

“Making a Difference in The World”

“Restoring Our Passion for Life” - Part 1

Mark 12:28-34 preached on February 28, 2010

Passion! It's the driving force behind all great art, all great music, literature, drama. Passion makes things great. It enables soldiers to sacrifice themselves in battle. It drives scientists to find new cures to dreaded diseases. Passion equips athletes to reach the next level, to enable them to break records. Passion is what sustains us in reaching our goals as we go through life. Nothing great is done without passion. Passion turns the impossible into the possible. It energizes life. It's what makes life come alive. Without passion, life becomes dull, drab, boring. God wants us to live a passionate life.

One day a man asked Jesus, “Out of all the scriptures, what is the most important? What do I need to know more than anything else?” And Jesus said, “Two things.” *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these.”* (Mark 12:30-31) Do you hear the passion in those words? Do you feel the passion? Jesus said that there are only two things that really matter in life. We need to love God, and we need to love the people around us. And we are to love them passionately - with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength. In the Message it says, *“Love the Lord your God with all your passion, all your prayer, all your intelligence, all your energy.”* We need to give our love with all that we have. This is not for wimps. Jesus is saying, “If you want to follow Me, you've got to live with passion, because it deserves everything you've got. These are things that are worthy of your passion.”

The Bible uses the phrase “with all your heart” many times. We are to seek God passionately, with all our heart. (Deuteronomy 4:29) To love God passionately. (Deuteronomy 6:6) To serve God passionately. (Deuteronomy 10:12) To obey God passionately. (Deuteronomy 30:2) To trust God passionately. Then in Colossians 3:23 God says, *“Whatever you do, do it with all your heart as unto the Lord and not as unto men.”* That says that we are to do everything with passion. No matter what, we are to do it with all our heart. Never do anything half-heartedly. If we're going to do it, it's worth doing with all our heart. If we're only going to be half-hearted about it, don't bother.

In America, we are often passionate about everything except God. We are passionate about sports, movies; fashion; clothes. We are passionate about certain cars and food and television and all sorts of things. This week I searched amazon.com for books with “passion” in the title. There were over 19,000 hits. Over 19,000 books about passion. You can find A Passion for Birds, A Passion for Books, A Passion for Cactus, for Chocolate, Fashion, Fish, Flying, Gardening, Golf, Hunting, Jazz, Mushrooms, Needlepoint, Pasta, Ponies. Potatoes, Roses, Shoes. And even, A Passion for Steam. Steam!?!?

The amazing thing in our culture is it's ok, even appropriate, for people to be passionate about anything as long as it's not God. I can go to any sporting event and yell, scream my head off, jump up and down, raise my hands in the air. I can cry after losses and dance after wins, and people would say, “Now there's a fan!” But if I came to church and did any of that, they'd say, “There's a fanatic! What a nut.” It's appropriate to get excited, to be enthusiastic, to have a passion for anything in life, as long as it's not God. Yet Jesus said, If you're going to follow Me, you've got to do it with passion. With all your heart.

Romans 12:11 *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor.”* That means we've got to work at maintaining our passion. It's not automatic. We must stoke those fires, fan that flame to maintain our spiritual passion. Now I believe that at our birth each of us had an innate sense of passion, intentionally given to us by God. We were wired that way. God gave us feelings. He gave us emotions. He created us to be able to passionately feel all that happens in the world. But through years of socialization, we have suppressed that natural passion. We've pushed it down. We keep a lid on our emotions, particularly in public. But passion is a natural reaction for us.

Look at little kids. They couldn't hide a feeling if they had to. They're extremely passionate. They feel everything very deeply. All highs and lows with virtually nothing in between. So what happened to us? Where did our zest go? What happened to our zip, our enthusiasm for life? Some of you can remember the day you graduated from high school and that was a pretty passionate day for many of us because it was over! All the required education was now behind us. We had done our time. As a high school graduate we thought, "The world is my apple, and I'm going to pick it. It's mine for the taking. Watch out world! Here I come!" We had great hope, great enthusiasm, great passion as we entered adult life.

