

Losing Your Resume

Matthew 18:1-8

Pastor Peter Hiatt

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At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire [eternal fire]. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire [or more literally, the hell of fire].

Matthew 18:1-8, NKJV

Last week I was up late one night, watching television, flipping through channels with the remote control, when I noticed a particular show on the Travel channel about adult entertainment in Las Vegas.

I changed channels, thinking, "I shouldn't be watching this." Then I changed the channel back, just to check. Then I changed the channel; then I changed the channel back. Then I changed the channel; then I changed the channel back. Then I changed the channel; then I changed the channel back. I think it was lust. I think I committed adultery in my heart. Could there be a worse place to commit adultery?

I violated my marriage covenant, which is to be a picture of Christ's covenant with His church. I suspect I violated those women, whether they knew it or not. They weren't just women, they were someone's little girl. Not just an earthly father's little girl, but God, the Father's little girl.

We say we have such a hard time understanding the wrath of God, but if you are a father with a little girl, you understand.

This shocked me as a young father. But if someone even disregarded one of my little girls, I felt this fury rise within me. Now I realize my wrath was my love; it was the edge of my burning love. My wrath was my love encountering evil.

Well, these dancers in Vegas weren't my daughters, but what if they were God's daughters and He loved them, and I was looking on them as if they were objects to be used for my pleasure and then discarded?

My left hand held the remote, and “if my hand causes me to sin, it would be better to cut off my hand than to be cast with my hand into the hell of fire.”

[Peter is speaking as he prepares to cut off his hand with a machete...] I believe the word of God is true and is authoritative on all matters about which it speaks, and I hope that you do as well. [Peter swings the machete and pulls his hand away at the last second, hitting the table instead.]

Actually, I decided to move it at the last second because several things occurred to me:

- First, Jesus said, “If your hand causes you to sin,” but I’m not sure it was my hand. In Matthew 15:19, Jesus told us, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, and fornication.” I need to cut out my heart, but not just my physical heart. If I was blind and maimed and had an artificial heart, I could still lust. I need to cut deeper, but what could cut like to the “division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart?”
- Secondly, if my right hand cut off my left hand, my right hand would be offending my left hand, but not only my left hand, but my whole body. So my whole body would have to thrust my right hand into, like, a meat grinder, but then I’d have to, like, cut off my whole body for offending me (I love my right hand). Well, that would basically be suicide! And that’s a sin. And not just sin, sin against one of “these little ones” because I, too, am a child of God. So, how can I be cut off and not cut off? How could I die and yet live?
- Thirdly, Jesus isn’t really talking about sexual sin here. He talked about sexual sin in Matthew chapter 5 (which

is a parallel passage to this one), but here he's talking about more.

According to Mark and Luke, the disciples had been arguing about who was "the greatest" in the kingdom of heaven. And so they asked Jesus, "Who wins disciple of the year and gets the church growth award?"

And Jesus picks up a "Mikros," a little one, a least one, and He says, "Here's the greatest, and you guys better repent. Cut it out or feel the fire."

Then Jesus informs them,

A millstone around your neck
would be better
than damaging a child's faith in God
by teaching that child
to have faith in his own greatness.

Several years ago, I sat in the doctor's office with my six year old daughter, Elizabeth. This young, lady doctor was asking Elizabeth some questions as a part of her physical. "Elizabeth," she said, "Tell me what you like about yourself."

Elizabeth's eyes lit up. Her legs swung under the examination table. She looked at me and said, "I like being with *my daddy*."

Immediately, the doctor exclaimed, "No!" as if someone had poked her in a wound. "I mean, what do you like about *yourself*... like that you run fast."

And little Elizabeth said, "Oh, yeah, I like that I run fast."

At that moment I wanted to take a machete and cut that doctor's lips off. She spoke like a snake, but I realized

she wasn't a snake. She had just been bitten by the snake. And long ago she had probably been deeply wounded trusting a daddy who was untrustworthy.

All earthly fathers, even at their very best, can only be a shadow of their heavenly father.

So I restrained myself, but I wanted to yell,

No, Elizabeth, don't put your trust in your *self*, your abilities. Don't put your trust in

your legs, your arms, your eyes. Put your trust in the love of your Father.

You are so much more, Elizabeth, than legs, arms, and eyes. One day, they will fail you, but love will never fail you.

You are more than legs, and arms, and eyes; you are the breath of God, and I am beginning to see it because I am your father, being made in the image of your heavenly Father.

