't be tardy. Be urgent about things. Be diligent about things. Be doing lots and lots of work.

And then he goes on to say 'be fervent in spirit'. That refers to what is on the inside ~ the heart. Be all fired up on the inside. So look at the balance he is trying to say. You've got to be active with your hands and you've got to be passionate in your heart. So he says 'do not be slothful'. Do lots of work. Christian living should be very productive. Let me say this to you. Some of us believe that Christian living is about quiet devotion, staying at home, hiding in our caves. No. Christian living is full of activity. Christian living is very productive because Paul says 'don't be slothful in zeal'. Many verses tell you that.

"Whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might ..." Ecclesiastes 9:10 ESV.

Do it energetically.

He says "And let us not grow weary of DOING GOOD, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9 ESV

Do good. Do lots of it. And then in 1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV - a very popular verse:

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..."

Let me ask you today: Are you abounding in the work of God? You say, 'Pastor, I am abounding in my sales.' 'Pastor, I'm abounding in my portfolio in the office.' 'Pastor, I am doing lots of things.' Let me ask you 'are you abounding in the work of the Lord?' That's the question because Paul says in Romans 12:11 'do not be slothful in zeal'. And in the last part, he says, 'serving the Lord' in your life.

Serving God should be one of great output, doing lots and lots of work. But then again, Paul also says 'be fervent in spirit'. The word 'fervent' is a great word. The word fervent is 'zeó' which is to boil, to be hot, to be bubbling. Imagine today, I have

a saucepan. And into the saucepan I pour water and I place it over a fire. What happens after a while is that the water will start to sizzle and then it will bubble. And if it goes further, it may overflow. That's the image here. He says 'let your heart, your spirit, be on fire, be bubbling, be boiling, and be overflowing. You should not be a Christian that is lukewarm or lethargic. You should be one that is excited and enthusiastic; you should have a passion for God in your life. So Paul says 'you should be fervent in spirit'. And passion is so important. I learnt something about passion. It says 'Nothing significant is ever done in life without passion'. You agree to that? Many things are done in life but nothing significant is ever done in life without passion.

And then again, someone says 'the worst bankruptcy in the world is the person who has lost passion'. In the work of God, have you lost passion? In the work of God, as you look at yourself in the mirror, do you see sloth typifying your life? You say, 'How can I do this? This command is very difficult - do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit. I know this is the ideal. But how do I get there? Pastor, you are just telling me to work harder, right?' In a sense, yes. But in a sense, no. It's not just you working harder. What is the secret to us living a zealous, passionate, fruitful life? 'Do not be slothful in zeal; be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' What is the secret to passionate ministry for God? It's found in that phrase 'serving the Lord'. You say 'what's so special about that phrase 'serving the Lord'?

15:07

In Romans 12, there are 3 Greek words that have been used to translate into service. This is the third word that is used and the word is 'douleuo'. It's a very unique word, the word 'douleuo'. I'm sure some of you are familiar with the word 'doulos'. What is a 'doulos'? Remember a ship that came to Singapore some time back, maybe a year or two ago? It's called the ship 'Doulos'. What's doulos? Anybody? (Someone suggested 'servant'). Servant. That's right, but a special kind of servant. (Another said 'slave'). Slave, alright. What kind of slave? (bondslave). Bondslave. What's a bondslave? What's a doulos, you say?

Now in Exodus chapter 21, Old Testament times according to the Jews, slaves or servants are supposed to work for their masters for 6 years. On the 7th year, they are given an option. The option is this: either you go free, in other words, you are no more obligated under this household, or you may choose to stay on serving in this family. But if you want to stay on in this family, there's a condition. You will forever be the bondslave of this family. Now the family will take care of all your needs but

there's a price for you to pay. You will have to be a bondsman. And the person, you would say, of course I want to go free. Who in the world will want to be a bondsman?

But you see, there are people who have been so well treated in the family, so loved, so appreciated. The master is so kind that the servant says 'boss, I want to work for you. I want to work for you for life'. And I want to work for you for life, willingly, because you've been so good to me'. And for a man to say that, it is at a cost because what happens now is that this man will go to a doorpost (suppose there is a doorpost). He places his ear at the doorpost. And then the master takes a sharp stick, they call it an oar, and puts it at the earlobe and he hammers the oar through the earlobe as a mark, a visible mark, that this man is now a bondsman. Ladies, do you know why you have earrings? Bondsman to your husband (laughter). No, I don't think so. But imagine that ~ a bondsman willingly subjects himself to his master all his life, because his master has been so good to him.