So what happened? After a while, that passion began to subside. The enthusiasm began to fade. And our zest, our zip, our joy for life began to slip away. Life became so mundane and routine. Same place, same thing. Monday... ho hum! Same thing over and over. And our dreams began to gather dust. We lost our zip. It's a predictable pattern. First we get the blahs. Then we begin to lower our expectations in life. Then we begin to question things around us. Inevitably, if we let this spiral continue, we begin to get aches and pains in our body and in our hearts until we develop a full-blown case of depression.

What happened? Why don't we have the enthusiasm that we used to have? Why don't we still feel the same way about our career that we used to? Or feel the same enthusiasm, the same romance about our marriage? Why aren't we as close and on fire for God as we used to be? What happened? We've fallen prey to one of life's passion killers. There are seven of them. We're going to look at three today and the rest in a couple of weeks. Use these sermons as a checklist, so when you ask, "Why do I have the blahs? Why have I lost my zest?", you will have a place to start. Because, if you have lost your passion, if your expectations and enthusiasm are gone, chances are that you have been infected with one or more of these passion killers.

1. AN UNCLEAR PURPOSE

Living without purpose is the most common reason people lack passion. Without a purpose for living, why bother? Why put forth the effort? Why get out of bed in the morning? If you have no reason to use your energy, why expend it? Why not just shut down and say, "Been there, done that! Ain't gonna do that no more!" The fact is, if you don't know your purpose, life seems pretty futile. The longer we go through life without clarifying God's purpose for our life, the less passion we'll have. Because passion and purpose go together. Without purpose, life is passionless and there's no reason for enthusiasm over the long haul. We feel like Isaiah who said, "*I have labored to no purpose. I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.*" (Isaiah 49:4) Have you ever felt like that? Without purpose, we have no passion.

On the other hand, purpose creates passion. The greater our purpose in life, the more passionate we're going to be about living; the more fully alive we're going to be. If we have some little dinky purpose, like, "I live for myself," we're not going to have much passion for life. If we have a medium sized purpose, we'll have a medium, moderate amount of passion. But if we get hold of God's purpose for our life, when we begin to see that we're a part of His kingdom, His plan, and we commit ourselves to His purpose for our life, we will have an enormous purpose, and that creates an enormous passion in our life. There's nothing more significant than being what God made us to be; doing what God made us to do; thinking like God made us to think. And when we tap into that, it creates a tremendous passion in our life.

Now know, without a doubt that God loves you, and God has a plan and a purpose for you. We need to get in touch with that purpose that we might have a renewed passion for life. John Maxwell wrote, "Success is waking up in the morning, whoever you are, however old or young, and bounding out of bed because there's something out there that you love to do, that you believe in, that you're good at -- something that's bigger than you are, and you can hardly wait to get at it again today. It's something you'd rather do, more than anything else in the whole world. You wouldn't give it up for money; it means more to you than money. And hopefully

it’s something that makes the world a better place for other people and not just yourself.” An unclear purpose will kill the passion in your life.

2. AN UNEMPLOYED TALENT

God has given us certain gifts, talents, and abilities. He put them in us for a purpose. If we are stuck in a job or a career that ignores our talent, that minimizes our talent, we are going to lose our passion for life. There’s a boredom factor at work. Studies have shown that up to seventy percent of all Americans are in the wrong job. They’re in jobs that they’re not shaped for, that do not use their potential or their talent. If you’ve got a job that uses thirty percent of your talent and abilities, that leaves a seventy percent boredom factor. No wonder we’re losing our passion. We’re not being used the way God intended for us to be used.

Now we will never find a job or career than uses one hundred percent of our talents. We’ve got more talents than can be utilized in any one job. To fulfill our potential, to complete the tasks for which we have been prepared, we need a ministry beyond our vocation. We need a ministry where we can use the talents that are not being used in our career. And when we find that ministry, we will discover the joy of using our talents. And we will find our passion.

