



Links Players

ALL WORKED UP

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. (Romans 12:11, NIV)

HOW STRONGLY WE FEEL ABOUT SOMETHING is frequently not revealed until it is threatened or taken away. We may be completely unaware of the grip this thing has on our heart. Then the challenge comes and our ire rises; or we lose what we've valued and we fall into depression.

Am I being too vague? Let's put it this way: For many years, you've been a very good golfer. So good, in fact, that you are the perpetual club champion, the player whose name is listed over and over again on that fancy board in the clubhouse. Then along comes a young new member with game. Your reign is threatened and your confidence is disturbed. How you respond is a measure, we might say, of your zeal.

Zeal is not a word you hear used much in our time. Perhaps it applies to the demonstrators of all kinds who have filled the streets of our capitals and other major cities over the past year. Maybe it fits some of the opinion givers on television and radio, whose voices ring with adamant notes. But few of us would describe ourselves as zealous. It's too... well, too much.

But look at Paul's words to the Romans: "Never be lacking in zeal." He starts with an absolute, leaving no wiggle room. In response, you would not be wrong to ask, "What am I to be zealous about? How is that supposed to look?"

The first question is answered right there in the text. Our zeal, our fervor, is to be spiritual. And it is to serve the Lord. "Causes" are everywhere. We can get worked up about a lot of things that don't deserve our energy. Jesus does—as do the things he calls us to do: love our spouse, dig into the Scriptures, help others, and more.

As to the second question, all zealotry needs a tempering. Without it, zealots are nothing other than anarchists. But zealots who contain their fanaticism can lead important movements. William Wilberforce relentlessly fought for the abolition of slavery in the halls of Parliament. It took 20 years to end the British slave trade and another 26 to abolish slavery, efforts constrained by the slow processes of legislative debate. But Wilberforce never let his fervor wane. Above the constraints, he was compelled by what he knew was right in his Christ-governed heart. Zeal is not craziness; it is love for Christ displayed through long, determined effort.

Opening questions What are some greater and lesser targets of your affection? Would you call yourself "zealous" about these things?

READING 1 Kings 19:1-9, 10-18; Romans 12:11

The challenge (1 Kings 19:1-9)

Elijah had done a great thing for the Lord by defeating the prophets of Baal, but now his life was threatened. How was he sapped in emotion and spirit? In what way was he physically refreshed?

The encouragement (1 Kings 19:10-18)

How did Elijah describe his zeal? Do you think God was impressed, or did he just hear Elijah out? In what way did God direct and encourage Elijah? How does this full episode show the ways that God lifts our spirits when our zeal for him is undermined?

Your zeal for Christ (Romans 12)

What is your level of zeal for Christ? Is it really for him, or do you get side-tracked by becoming zealous over secondary concerns? How can you better serve Christ in your zeal?
