

INCORNERSTONE BIBLE INSTITUTE INCONTEXT

by Jim Steel

Peat Fires in the Soul

Fire fighting tips for dealing with our dark sides.

Note: Feel free to use this article for a group devotional or a weeknight Bible study. Be sure to look up the verses.

My first exposure to peat fires was near where we first ministered. I was surprised to learn how such fires could burn beneath the surface of the ground for days and weeks, moving thousands of feet, before resurfacing. Memories of those persistent, irrepressible fires, have long since served as vivid reminders of the fire which wars within the soul. The Bible refers to this opponent; which we all engage, as our flesh, or our old man. Like the peat fire, the strength of the flesh is in its ability to assert itself secretly, beyond the sight of men. Men sin because the suggestion to do evil from the outside is met in the dark, moist womb of the heart, the privileged sanctuary of the soul (James 1:12-15).

While those peat fires can never be extinguished and should always be feared (1 Corinthians 10:12), we have the sure promise of God that we do not need to be caught up in the fires of passion (1 Corinthians 10:13). The following are some biblical suggestions which have helped this fellow traveler in his effort to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Thess. 4:3).

Live in the world of grace, forgiveness, and fellowship. (Keep a well-watered yard.)

The singularly most important key in gaining victory over our sinful natures is found in maintaining a close, abiding relationship with Christ. The abiding life, like the peat fire, is

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something which thrives within us (John 15). This daily abiding life is our birthright, and it is achievable. However, this walk in the presence of Christ is a fragile walk which can easily be supplanted by the cares of this life and by sheer busyness in service for Christ. The outward act will always stand prepared to supplant the inward life. The Martha in us all will compete with the Mary (Luke 10:41, 42).

Many Christians fail at this point

because the moment they slip from an abiding relationship, they feel unworthy to re-enter the presence of Christ. When we sin, our first reaction is to be aware of our unworthiness to approach our pure and holy Savior. We somehow feel that, even though we are quick to confess our disobedience, we must somehow, sit it out a while on the bench before we can step back into that intimacy. That is exactly what Satan wants us to think because the very moment we adopt that attitude we have deprived ourselves from our number-one defense in our warfare. In truth, it is the grace of Christ and our abiding love relationship with Him which keeps us from sinning far more than our knowledge of the laws of sowing and reaping. Only in my enjoyment of grace and true acceptance in Christ can I find the courage to win in this great warfare of the soul. Get back into a cleansed, abiding relationship.

Live in a world of honesty. (Dispose combustibles safely.)

During our struggle with temptation and the (sometimes) subsequent fall into disobedience, we are capable of playing clever mind games with ourselves. The need to absolve ourselves, at least to some degree, will always assert itself. More often than not, when it does, it can be traced to anger in one

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form or another. Psychologists would have us account for our aberrations in embedded problems from our childhood. But we do not need their help. We can all draw enough from the daily offenses of our uncontrollable circumstances to conjure up a good, moody depression. The need for absolute honesty is critical at this point. One mistake comes from nurturing anger over injustices and unchangeable circumstances. Healing for that difficulty comes through a readjustment of our expectations and a willingness to be satisfied and find our satisfaction in

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Christ, rather than in external circumstances. A second mistake, however, comes by not understanding that we have been lying to ourselves all along. The problem is not with our circumstances, the problem is with the peat fire. The problem is with our sinful natures, our own lusts which war within us (Jas. 4:1-3). I'm sorry if you were dropped on your head as a baby. So were we all - in one way or another. The truth is that we can always find a circumstance to blame.

While addressing the matter of honesty, it is also important to emphasize that we are all together in this struggle with the peat fires in the soul. The more willingly we acknowledge our faults, especially to those whom we love, the more strength we will find for overcoming them (Jas. 5:16.) Advanced

openness about our weakness and our tendencies helps others to help us. This leads us to the third thought:

Live in a safe world. (Keep your perimeters free from brush and trash.)

Westerners know that many homes have been lost for no other reason than the fact that landowners were lazy in maintaining a safe zone around their homes. God has given us numerous ways to keep our safe zones intact. First, there are the godly, sanctifying influences of our mates and families. We all need to make ourselves accountable to our family members. The second safe zone is built by nurturing a close relationship with God's people in worship and in ministry. While we must never rely on these sanctifying influences as our protection, we will find in them a great resource to help us make "no provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). This pastor has never known a victorious Christian who neglected his fellowship with God's people in the context of the local church (Col. 3:16). You are responsible for your spiritual environ. Maintain your safe zones.

Live in a world of warfare. (Fight fires early and aggressively.)

The best defense still remains a good offense. When we take up the whole armor of God and engage in the ministry to which God has called us, we will find both occupation for the mind and enablement for the soul (Ephesians 6:10-18). There are few antidotes to temptation as powerful as engaging ourselves in true ministry (not busyness) for Christ. For example, a man who teaches Sunday school will find it very difficult to teach one thing on Sunday and to do quite another on Monday. Ministry always makes us accountable, especially the ministry of the Word.

Live in a world of meditation. (Educate yourself about good safety procedures.)

Our direct meditation in the Word of God and our occupation with the scriptures are a powerful antibacterial for our souls. We hide God's Word in our hearts to protect ourselves from sin and temptation (Psalm 51). We think it would be a great idea for Christian homes to return to the days when Bible verses were neatly framed on walls, little packets of verses were found on morning breakfast tables, and gospel radio broadcasts filtered through the rooms of the home during the day. Computer screensavers, bedroom posters, and the magazines we read all offer up little clues regarding our respect for God's Word. The mind occupied with the scriptures will find it normal to be occupied with the Christ of the scriptures.

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