

**Mr. Tony Wasilkoff**

**Sermon Transcript**

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# Zeal

Well, good morning everyone. It's a pleasure to be here in Springfield. One of my favorite authors, perhaps your favorite author or one of your favorite authors, is Robert Fulghum. Robert Fulghum has written a whole series of interesting books, one of which is entitled "Everything I Needed To Know I Learned in Kindergarten." And as I said, many other volumes he has written as well. And he used to be a minister and many other things as well. Recently someone sent me an item entitled "Everything I Needed To Know I Learned From Noah's Ark." And it's similar in concept. And there are 12 principles that this person put together of what he or she learned from the Noah's ark historic event. Principle number one is *don't miss the boat*. We can connect with that when it comes to Noah's ark. Principle number two: *Remember that we are all in the same boat*. Principle number three: *Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark*. That's an applicable principle, we would all agree. Principle number four: *Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big*. And that's the age Noah was when he got something significant to do. Principle number five: *Don't listen to the critics. Just get on with the job that needs to be done, and ignore all of those people who criticize*. Principle number six: *Build your future on high ground*. Principle number seven: *For safety sake, travel in pairs*. And that appears in one of Fulghum's books, in fact the one on kindergarten. Principle number eight: *Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs*. So that's not always an advantage, but be there it is. Principle number nine: *When you are stressed, float awhile*. Principle number ten: *Remember the ark was built by amateurs, and the Titanic was built by professionals*. Principle number eleven: *No matter the storm, when you are with God, there is always, always a rainbow waiting for you*. And principle number twelve, *God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called*.

Twelve excellent principles from Noah's ark and what happened to him. Some folks are really passionate, I notice. Maybe someone in this room, or several someones in this room are passionate about boating. Maybe you don't have a boat quite the size of Noah's ark, but you may have a little aluminum boat, or whatever kind of boat you have. I know Noah was passionate about boating, and enjoyed working on a vessel. We once owned a seventeen and a half foot

outboard speedboat when we lives in the Kelowna area where one of the members here is going to the Feast, and enjoyed it from time to time just to get out and bob up and down on Okanogan Lake, and try to occasionally catch a fish. Enjoyed that for a setting. Other folks instead of just boating are really passionate, they get really fired up about fishing. And I know some folks will travel to various feast sites so that on the side before the Feast or after the Feast they can do a bit of fishing and check out the local good fishing spots. Other people I have noticed and observed, maybe some of you are this way, are really passionate about golf. And I am amazed to see individuals standing at driving areas, and practicing their swings, and they are out on the golf course. I golfed for awhile some years ago. Don't golf much now. But I had the illusion that the more I practiced the better I would get. And it didn't always work that way for me. But whatever your passion is, it is not necessarily wrong, and it is probably okay for you to have whatever you have as an avocation, something you enjoy as a diversion, something you can get, in that sense, fired up about.

Today, we will consider in this sermon a quality called zeal in the scriptures. The capacity for being zealous. How zealous would you say you are as an individual? How much zeal would you say that you have as an individual? What are you zealous about? How much zeal, for instance, might you have shown this morning, or this past week? And where can you and I obtain zeal? How does zeal occur? Where does it come about? Let's begin in Matthew 11 and have this as a beginning point scripturally when it comes to the overall quality of zeal. Zeal is absolutely necessary for you to be a continuing servant of God. It is necessary for you, it's necessary for me. And yet from time to time, if you examine your own life as I examine mine, we find that zeal will wane a little bit. Zeal comes and goes. It ebbs and flows. Sometimes we are a little more zealous, and sometimes we are a little less zealous. But zeal, nevertheless, is essential, as essential as an engine is for an automobile.

If you are looking at trading up with respect to your car, or trading in your truck for a car, or vice versa, if someone shows you a vehicle, and you look it over and they say, look at this vehicle. Look at this car. Look at this truck. What a paint job! And look at the upholstery! It's in terrific condition! And look at the tires. You can even kick them if you want. The tires are excellent! And you look under the hood, and there's no engine. But it's a good vehicle otherwise. The only thing that is lacking with it is it has no engine.

Well the same thing applies to you and to me. If we are Christian people and we don't have zeal, we are like a vehicle without an engine. We may have great upholstery, we may have a wonderful paint job, we may have excellent tires. But if the engine isn't there, then we're not going very far in most instances.