Paul says the reason why you should not be slothful in zeal but be bubbling and excited and boiling in spirit is because you are now 'doulos' to Jesus Christ. And the reason why you willingly subject to the lordship of Jesus is because He is so good to you. And, you see, it flows. The bible is given to us in a very organised manner. Why is it that you would want to serve God with passion ~ Romans 12:1 ~ 'that with your eyes wide open to the mercies of God'. Brethren, my beloved brethren, by the mercies of God I beseech you to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

The reason why I serve God with passion today is because His love has ignited the flames within my heart. The gospel of Jesus Christ becomes my passion. And I love Him today because He so loved me. And I am a willing bondsman. I want to give my life to Jesus. And when you have such a mindset, when you have such an attitude, when you are so blessed with the gospel, when the gospel goes right within your heart, then ministry is no more a drudgery. Serving God is no more going through the motions but is passionate because it's boiling from within. The gospel flame has been set alight.

So today's sermon is really not about you getting to do hard work. No. Because that's still about you doing it. But I think the emphasis of scripture is this: before you can do hard work (h-a-r-d), you've got to have heart work (h-e-a-r-t). You've got to have the gospel deep within your heart and then you'll be willing to do hard work. And it doesn't matter whether your work is difficult or demanding or even dirty, you do it with joy because there's a flame, there's a purpose, there's a motivation from within.

20:15

I share with you another medical illustration. I've shared this before but I'll share it again. I used to work in a colorectal department. You know what's colorectal? You should know soon because one of the PAP (People's Action Party which is Singapore's ruling political party) candidates is a colorectal surgeon. I worked in a colorectal department, basically the backside and the intestines. And it was not an easy department to work in because everywhere, you can smell things. And I remember I was the most junior doctor there and we had a patient about 80 plus, 90 years old. She's a lady that is so sick but she was also very miserable because she suffers from constipation. Now some of you may already suffer from constipation and you know how miserable it is. But for her, she was constipated for weeks. Can you imagine that? She is not very big-sized. She is a small-sized lady and she was constipated for weeks and we tried all kinds of methods. We tried to let her drink some medicine. We did all kinds of things but they didn't work.

And so when we were doing our rounds, the senior doctor says 'alright, what she needs is manual evacuation of faeces'. Manual means 'eng chew' (use your hands in the Hokkien dialect) and 'evacuation' means empty out faeces. You know what it is. So I wrote down 'manual evacuation of faeces to be done by ...' we were all looking around. Who's the most junior doctor here? You? Alright, you do it. And so...by Dr Jason Lim. The nurses looked at it, and, after a while, they paged me. 'Dr Jason Lim, it's time to do manual evacuation of faeces. (Laughter). Wah, it was terrible. Manual evacuation is not (just digging) a little bit like that (wiggling his fingers). You've got to go in to really evacuate. Something is stuck. But it's not stuck outside, it's stuck inside. So you've got to ... wah, I mean, it was miserable. So what I did was I wore layers upon layers of apron. I double gloved; triple gloved and ensured that it doesn't break. And here it goes.... arrhh...I reached right within and I pulled out - and there was like a tsunami, you know (laughter). There was a gush of faeces that came out and it smells and it was dirty. And I was wondering why in the world did I sign up for this (laughter).

And soon after a while - the smell was bad, it was dirty - but soon after a while, it dawned on me I did not sign up to be a doctor to serve myself. I was here for a higher reason. I was here to help people. I was here to alleviate discomfort. I was here to save lives. I am here for people. And that mindset somehow changed the whole atmosphere. I mean, the room was smelly, it was dirty, things were dripping all over. But suddenly, that faeces' smell became the most aromatic of perfumes (laughter). (I took a deep breath.) This is why I am here. (Another deep breath). This is why I am

here. I am not kidding. I enjoyed the whole process of manual evacuation of faeces. John or Pat (referring to the two men seated in the front), you will have your own experiences soon. But that mindset changed my work. I enjoyed it.

