

NEWS AND VIEWS
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*“Southern Baptists with the Full
Gospel for the Whole World”*

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Experiencing the warmer days of early summer seems to provoke memories of last winter's disabling cold. Remember what it was like to experience the healing warmth of a fire in front of a crackling fireplace? That's a comfortable fire. Now try to imagine falling asleep and suddenly waking up to see that the fire is out of control and the flame is consuming all that it touches. This fire would no longer be considered comfortable. That fire would have become a transforming and a consuming fire! A consuming fire radically changes everything it touches.

I remember the first time I realized the damage that fire could do. Living in a small town, we heard the blaring of a siren as it pierced the air one cold winter's day. Following the sound we were stunned by the sights and smells of this major transforming event. A house was on fire! On the trail of the fire truck we smelled the smoke as the plume rose over the trees and adjacent rooftops. When I turned the corner, total chaos dramatically unfolded! People were running toward *and* away from the house at the same time. After the fire was out, none of us were prepared for the devastation of the fire or the despair of the family as they sifted through the ashes.

The family that endured that trial would never forget that day. They were forever changed. An encounter with God is a lot like surviving a house fire. Sometimes the experience is brought about during a time of great pain. The writer of Deuteronomy likens God to a fire. A consuming fire. Let's look at how the Lord God is described in scripture and some thoughts about the passage before us today.

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 4:24)

I. A CONSUMING FIRE IS A TOTAL LIFE CHANGING EVENT. In the house fire, the fire totally consumed everything. Only the bricks remained but even they had been touched with soot and heat. Nothing is partial about a consuming fire. God wants to be total in His encounter with us. In a consuming fire total loss is encountered. A consuming fire is totally destructive, yet totally purifying. Nothing lives in its aftermath. Nothing of us should remain after an encounter with the living God. We become aware that we must die to self and become purified to remain in His presence. That awareness is a life changing event.

II. A CONSUMING FIRE CHANGES OUR FOCUS. Like the family that ran out of the house with only the clothes on their back, their focus was on living and surviving the fire. Nothing else mattered at the moment. After the fire, everything was changed. After an encounter with God, we are changed. We can focus on the things that really matter and turn away from the things that don't. Nothing of our old lives remains the same. We are changed into something new. We enter into a new way of thinking. An encounter with God is life altering.

III. A CONSUMING FIRE DEMANDS TOTAL ATTENTION. Distraction of lesser things wanes when we experience a consuming fire. On the way out of the house on fire, no one in that family stopped to pour themselves a glass of iced tea! How often do we encounter God and become easily distracted? God deserves our total attention.

When God has brought His consuming fire to bear in our lives, the recovery is often painful. Sometimes His fire is used as discipline and sometimes it is used to refine us. Life in the furnace burns away life's attachments. God has a way of leaving us in the fire long enough to purify and not long enough to destroy.

One thing I have learned about being around a fire is that it is always exciting. Firemen will tell you that although it is exciting, it is also very dangerous. It's just not safe. That's the way it is walking with God. Exciting, yet never safe. God is truly a consuming fire. He is *not* a comfortable fire. Sometimes I can resonate with Jeremiah the prophet who said that if he tried to be silent about God, it was like a fire shut up in his bones and he could not keep it in! The desolation of winter is coming...let the fire out. Start living a totally transformed life with the Lord your God...a consuming fire.

Blessings to you,
Pastor Sam