Elizabeth, legs, arms, and eyes can't really make you dance. Love makes you dance. Love tells you who you are. So if you're tempted to trust your legs more than the love of your Father in heaven, it would be better to have no legs.

Long ago in a garden, a snake tempted a little girl. The snake said something like, "What do you like about yourself, Eve?" Eve smiled and said, "I like being with my daddy." And the snake said, "You know, Eve, I'm not so

sure your daddy can be trusted. Maybe you should trust yourself. Maybe you should know what's good and evil. Let's build you a resume. Let's make your self great."

The disciples had been arguing over who was greatest in the kingdom. Who do you suppose would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven? You know the answer's Jesus, but who's second or third or whatever? Who would that be and what would their resume look like?

The disciples were competing for greatness. They were comparing resumes:

- Who sinned the least?
- Who obeyed best?
- Who could run fastest?
- Who could pray the longest?
- Who gave the most?
- Who was most religious?

They asked Jesus to start handing out awards, and He picks up a child and says, "Here, a child, the least, is greatest." But the child can't run fastest... or pray longest. The child gives the least and is certainly least religious; the child has the least knowledge of good and evil. The child has the least impressive resume.

A little child is also the least self-conscious,
because there's not much self to be conscious of.

A little child is
 a life without much self,
 an "I" without much accumulated "me,"
 a person without much pride,
 a spirit without much of what the Bible calls *flesh*,
 breath of God without much accumulated dirt.

That is, hardly any resume.

A child receives everything by grace.

When you have kids, you find yourself absolutely loving these little things. Yet they've done nothing good or bad to merit your love.

They have no resume.

They're not good for anything.

They're just good.

I mean, they're just valuable, beyond belief.

They're the breath of God.

It's easy to see that value in little kids; yet it's true of every person in this room. It's just harder to see in adults because they have more knowledge, resume, self, flesh, and ego to hide behind.

So when you bump into them at the party, it's harder to get to know them because you've got to wade through forty years of resume and discover it's all basically dirt and lies.

But when you encounter the child — the “mikros,” the least of them, the breath of God — well, then you can begin to party. Then you can love and be loved... once you've lost the resumes.

The disciples were arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom. They were competing over who fulfilled the law the best.

Jesus summed up the entire law with a word: Love.

To compete is:

- to try to win at another's expense,
- to try to be first such that another is last,
- to try to be the greatest such that another is least.

To love is:

- to be last that another might be first,
- to be the least that another might be great.

To try to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is to announce that you're not in it and can't even see it. For the kingdom of God is the kingdom of love and in this love: He who was greatest emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of man, He humbled Himself and became obedient. Obedient even unto death, death on a cross where He took our sin, our shame, our arrogance and bore them all the way to Hell.

Speaking of His cross, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of the world." In other words, this is the heart of God [pointing at the cross]. This is the love of God, the greatest became the least that the least could be great.

So do you like it or do you hate it?
My body broken for you. My blood shed for you.
Do you want it or do you despise it?

Be careful... for this is love, and this is fire. We think we're judging it, when it is judging us.

The disciples were trying to be the greatest in the kingdom of love:

- That's the opposite of love.
- That's the opposite of the kingdom.
- That's the opposite of the great banquet, the great city, the new Jerusalem.
- That's the opposite of a great party.

Have you ever been to a party where people are, consciously or unconsciously, comparing their resumes, and, you know, all full of themselves? What a drag. It's the opposite of heaven. It's the opposite of life.

Life is individual members serving the whole. When the members compete, it's called cancer, and it results in death. Competition explains death; sacrificial love is life.

So have you ever used your hand to write a resume to write an argument that you were the greatest? I'm not saying you should never write a resume, just that you should write a resume because you feel called to serve Christ's body with the gifts that He's given you.

But if you write a resume to prove that you are the greatest (which we all do, all the time, consciously or unconsciously, therefore teach others, even little children to do the same), then maybe you should cut off your hand, or better yet, cut out your heart because God is love, absolute love.

One day you will have to stand before Him. When you do, you don't want to be attached to anything evil

because evil burns and is consumed in the presence of absolute, unmitigated love.

Jesus said, "It's better to enter life maimed than with two hands to be cast into the Hell of fire." Now you may have wondered, how could God be love and cast people into the Hell of fire. And what is the eternal, unquenchable fire? Where is Hell? How do you get there?