**Matthew 11:7.** *As they departed Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, what did you go out into the wilderness to see, he asked. A reed shaken by*

*the wind.* John the Baptist had a sizeable following. He had a certain amount of charisma, a certain amount of popular appeal. Individuals were attracted to him. **Verse 8.** *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments. Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses.* He asked them to think. He asked them questions. He asked them to analyze why they were attracted to John the Baptist. Was it because of his wardrobe? Did he make it to the "Ten Best Dressed Men in the Middle East" in his day and age is another way of framing the question, if you will. **Verse 9.** *But what did you go out to see? A prophet, Christ asks. Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.* John the Baptist was a most unusual human being. *For this is he of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.* You remember, do you not, that John the Baptist had the task of preparing for the first coming of Jesus Christ. **Verse 11.** *Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist. But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* Interesting way of framing this, isn't it? Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not been anyone greater than John the Baptist. Is there anyone here today who has not been born of women? Most of us here have a mother, I think. That's how we began our lives, and we are so grateful for our mothers. And there is no one who can quite replace mothers. **Verse 12.** *And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Now this is one of the most difficult verses of the entire gospel account. One of the most difficult verses in the entirety of the New Testament. Certainly of the gospels as I said. How do you understand this verse? How do you comprehend it? How do we grasp it? From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. There is persecution against the church. And the violent take it by force. You remember this verse when you first came across it, because most of you who are here, or watching on videotape, are longtime seasoned members, and you have come across this verse and scratched your head thinking, how do I understand this? How do I grasp it?

Let me read to you how the Amplified Bible puts this particular passage. From the Amplified Bible, *And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has endured violent assault. And violent men seize it by force as a precious prize, a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought for with most ardent zeal and intense exertion.* So it is saying that the people who finally make it into the kingdom of God are those who really pursue the kingdom with zeal, with energy. With zest. With vigor. *The violent take it by force.* Now you're probably not a violent person. Or maybe you used to be. And you overcame it. And you're not violent any more. And yet there's a type of action the scripture demands of the Christian person, a kind of vitality if you will.

Now let me expand on this a little bit further by asking us to turn to Psalm 119. When you think of King David, what kind of a man do you picture in your mind?

That King David was a warrior, certainly. King David was a king, a monarch, certainly. But in terms of his heart, what kind of a man was the servant of God whose name is David? Well, you know that he was a man after God's own heart. What does that mean? In what way was he a man after God's own heart. Let's take a snapshot of King David in Psalm 119. We'll hit some of the verses in terms of the kind of heart King David had.

**Psalm 119:2.** *Blessed are those, he wrote, who keep his testimonies, who seek him how? People are blessed who seek God with three quarters of their heart, with seven eighths of their heart. No, it says with their whole heart. And what God expects in us is what he expected in David, what made David so exceptional is that he was not half hearted. When it came to his prayers, which is what it is talking about here, he was wholehearted. Not halfhearted. Wholehearted. Look at verse 10. With my whole heart I have sought you. O let me not wander from your commandments.* This is what made him exceptional. This is what will make you and me exceptional. David was not halfhearted. He was not three quarters hearted. He was wholehearted. A wholehearted human being when he came to God's law, God's way, his relationship with God.

**Verse 34.** King David said, *Give me understanding* in his prayer to God. And what would he do if he got understanding? *And I shall keep your law. Indeed, I shall observe it with my half a heart? On a good day, three quarters of a heart? No, he said with my whole heart.* David was a wholehearted individual.

Let's look at **verse 58.** *I entreated your favor,* describing how King David talked to God in prayer, the kind of relationship he had with his creator in heaven above. *I entreated your favor with my whole heart. Be merciful to me according to your word.*

Have you ever seen people being halfhearted on the job? Children being halfhearted with their piano lessons, halfhearted with their music lessons? People who are halfhearted in any endeavor, it is so demoralizing to watch it. And certainly demoralizing on other people who are in that particular vicinity.

Verse 34 we covered. Verse 58. Let's look at **verse 69.** *The proud have forged a lie against me. But I will keep your precepts,* King David said *I will keep your precepts* with my what? *With my whole heart.* And then verse **145.** Almost to the end of 119, but not quite of course. *I cry out, I cry out with my whole heart. Hear me O Lord, and I will keep your statutes.* King David was a human being who when he came to serving God and obeying God and pleasing God and pursuing God and relating to God, was not halfhearted. Not three-quarter hearted. He was wholehearted. That's another way of saying zeal. To be zealous. To be energetic.