Maybe today you feel like you are in a pool of faeces. Life is tough. You have so much to do and you still have to teach Sunday school. And you still have to set up the AV system. And you still have to serve in your SF (Spiritual Families), your care groups. You feel like there's so much to do and life is so dirty. My friends, it's not about us saying 'let's do it more. Let's grip our teeth and go through it.' No. Get a renewed purpose within your soul. Get the gospel deep within your heart. You see, before your hard work, it's got to be heart work. Got to get the gospel. Got to realize that it's all about Jesus. Got to realize how much He loves you. Therefore, you are willing to be his bondsman. Look at the cross, look at what Jesus did while we were yet sinners; while we were filthy and dirty and unworthy and there's nothing lovely in us, He came to die for you on the cross.

25:11

My friends, as you look at the beauty of Jesus on the cross, you'll be willing to serve Him. See, when you serve people, when you put up cables, when you set up things, you are not serving just people, ultimately you are serving Jesus. And if people are not worth it, let me tell you something, Jesus is worth it because He gave Himself for you. We are reminded about Jacob and how he laboured for 7 years under Laban. Laban is a terrible guy. He's a crook. He's a deceitful man but Jacob was willing to work 7 years under a wicked boss. Why? Because of Rachel, Laban's daughter, was beautiful in his eyes. And to Jacob he was willing to spend those 7 years working hard because he saw Rachel as someone beautiful to him. If Jesus is beautiful to you, you'll be willing to serve, 'not being slothful in zeal', but bubbling, bursting, enthusiastic on the inside.

Look at the gospel. Look at how Jesus gave Himself for you. Look at the gospel and how Jesus laboured. Do you know, Jesus, I think, was the most hard-working person alive? I talked about Caleb. I talked about Elijah. I talked about Apostle Paul but I believe Jesus outstripped all of them. The bible tells us Jesus went to all Galilee, teaching and preaching and healing. The bible tells us 'the zeal of thine house has consumed me'. Jesus says, 'my need, my satisfaction, is to do the Will of my Father. Jesus was all passion. Jesus was all work. This is our Saviour. He gave Himself for you.

The good news I have for you today also is this: that, one day, your Saviour is coming back for you. Yes. You'll be resurrected if you are dead. If you are not, you have your glorified bodies. And, together, we'll meet our Saviour, our Master to whom we have enslaved ourselves willingly. And therefore Paul says 'be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord' because the gospel informs us we are destined to be with Jesus. We are destined for life.

Question: Pastor, how can I have my heart set aflame with the gospel of Jesus Christ? I realize today, if I want to be away from this sloth I want to be living a life of zeal and passion, I've got to have a heart that is set alight by the gospel. How can I get it? Let me say a few simple things you can do. I want to encourage you this week to just do these few simple things:

1. Preach the gospel to yourself. You say 'what is that?' Read about the gospel. Read about how Jesus came. Read the book of Romans. I tell you, Romans is such a critical book in understanding the central message of the Christian life, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Get a modern version. Maybe you want to use the ESV (English Standard Version) which we are using today, NLT (New Living Translation), whatever. Get a modern version, some fresh version you have never read before. Go through Romans once again and see the gospel.

When Martin Luther discovered the primacy of the gospel, he says 'I preach the gospel to myself every day. Why? Because he says 'my heart, my heart is so prone to departing from the love of Jesus.' And so he says 'I read the gospel. I preach to myself the gospel. Be in a church that preaches the gospel because the motivation, the engine, the passion of the Christian life is the gospel of Jesus Christ ~ how He loved you and gave Himself for you.

2. I'd like to also encourage you this week not only to read the gospels, see Jesus in all of the pages of the bible but I'd also like to encourage you today to praying. To pray what? To pray this simple prayer: Lord, would you set my heart aflame with the gospel. You see, the work of the gospel in our hearts is not what you can do. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. And whilst you may read the bible, you may look at the gospel; you need to ask God to set your heart aflame. It's the work of the Holy Spirit.

29:58

So, this week I pray you will not start by saying 'ok, Pastor, I am going to serve in 10 ministries next week'. No, no, no. Don't start there. Start here (pointing to the heart). Start with your heart. Start with Jesus. Start with the message of the gospel. Start

with asking the Holy Spirit to take the gospel message to get your heart on fire. Then when your heart is bubbling. When it's on a saucepan, it's on fire. It starts to sizzle. It starts to bubble. It will overflow. And when you serve God, it is zealous, it is fervent, it is enthusiastic because it is the work of God through you.