Lucky for you, I have photos and a map (you may want to close your eyes).

This is an actual photo of Hell.



These are tourists in Hell.



The word translated “Hell” is gehenna, which means “Valley of Henna” in Hebrew.

In the King James version, two Greek words get translated as “Hell.” One is the Greek word “Hades,” which translates the Hebrew word, “Sheol,” which was the shadowy realm of the dead but not a place of eternal torment. For in the Revelation, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire and death is no more.

The other word translated “Hell” is Gehenna. Gehenna is the valley to the south of Jerusalem. It was there that King Ahaz sacrificed his son to the pagan god, Molech. And so Jeremiah and Isaiah prophesied that God’s judgment would fall in Gehenna and “the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone would set it ablaze.” (Isaiah 30:33)

In Jesus’ day, Gehenna had become a picture of judgment, and yet it was also a place that everybody knew. It was the place where Jerusalem burned her trash. So a wife might say, “Honey, pick up the trash and go to Hell.” And by that, she meant, “Would you take the garbage to the dump?” And there it would be consumed by fire.

Every Hebrew also knew this, that God *is a consuming fire* (Deuteronomy 4). They weren’t really worried about being saved from Satan. Satan was a problem, but not the one to fear. They were worried about being saved from the wrath of God, because He is the eternal, unquenchable, consuming fire. The eternal fire, it burned in the temple, and it was to “never go out,” but was set ablaze by God.

The fire fell on the altar to consume the offering, offerings like lambs, on which the Hebrews confessed their sins. That glory burned in the heart of the temple and that fire would fall in final judgment at Gehenna.

on the corpses of those who opposed the Lord in the Valley of Gehenna.

When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden (which many Jews believed was Jerusalem), the Lord guarded the way back in with fire and a sword, actually a flaming sword.

In the Revelation, it's as if we pass through a sea of glass and fire, then we see the new Jerusalem, the great banquet.

Isaiah prophesied that the redeemed would pass through the fire and not be burned (Jesus is quoting Isaiah in Matthew).

Paul writes that we are saved "as through fire." So whatever is of Christ will pass through the fire and will be purified, but whatever is not of Christ will be burned up like wood, hay, and stubble.

We're saved "as through fire."
 We're saved through the cross.
 The cross is the judgment.
 The judgment is the revelation of love.

The Hebrews knew that God is a consuming fire. And Jesus revealed that that consuming fire is love. God is a consuming fire, and God is love (1 John 4), and God is one (Mark 12). He is not part fire and part love. He is all fire and all love.

So Satan is not at home in the fire of Gehenna. There is nothing Satan fears more than the fires of Gehenna because the fire of Gehenna is the breath of the Lord and the edge of the new Jerusalem, the unquenchable, unstoppable, everlasting, eternal love of God.

All last week, I kept wondering, “Is Gehenna the edge of the new Jerusalem, the edge of love?” At the last service last week, my friend, Laura, came up to me and handed me a paper. She said she’d been praying and felt God give her this verse for our church, Zech 2:5. It’s also a prophecy about the new Jerusalem. “Jerusalem will be inhabited as a city without walls.” And then this, “For I myself will be a wall of fire around it, declares the Lord, and I will be its glory within.”

So perhaps, to get to the party,
we must somehow pass through the fire.

So then, maybe Jesus is not saying, “God is an eternal sadist who delights in the death of the wicked, so He burns them until they die, and then He resurrects them and burns them until they die over and over, forever and ever.”

Maybe Jesus is saying,

Our Father in heaven is absolute love and whatever is not of love will be devoured by love. But whatever is of love will surrender to love in eternal ecstasy. So whatever is not of love, cut it off before you get to the fire or you’ll run from the fire to save what burns you, to save your resume, thinking that your resume is you.

You’ll run from life, thinking you’re saving your life. You’ll run from the fire and hide in outer darkness, hide in the trees, hide in

the law, hide in yourself, hide in your resume. There, you are utterly alone with Satan where men weep and gnash their teeth. But not forever, for death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire.

So cut off your sin, cut off your self, your pride, your resume before that day.

What sword could cut to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart? What sword could kill you and yet give you life? The word of God is a sword, and Jesus is that Word, the Living Word, like a sword on fire.

You hear the word. He convicts you of your sin. You confess. He cuts your flesh. Your body becomes His body. He lays it on the altar, the acceptable offering consumed by the fire. He takes your body, and He gives you His body saying, "Take and eat."