**Luke 2.** Here we can review the life and times of Anna the prophetess. One of the famous ladies of the Bible. We heard about ladies in the sermonette today, so

we will pick up a similar theme as it were. **Luke 2:36**. Now most of us have reasons, I suppose, or excuses perhaps, for why we aren't as dedicated as we know we should be from time to time. I realize, of course, that anyone giving a sermonette or a sermon in this setting is speaking to the choir. And when you speak to the choir about being in the choir, then you are speaking to the wrong audience. So clearly if you were not to some degree zealous, you wouldn't be here for a 10:00 service. You would have been somewhere else. It took extra effort for you to be here for a 10:00 meeting on a Sabbath morning. I'm sure you're not here because you couldn't think of anything else to do, and you said to your spouse, or you said to yourself, well, I can't think of anything else to do. May as well go to church. You had lots of other things you could have done, but you're here because of your zeal by and large. **Luke 2:36**. This is an amazing lady. *Now there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity.* The prophetess, indicating that she was a teacher, had a very special relationship with God. She had been married for seven years it tells us. **Verse 37**. More detail. *And this woman was a widow of about 84 years.* So evidently she was 84 years old, *who did not depart from the temple, but served God...how did she serve God? She served God with fastings and prayers...how often? Night and day.* Now to me this individual pictures a certain type of zeal. If there's anyone who has an excuse for not being as diligent as they used to be, it is someone who is 84. Who says, I'm old. I'm tired. I'm weary. I'm wearing out. I'm worn out. I can't see so well any more. I can't hear so well any more. I don't feel so well any more. And yet people who with age remain zealous are remarkable examples to others. Remember Herbert Armstrong, whom you will remember, most of you, when he got to be in his eighties and beyond would relate how "even the simple things" he said "aren't so easy any more." And you know what he was referring to when he said even the simple things aren't easy any more? Getting up out of bed and getting dressed! Getting going again. I remember though as a student, and he was well up in years even at that time in the sixties, trying to walk behind him as he walked across the campus. He never walked slowly. He always walked briskly across the campus. Just to be energetic in his manner and his methodology. That is how we can define zeal. What is zeal? How would you define zeal? Well, that's one way of doing it. We'll come back to that here in a minute.

**John 2**. Here's an example from the life of Jesus Christ directly. It will be a familiar account from his life. **John 2:13**. *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* Aha! It's a Passover of the Jews. Therefore we don't have to keep it because it's Jewish. No, it's only the gospel of John that uses that terminology, and John is written to Gentiles. So it is called Passover of the Jews so the Gentiles would know what it is referring to. In **verse 23** it is simply called the Passover. How come the Passover is Jewish in verse 13 but is not Jewish in verse 23? Clearly we are looking at something quite different. **Verse 14**. *The Passover of the Jews was at hand. Jesus went up to*

*Jerusalem, and he found in the temple those who sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and money changers doing business. So Jesus Christ discovered in the temple business being conducted, and not just business, but a means or a method to make a profit. Not just a profit, but to try to get more than what would be fair or appropriate. Now when he made a whip of cords, **verse 15** says, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen, and he poured out the changers money and overturned the tables. This is not a Jesus meek and mild in my book. This is a Jesus dynamic and energetic, who when he saw something amiss wanted to correct it and make a statement. When was the last time you saw someone come into the room and chase out all of the animals, and turn over all the tables? This is what you would call police war. But Jesus Christ was not meek and mild. And he said to those who sold the doves, take these things away. And do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise. And then **verse 17**. Then his disciples remembered that it was written, quoting from the Psalms, Zeal for your house has eaten me up. What a remarkable statement. And this too is somewhat of a cryptic verse, where Christ Jesus at times was so zealous for what he was doing that he would become tired, that he would become fatigued, that it would wear him out.*

What is zeal? Zeal is ardor for a person or a cause or objective. How do you define zeal? Zeal is when you get fired up about something. What do people today get fired up about? What do you get fired up about? Well it varies from person to person. You listen to Rush Limbaugh, you'll hear what people can get fired up about, depending on whether or not you are a Republican or a Democrat. And I'm neither. I'm not allowed to be. I'm outside these borders. But I do listen to Rush Limbaugh from time to time, just to hear what's on the typical American mind when it comes to politics. What do people get fired up about? Well for us we are looking at this from the religious point of view or the spiritual point of view. There are four central areas that I would like to leave with you today. Four central areas in which you and I as Christian people need to be zealous about. And to be sure that the zeal doesn't wane too far. We are human beings, and our zeal will vary. We cannot be at a 10 at all times. We will sometimes drop to a 7, and head back up to a 9.5, and drop back down to a 7. But we try to keep it in the higher range by virtue of our zeal.