The passion of Jesus, the love of Jesus has become your engine and your motivation. Can you imagine the church is set on fire? Can you imagine that? When we come on Sundays to worship God, we don't come in sloppily, we don't come in lethargically, and we don't come in saying 'what is it for me today?' But you come in excited because the gospel has changed your heart. Can you imagine what it'll be like when we ask for volunteers to serve? There will be no 'aiyah, you arrow me again, huh?' There'll be no more hiding behind excuses like 'let me pray about it'.

'Let me pray about it.' You know this favourite phrase is the dang jian pai (excuse, or shield) of the year? It's a very spiritual sounding 'dang jian pai' shield ~ 'Let me pray about it'. But 10 years later, you are still praying. When it comes to participation in small groups, you won't say 'let me wait another 6 months'. You know it's important. And you want to serve the Lord. You want to grow. You want to help one another, brothers- and sisters-in-Christ, deepen their spiritual life. You go because there is the fire from within.

I would imagine a church that will never be lacking in labourers. I would imagine a church that is coming enthusiastically worshipping and glorifying God. I would imagine a church that would make a statement to the world around us. It's a shame when a church serves Jesus lackadaisically, we serve lethargically. We serve as if it's a laissez-faire thing ~ if I have time, I'll do it; if it's convenient, I'll do it.

But how different it will be when the church is on fire like the book of Acts. They were people on fire because the gospel was in their hearts. So Gospeliters, in this new year, I encourage you today to be a gospel-centred people. Look at the gospel. Marinate in the gospel. Soak in the gospel. Read the gospel. Think about it. Let the love of Jesus fill your heart and pray this: 'God, set my heart aflame with your gospel'. And may the Lord bless you that your life will not be one of drudgery or dragging your feet but one of passion and joy; and meaning and purpose because Jesus is your Master.

Let's bow for a word of prayer this morning. It's a very simple message this day. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes everything. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes the way you live in the church. Changes the way you deal with friends. Changes the way

you treat enemies. It changes the way you work. You say 'I am very hardworking, Pastor. I work very hard in my office'. That's not what I'm talking about, friends.

Today, I am asking about your zeal when it comes to serving the Lord. Yes, you can serve the Lord in your office but serving the Lord is more than being in the office. It's about your life, it's about your devotions, and it's about your prayer. It's about ministry. It's about loving people. Do you only live in the realm of good intentions but you never take a step to serve? Or maybe from this pulpit you've heard many, many times the need to be in community groups to serve others. The need to be filling up the gaps where there are, but you couldn't find in yourself the internal energy and motivation to do so.

My friends, God does not command us to do something that He doesn't give us the power for. Today, the power is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. With your eyes wide open to the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice and then you can serve Him with zeal and fervour and passion. So this morning, I want to lead all of us back to the cross. Come to the gospel. Come to the good news of Jesus Christ dying to save you from your sins. In order to bring you back to God, come back to the gospel and look full at His beautiful face and then it changes your world because it changes your mind, it changes your life.

There's a fire rising within because His passion has become your passion because Jesus is now a person of great beauty to you. My friend, you serve hard in your office because you are someone of beauty to yourself. You value your life. You value your career. But let Jesus be the ultimate person you value. Let Him be your beauty. Let the gospel have its deep work within your heart. Take this time. There's no rush. I'd like you today to just contemplate on what has been spoken and ask yourself this question: 'Am I a person of passion? Is the gospel real to me?' Take this time and pray to your Father. Pray to God 'set my heart aflame with your gospel. The gospel changes everything. A passion for Thee. Set my heart on fire, dear God, not just to serve but to love you with all our heart because you have loved me with your son, Jesus'.

And so, Father, this morning we are grateful. Grateful that we can love you because you first loved us. May the love of Christ so constrain us, motivate us, compel us that we may serve you and glorify you with our whole life. Indeed may Romans 12:11 not slothful in zeal, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord characterize our lives because that's the work of the gospel through us. So set our hearts ablaze with your gospel. We plead with you. We ask you. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