He was cut off, and from the outer darkness He cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" That darkness was consumed by fire which consumed our shame. He now walks us through the fire and into the banquet. He walks us home with fire in our veins, His love, His life, His spirit, His blood. Gehenna fire feels like Hell to Satan, but I suspect that one day, to you, it will feel like coming home to your Father, who is a consuming fire of absolute love.

So what am I saying? Your sin is incredibly vile, and God's judgment is profoundly severe. God, in Jesus, bore it all for His steadfast love endures forever. And why did He do it? To get you home, to get you to the kingdom, to get you to the party, to humble you, to cut you down to

size, to turn you into a child, for only children know how to really party.

“And of such consists the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus says in Matthew 19. You must become like a child to enter.

Alice must get small to enter Wonderland. So you must stop trying to be the greatest. You must surrender your pride, your flesh, your knowledge of good and evil. You must surrender your resume.

In a moment, I am going to have you write a quick resume. Don't worry about having to cut off your hand because you've already written it in your heart.

On one side, write what you've thought might qualify you for greatness in the kingdom of heaven. It might be: responsible citizen, good mother, senior pastor, circumcised on the eighth day, as to the law, blameless. You see Paul had a resume; he said it was crap. That's Philippians 4:8.

On the back side, I want you to write what you think would least qualify you for greatness, maybe lust, adultery, greed, murder, gossip. So on the front, what you are proud of about yourself; on the back of the paper, what you are ashamed of about yourself.

Front and back, both sides are called *self*; both sides are called *flesh*.

- It's like your knowledge of good and evil.
- It's like your certificate of debt.
- It's like your resume.
- It's what keeps you from believing in love, receiving love, and living in love.

- It's what keeps you from becoming like a child and enjoying the party
- For it's what traps you in your own miserable self, dependent upon yourself, addicted to yourself, and yet, terrorized of yourself and blind to God's grace.

In a moment we will come forward for communion. There will be an offering plate, broken bread, and wine. I invite you to take your resume and put it in the offering plate. Then take the bread, dip it in the wine and consume fire. If the wine burns like fire, which happens to some, don't run. The Lord is revealing something He wants you to confess now, so it won't burn later.

After the service, we will take this offering of resumes and burn it to start the party, burn it to enter the party. Yet in reality it was burned 2,000 years ago on a cross on the edge of old Jerusalem at the edge of the kingdom of heaven.

So what's my point? Become like a child and enter the kingdom, that is lose your resume, and join the party.

My daughter, Elizabeth, is no longer six. She's a teenager now. This last year was an incredibly difficult year for her and an incredibly difficult year for me. My father was dying, and worse yet, I, as a father, was dying. Elizabeth's struggles and doubts and fears were far more frightening for me than my dad's death.

Elizabeth was in Junior High and stressed about her resume, who she was, and what she liked about herself. To be honest, I was also stressed about my resume — whether I was a good father, and a good pastor, and what I liked about myself. Last year I felt like I was being tried by fire, and I was humbled.

For a short time, Elizabeth lived away from home. A few days after she returned, I had to go speak in California. As I left, she gave me this letter, and made me promise not to read it until I got on the plane. I was scared to death. I expected it to be a new resume of all I had done wrong.

All the way to the airport, I wanted to read the letter, but I waited until I sat down. The second I sat on that plane, I opened the letter. She'd written it while she was away. She said she missed me. Then she wrote, "All I really want is for you to hold me and tell me you love me and that I will make it through this time."

Then she shared a picture that she saw in her mind:

I was three years old again, and you were holding me, singing a song. The lyrics to the song say, "Everything is going to be all right, rock-a-bye." And then Jesus is holding both of us, singing, "Everything is going to be all right, rock-a-bye." And as Jesus said to us, "Everything is going to be all right," he was rocking us to sleep.

When I read that, I whispered, "Oh, thank you, Jesus." But then I just wanted to jump up, scream, and party with everyone on the plane.

Because, you see, my resume had been burned, and Elizabeth's resume had burned, and who were we really? Two little children, sitting on the Father's lap. And what did I like about myself? Senior pastor, good father, changer of television stations, and good husband? No, what I liked about myself, was that I liked being with my Daddy.

And when I am with my Daddy, I have all things with Him, and the New Jerusalem comes down.

Now the band will come forward and as they sing, take out the paper and pencil and write your resume.