The first area that you and I need to be zealous in, the first area that you and I need to cultivate a zeal for, is a relationship with God. When it comes to our relationship with God through Christ, we must cultivate a zeal, a zeal that stays in the higher elevations of that scale I referred to. Look with me at **Acts 22, verse 1**. *Brethren, and fathers, hear my defense before you now.* Here is Paul's defense in Jerusalem where he has to give account for himself. Chapter 22, **verse 2**. *And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. And then he said, verse 3, I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel,*

*taught according to the strictness of our fathers law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.*

Can you picture the apostle Paul as being indifferent? The apostle Paul as being bored when he came to his relationship with God? I don't think so. And so similarly with you and me, when we look at our capacity for zeal, how zealous are we still when it comes to our relationship with God? People will say often, you will hear them say it often, something along this line, I have a personal relationship with Christ. I have a personal relationship with God. I hear that fairly often, as do you. But you know what I don't hear? I don't hear it defined. I never hear it defined. What does it mean to have a personal relationship with Christ? Rarely do I hear it defined, if ever. What does it mean to have a personal relationship with God the Father? To me, it means that we pray and we study daily. And we set aside time every single day to pray, and we set aside time every single day to study the Bible. And the old rule of thumb that I still like to beat the drum on, and we used to say this years ago more than we have recently, is about a half hour every day of prayer, and about a half hour every day of Bible study. And when I have seen people do that in different church areas for the last 30 years, I have seen people grow spiritually. If they set aside time each day to pray, set aside time each day to study, they will grow spiritually. Why? Because when you pray you are talking to God. And when you study the Bible, God is talking to you. You have a dia . If you are married, or you have a boyfriend or girlfriend and you are single, and you say I have a relationship with my son, or my daughter, in a family setting, or my husband, or my wife, in a marital setting, but you never talk to them, and they never talk to you, what kind of a relationship is that? If you have a fight with your husband or your wife, or a fight with a family member, and you say, okay, I'm not going to talk to you for a week, and you get the silent treatment for a whole week, or even a day, let's say a week. Silent treatment from your spouse. They won't talk to you. Would you say you have a good relationship with you spouse during the silent treatment week? Not so. And so, to have a relationship with God and Christ means that we are relating to them through daily prayer and daily Bible study. Do you remember what it was like when you really looked forward to prayer, and you really looked forward to Bible study? Do you remember those days when you subscribed to the Bible Correspondence Course, and you had to promise to study the Correspondence Course for 30 minutes a day? I could never do that. Because once I started, an hour and a half would go by. I couldn't stop at 30 minutes. Thirty minutes wasn't enough for the Bible lessons. That was a type of zeal that we all once had at one time. Which we can recapture. God can grant that to us.

The second area that as Christian people we need to cultivate zeal for or about is for God's work. First of all, in our relationship with God, and secondarily when it comes to the work of God. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, if you will, brethren. We'll look at the last couple of verses of this resurrection chapter. *But thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore my beloved*

*brethren*, now these words are given as advice at the conclusion of the resurrection chapter. We hear prayer requests for people who are hurt, who are dying from cancer. We know the resurrection is real. We realize at a memorial service, as there will be one tomorrow in this area, that this is not just an empty doctrine. We have absolute confidence that this will happen. And as the chapter of the resurrection concludes, these are the words that we find ourselves reading. *But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren*, this is a very heartwarming appeal, *be steadfast, be immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

Have you ever thought that certain things you have done, certain investments you have made in time and energy were just all a waste? Where you had done something, where you worked somewhere, you were a part of a project, and you look back at your years being there, and you thought, this was all a waste of time. It was all for nothing. Whereas, when it comes to your involvement in the work of God, it is never a waste of time. It is always meaningful. It will never be for nothing. So when it comes to the work of God, how zealous are you, and how zealous am I, when it comes to what is happening in the work. Mr. Armstrong used to say that he had never seen someone whose heart was in the work who didn't grow spiritually. Remember that? He used to say that years ago, that if we as God's people had our hearts in the work that we would also grow spiritually. I think that was true. I think it is still true. When you hear about news of the work, do you get fired up about it? When there is a letter from the president, when there is an update from the home office, when you read in the "United News" what is happening in the Philippines, or Australia, or New Zealand, or in that most wonderful of all countries, Canada. What's happening in the work in various parts of the world, does it pique your interest? Do you want to know more about what is happening, how God is calling more and more people?