God put us on earth for a purpose, and He has a place, a ministry for each of us. We discover that place by discovering what we’re good at, by finding our talents. For God wants us to do what we’re good at. 1 Corinthians 7:17 *“Each one of you should live his life with the gifts that the Lord has given him.”* We need to discover what we’re good at, and then we can find the place where we can use those talents and abilities.

If you are in a job that is draining the passion from your life because it’s not using your gifts, not using your talents and abilities, get out! Your life is far more important than that job. We live in America. We have a choice. Some countries are not free, and they just have to do what they’re told to do. But we have the freedom to choose. Don’t go to work tomorrow and say, “My pastor told me to quit so I’m out of here.” No! Plan for a change. Prepare for it. Say to yourself, “A year from now, I’m going to be...” And fill in the blank. But right now that job is paying the bills. You need food on the table. But you don’t have to stay there forever. So get in a position where you can use your talents to the glory of God. If you don’t, your passion will be depleted year after year. You’ll lose your zest, and you’ll lose your joy. Your life, your joy is more important than that job.

One of the purposes of the church is to help you find your place in life. God created the church, in part, to help us discover our talents and our spiritual gifts. We have a tool called PLACE, to help us understand our Personality, Learn about our Spiritual Gifts, Assess our Abilities, Connect that to our Passion, and Examine our Experiences. Some of our people have taken that already. If you are interested in taking that course, list it on the pew register, or give me a call. But know that when we discover our PLACE, the church and our world will be a much more joyful place. We will give glory to God because we will be doing what God created us to do.

The third passion killer is found on our calendar. It is,

3. AN UNBALANCED SCHEDULE

We all struggle with this one. Whether we’re overworked or underworked, either way, we tend to lose our passion. Because we need balance in our life. We need a balance between our input and our output. Some people are always giving out. There’s always someone to help. There’s always someone to serve. There’s always someone to share with. They’re always giving of themselves. But they’re never taking in, never taking the time to recharge. If you’re like that, you’re thinking, “I don’t want to listen to this. I just want to go home and take a nap!” You might be suffering from compassion fatigue. Eventually what happens, if you’re always

giving out, is that you just stop caring. You stop caring about yourself. Stop caring about other people. Maybe you even stop caring about God.

There’s a flip side to this, too. There are others who are always taking in. Attending another seminar. Going to another class. Listening to another tape. But never doing anything about it. Now I am a very big believer in Bible Study. But if we study the Bible and never do anything about it, never put the lessons and principles of scripture to work in our life, it can create a lack of passion for the Bible. The Bible is something to be done in our lives, to be a part of our life. Not just to look at.

Fortunately, God has given us a solution to both of these concerns. 1 Timothy 4:7 *“Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.”* It takes time and energy to keep ourselves spiritually fit. Often when I’m driving around, I see people running, trying to keep themselves physically fit. I wave to them from the comfort of my car. I’m friendly. But I don’t intend to join them. It’s good to be physically fit, but I know that I already have the body of god. I just have to become a Buddhist. But this verse reminds us of the importance of being spiritually fit. Just like it takes a balance to be physically fit - a balanced diet, a balanced exercise program - it also takes a balance in our lives to be spiritually fit.

We are spiritually fit when we balance the five purposes of God in our life. The purpose of worship - focusing on God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the purpose of fellowship - loving others and making a difference in their lives; the purpose of Discipleship, Prayer and Bible Study - letting the message make a difference in us; the purpose of ministry - serving others; and the purpose of outreach - telling others. When we balance those five purposes, we are able to be healthy spiritually. And when we are spiritually fit, our passion can be restored.

We have dealt with three passion killers. In two weeks we will look at four more. But as we go into this week, may we seek God’s purpose for our life. May we seek to employ all the talents we have been given. May we strive to find balance in our calendar, in our hearts, and in our faith. And in your life may it be so. Amen.