- On one side, write the things you are ashamed of about yourself.
- On the other side, I want you to write the things you are proud of about yourself.
- Both sides are self.
- Both sides are flesh.
- Both sides belong in the fire.
- Both sides will be consumed by the fire.

Therefore, you must believe your resume is not who you are. That is, you must believe you are forgiven.

[The band plays “Consuming Fire” by Third Day]

Set this place on fire
Send you spirit, Savior

Rescue from the mire
Show Your servant favor

Yesterday was the day that I was alone
Now I'm in the presence of Almighty God

Chorus:
And yes, our God, He is a consuming fire
And the flames burn down deep in my soul

Yes, our God He is a consuming fire
He reaches inside and He melts down this
cold heart of stone.

Set this place on fire
Send Your spirit, Savior
Rescue from the mire
Show your servant favor

Yesterday was the day that I was alone
Now I'm in the presence of Almighty God

Repeat chorus

Did you realize that inside you there is a
flame?
Did you ever try to let it burn?

Lyrics & Music by Mac Powell

And so, on the night that He was betrayed, He took bread and said, "This is my body, [Peter swings the machete and cuts the bread.] broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, after supper, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. So we invite you to come forward, tear off a piece of the bread and dip it in the cup — consuming fire, the glory in the temple. And when you come forward, take your resume and put it in the offering plate. It is the offering that is to be consumed by fire. And so what walks out on the other side? Someone without a resume, a little child.

Jesus said, “Whoever receives one of these little ones in my name receives me.” If you come to the table in faith, there is a little one who lives in you, and the little one’s name is Jesus. He is all the resume you will ever need.

Now come to the party. Do you remember the greatest party in the Bible, apart from the party that is predicted in the book of Revelation? It was at Pentecost. Remember when the Spirit of God, the breath of God, fell on the disciples like fire? (I believe it was the same fire that ignited the valley of Gehenna.) Do you remember what happened? Everyone thought they were drunk!

Why do people drink at parties? They’re trying to lose their resume and become children. And Paul writes, “Don’t be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.” Why? Because you’re not called to a party that lasts a few hours and then you get a headache; you’re called to a party that lasts all eternity.

So it’s time to take out the trash. [Peter hands Aram the bag with all of the resumes in it.] Hear you go, Aram. [Aram opens the door, tosses the bag to the guys running the barbeque, and yells, “Burn the resumes and start the party!”]

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell [gehenna] of fire.”

Matthew 18:1-9, NRSV

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna].

Matthew 10:28, NSRV

For Tophet [gehenna] was established of old, yes, for the king it is prepared. He has made it deep and large; its pyre is fire with much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.... The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”... But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the

rivers, they shall not overflow you. when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior..." For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. for by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many. "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. And I will also take some of them for priests and Levites," says the LORD. "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD. "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

*Isaiah 30:33, 33:14, 43:1-3a,
66:15-16, 20-24 NKJV*

He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24, RSV

And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand! Then I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see

what is its breadth and what is its length.” And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, “Run, say to that young man, ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within her.’”

Zechariah 2:1-5

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new...” And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls... And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in

the Lamb's book of life.... Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.

*Revelation 20:14-21:5a, 21:15,
21:23-27, 22:14-15, RSV*

The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not go out... And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting; and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. And fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

Leviticus 6:12a, 9:23-24, RSV

For every one will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it?

Mark 9:49-50a, RSV

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them... And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

Acts 2:1-3, 12-13, RSV

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and

acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship... “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:1, 20-21, RSV

Is not my word like fire, says the LORD?

Jeremiah 23:29a, RSV

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered the king, “True, O king.” He answered, “But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

Daniel 3:24-25, RSV

Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire...

Malachi 3:1-2, RSV

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!

Luke 12:49, RSV

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:22, 28-29, RSV

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire... Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Deuteronomy 4:24a, 6:4, NKJV

God is love.

1 John 4:16, RSV

The love of Jesus Christ is not a mild benevolence; it is a consuming fire.

Bede Griffith

You're never so centered on yourself as when you're depressed. You're never so ready to forget yourself as when you are happy.

Anthony De Mello

We must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly, serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment.

C. S. Lewis

And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.

Matthew 18:8, RSV

God is not attained by a process of addition to anything in the soul, but by a process of subtraction.

Meister Eckhart

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Lookout Mountain Community Church
534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401
Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361
E-mail: info@lomcc.org