We had a phone call last week from a doctor. We have in Canada the same as you have here in the United States and other countries too, means of promoting the "Good News" circulation list by sending out copies to waiting rooms. Waiting rooms in doctor's offices, dentist's offices. And some of those publications are put out in the waiting room, and some of them aren't. And we have no way of knowing which are put out, and which aren't, and so on. But we know a certain percentage are put out, because people are subscribing to our literature because they go to the doctor's office...you know when you go to the dentist's office or the doctor's office, the first thing you do is pretend you are not there. And one of the best ways for me to pretend I am not in a dentist's office is to grab some literature and to read it and hope that what is happening will go away. But sooner or later they escort me to the chair. It feels like the electric chair. Some of them are electrified. But in a waiting room situation where we have magazines, people will read, they will take out the little card, they will send it in. But in this case we had a phone call at the church office in Canada from one of the doctors who was asking



about the magazine, and he was, for some reason he was getting it at his house and he asked for another copy to be sent to his office. He said, "My family reads the magazine at the house, and I read the magazine in the office, so send me a copy to my office as well as to my house." We don't know who this person is. A brand new individual who somewhere down the line might be a donor, a coworker, a prospective member, or member, we don't know. But people are being called throughout the United States and throughout the world into the faith. Brand new people. It's exciting to be part of a work that is being done. Isn't the "Good News" magazine fabulous? It's an excellent publication. The booklets that are coming out, aren't they terrific? The most recent one about "Did God Create A Devil" or "Is There a Devil?", and there's another one being produced presently. Good, excellent work is being done out of the home office and by many people such as Scott Ashley, and many others as well.

Now a third area for zeal that you and I need to be increasingly more zealous, or to be sure that our zeal doesn't wane too much, is for God's people. To be zealous for the people of God. Look in **Colossians chapter 4**, if you will. We will read **verses 12 and 13**. *Epaphras who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you always, laboring fervently for you in prayers.* To labor fervently for you in prayers is talking about zeal. When someone is fervent they are energetic. They are producing energy. Or being energetic in the way they pray. *That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* Verse 13, *For I bear him witness that he has a great what? for you.* My Bible says zeal. *That he*, this human being referred to in the previous verse, has a little bit of *zeal for you*. No, it says a *great zeal*. A significant amount of zeal for you. *And those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hieropolis.* He was zealous for God's people, and so do we need to be zealous for God's people. How do we do that? How can we be zealous for God's people? We do it every Sabbath, don't we? By fellowshipping before services, after services. We are zealous when we take the prayer lists seriously and pray for one another when we are sick. We are zealous when we make a phone call, when we send a letter, when we send a card. We are zealous when we attend church socials and church activities. We are zealous when Mr. Blackwell says, "I need a volunteer" for this task, or that task, or the other task. We are zealous at the Feast. And here you are, you're a part of the hosting congregation for the Branson Feast site. There are so many ways which we need to be zealous for God's people.

When I first became a Sabbath keeper, it was like for a lot of us. It was me and Mr. Armstrong. 1964, and I ached at that time to meet a fellow Sabbath keeper. I would keep the Sabbath by myself week after week, and month after month alone. And the Sabbath day was one of the most wonderful days of the week, but it was also the longest day, because there was no one to fellowship with. There was nowhere to go to church. And I ached, I literally ached just to meet a fellow Sabbath keeper. I didn't care what franchise. I didn't care whether it was

McDonald's or Burger King, what fellowship. Anyone who was a Sabbath keeper, I wanted just to connect with. Never did have the opportunity until starting to attend what was then the Radio Church of God. We weren't yet Worldwide Church of God. We were just the Radio Church of God. It seems like an odd name now, doesn't it. But it didn't seem odd then to be the Radio Church of God, and to actually meet fellow believers, as was said in the opening prayer today, and to spend time with them. Oh, I couldn't get enough of it. And to be invited over to somebody's home, to spend time with them in their home, and to talk about God's word, that was so fantastic, that was so wonderful. We take it for granted after awhile, don't we?

The fourth area in which we need to be sure that our zeal doesn't diminish, that it is sustained, is that of good works. **Titus 2.** We must also develop when it comes to good works. **Titus 2:11-15.** *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* There's nothing mystical about the term grace. It simply means unmerited pardon. *The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness, verse 12, and worldly lusts, we should live, how should we live? Soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.* Christians don't just fit in with society. They live with high values and high standards. Verse 13. *Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* We look forward so much, verse 13 says. They did, and we do today, we look forward so much to Christ's return, and his coming. Verse 14. *Who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for himself his own special people.* Notice how these special people are described. *His own special people zealous for good works.* So this is the fourth area in which you and I need to be sure that our zeal does not diminish, that it is sustained. And we are people who are zealous for good works.

And there are many different areas in which we can perform good works. You can do it individually in your own community, at your place of work. We can do it as a group when it comes to food banks and other things like that we have done. I think in Branson you have done certain good works as a Feast site for certain needs in the community. That has been done in other Feast sites as well. We do good works in the church, and we do good works outside of the church. There is always a need for God's people to be involved in doing good works, or good deeds. There is always someone in need who can use a little help. And when is help helpful? There was a prayer once prayed - it's tongue in cheek, of course, and goes along the line of "Lord, help deliver me from those who are trying to help me." Those who are trying to hurt me I can take care of. But those that try to help me, those are the ones I have trouble with. Why? Because help isn't always helpful. Help is helpful when we try to help people help themselves. And so they are not addicted to help.

**Romans 12.** Turn there next please. **Romans 12:10.** We will read through verse 11. *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.* Yes, we are as God's people to be kind to one another. And thoughtful to one another. And considerate of one another. *In honor giving preference to one another.* God's people are really good at that overall. **Verse 11.** *Not lagging in diligence...* because after a while we tend to lag in diligence... *and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* This is talking about zeal. This is talking about being on fire for God, about being energetic for spiritual things.

I read a book a while ago called "One Minute Manager". The only book on management I've ever read. It's a good read too. Not many pages, and it's big letters. A lot of white space. The author describes how he had from time to time what he would call problem employees. People on the job who wouldn't perform, who wouldn't produce, that he couldn't motivate no matter what approach he used. And then he was amazed to find one day after he left that company and went to another, he found himself at a bowling alley. And in the next lane was one of his problem employees bowling. Someone he couldn't motivate with a stick of dynamite. And here he was after work bowling. And he had so much energy because he was bowling. He would throw the ball down the lane to try to hit the pins, and he would shout and jump up and down because the ball was heading toward the center. And if he got a strike he was really energetic, really on fire. And he said, now how come he couldn't be that way at work? How come he couldn't be that excited on the job as he is in the bowling alley? And I would ask this question, what if he had to bowl every day? Eight to five. Bowling then would become work, and he would no longer be as energetic. And doesn't the same apply to us when our calling is first new, and keeping the Sabbath is new? Do you remember what it was like when you kept the Sabbath day for the first time in your life? Do you remember what it was like when you came to Sabbath services for the first time in your life? Do you remember what it was like when you went to the Feast of Tabernacles for the first time in your life, how new and exciting it was? Do you remember what it was like when you were courting, when you were dating, when you first got married, and you said, our honeymoon will never end. We will always have a honeymoon. But like anything else, human beings become complacent. We become familiar with the routine. We are worn by the living. Just wearing down by simply being alive. It happens to us. That is why the scripture has so much to say about being sure that zeal doesn't wane, that it doesn't diminish.

**2 Corinthians 9.** And we'll look at just the first couple of verses. *Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you.* You would think, okay that's where the chapter should end. Because if it's superfluous for him to write to you, right there he should stop. There are a lot of things that are superfluous that we need to do simply because we are human. We need to be reminded. There is nothing here today that you would have heard that you have

never heard before. You've heard everything I've said before. But it's good to be reminded. **Verse 2.** *For I know your willingness about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago, and your zeal has stirred up the majority.* Do you know what that is saying? Of course you do. That zeal is infectious. That when one person is zealous it has an effect on another person, and another person becomes zealous. And another person becomes zealous. And another person becomes zealous. We buoy each other up. We motivate each other. We invigorate each other. Isn't that true when you say, oh I can hardly wait until the Feast of Tabernacles this year. Someone says that, and you weren't feeling that way. You think, oh, I guess I should feel that way too. Come to think of it, I can't hardly wait either. I just didn't know I couldn't hardly wait. But now that I was reminded that I can't hardly wait, now I can't hardly wait as well for Trumpets, or the Day of Atonement. I can hardly wait for the Day of Atonement - sunset! Or however you anticipate the fall holy days. They are just around the corner, almost upon us. We have so much to anticipate, so much to look forward to.

**Revelation 2.** Revelation has been covered a little bit in the sermonette today. Let's review that even a little bit further. Chapter 2, **verse 1.** *To the angel of the church of Ephesus write. These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.* I have a red letter version of the Bible, and this is all in red, because Jesus Christ is the one who is speaking. He is the one here who is instructing. He says in **verse 2,** chapter 2, *I know your works, your labor.* So Jesus Christ knows all about you. And if works are not important, why does he know works? If works are done away, why does he measure our works and our labor? *I know your works, your labor, your patience, and you cannot bear those who are evil, and you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.* Yes, Christians need to put others to the test when it comes to preaching. Are they preaching correctly? Are they preaching accurately? *You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name sake and have not become weary.* Do you ever feel weary? I find today in my ministerial travels people who are tired. And I look in the mirror when I shave in the morning, and I see someone who is tired. Bags under his eyes, and I think, where did that old person come from? And you're saying, you haven't seen anything yet if you think you're old and tired and worn out now, you haven't seen anything yet. People in this day and age are over committed. We have so many stressors and anyone I talk to, as do you, whether it is in the workplace, or over the back fence, or in the neighborhood, or at a family picnic, is tired. People are just weary and fatigued. *And have not become weary spiritually, **verse 3. Verse 4.** Nevertheless I have this against you, in that you have lost or left your first love.* The sparkle is gone. The energy is gone. The vitality is gone. *Remember therefore.* Here's the solution. If we have diminished in our zeal, if our zeal has evaporated, here's the plan for recovery. Number one, *Remember therefore from whence you have fallen.* Remember what it used to be like when you were dynamic, when you were

energetic, when you were fired up. Step number two after you remember, step number two, simple, *repent*. I've been wrong. I've allowed myself to drift. Step number three. *And do the first works*. Do what you used to do. Thirty minutes of prayer each day, thirty minutes of Bible study each day, you meditate each day, you fast regularly, you're involved, you're excited about your relationship with God, with the work, with brethren, with good works. Those are the three steps. *Remember, repent, do the first works*. Notice the rest of the verse. Christ Jesus says to you and to me and to all believers in every age, *or else*. Yes, that's the way Christ speaks to us. Do this, *or else I will come to you quickly, and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent*. He is a loving, kind, benevolent savior who gives us a prod from time to time just when we need it.

After years of working for the same company, an elderly carpenter, finish carpenter, rough carpenter, you name it, he could do it all. He was ready to retire. Some of you are retired. Others of you are looking forward to retirement. But don't misunderstand. Retirement is not all that it is cracked up to be. At least, when I talk to people who are retired they say, I'm busier now than I ever was. I don't know how I ever got stuff done before I retired. I'm afraid about retiring. But nevertheless this carpenter was looking forward to retiring. And he told his employer, his contractor, of his plans to leave the house building business, and he would lead a more comfortable life, more relaxed life with his wife and extended family. He would miss the paycheck, yes he would, but he needed to retire. And he had saved enough and invested enough they could get by. Well the contractor was sorry to see this good worker, one of his best, in fact, leave. And he pleaded with him. He said, look, before you leave, before you retire, can you consider this? Can you just build one more house for me? One last house, and once you have this one last house completed, then you can leave. Can you possibly consider doing that? And the man hesitated and said, well, I really don't want to. I'm really ready to retire, but since you're a friend, an associate, and a business partner, I will do this favor for you. And so he went about building his last house of his career. And he couldn't put his heart into it. It was done not to standards. The workmanship wasn't quite correct. It was shoddy, in fact, at times. The material wasn't the best. It was an unfortunate way to end his career. But after all, he was retiring, and it was his last house. When the carpenter finished his work, and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front door key to the man retiring and said, here, this is your house. This is my farewell gift for you. This is how I am saying good bye, and thanks for the work you have done for me. At which time the carpenter thought, oh, if only I'd known I was building this for myself I would have done a lot better job.

So each day in your life as you hammer a nail, as you pick up a board, as you put up a wall, you and I need to build wisely, because it is the only life that we have. And we have to be living it each day with zeal and diligence. Because this way of life we have been called to live is worth being zealous about.