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Rekindling Passion

By Wayne Jacobsen

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Can you remember the last time you awoke in the middle of the night, not to anxiety or fear, but to Jesus' invitation to spend some time with him? Or when last God's presence was so real neither of you needed to say anything and the minutes raced by as if time itself no longer had significance? How about the last time being obedient to God landed you in hot water because someone misunderstood or because, "that's not the way we do things around here"?

There is nothing like the days when our passion to know God burns white-hot. No matter what life may throw at us, God shows himself bigger still making himself known in the most unexpected places. Living like that makes every day an adventure in Father's life and his work in you becomes far more real than the circumstances that try to pull you down.

During such times you search his Word, not because you should, but because you can't wait to see what God might have hidden there for you to discover that day. You get with other believers and find yourselves sharing the deepest secrets and struggles of your heart and end up praying together just to see what God might want to add to the discussion. When he puts someone on your heart you don't hesitate to contact them and find the timing was perfect, for both of you!

If you've experienced such times, you also know how easily they fade away. It happens so subtly that weeks, months or even years can go by before we realize we are just going through the motions of something that once had so much more life. Without ever making a conscious decision to do so we end up trading the dynamic relationship with the living God for religious activity that never satisfies our deepest hungers.

But it doesn't have to. Living in passionate love for Father is what he's offered us every day.

Where Are the Radicals?

Whenever God renews people in relationship with him, almost always a conflict results between them and those who control the religious institutions of the day. I saw it happen in the early days of the Charismatic renewal and the Jesus People revival. But it has also happened consistently throughout church history. Virtually every denomination that exists today began as a reaction to the loss of passion in the institutions of their day. Even when Jesus himself challenged people to think differently about God, he was spurned by the very people who thought they were serving his Father.

This cycle repeats itself because institutional needs and spiritual passions operate on two different planes.

Institutions champion safety, conformity and tradition. As such they can provide wonderful experiences and even helpful instruction about the living God. In the process, however, they can easily negate the risk, vulnerability and spontaneity that allow us the depth of relationship Jesus wants with each of us.

In the 70's and 80's, I knew so many people who hungered to see Jesus do something new in his church, so that corporate life would encourage people to know the living God, not supplant that hunger with order and routine. We risked the comfort of our institutions to seek ways to help people experience passionate relationship with the living God. Where are these people now? Amazingly they ended up back where they began, only now in institutions they control.

Alan Richardson, in *Who Builds the Church?* expresses the same dismay that I have often felt.

The pioneers, those men who in the late 60's had found no satisfaction in an institutional church, had gone full-circle. Ironically, many today stand in the pulpits of new "sanctuaries", bigger and better than they left 20 or so years ago. Yes, those same men who sought to be on a cutting edge that threatened to unsettle the security of the institution of those days, have now themselves settled for the security of structured, comfortable and well-ordered 'church'.

Please don't misunderstand that statement as a sweeping condemnation of the groups we call churches. I don't think that's Alan's intention or mine. The point here is not how we do church, but whether or not we are living in a daily, passionate love for God or whether we're ensnared in religious busyness that doesn't satisfy the passion with which we began.

Passion and comfort offer us two different journeys. Those who wonder why their passion has been lost, rarely consider that their need for safety, predictability and control has taken them down a different path. Recently I spoke with one pastor who admitted that he had been through his more radical days. Now he was managing a large congregation. "I know this isn't the best. I know it isn't taking me where I most wanted to go, but I've decided just to make the best of it."

I hurt for people like him who don't realize that Godly passion wasn't meant to start us down the road, but also to walk with us all the way to its end.

Passions Lost

So where does our passion go? Jesus told the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) to answer that question. He points out there what the early church also discovered to be true many people get a taste for God but don't see it through to its fullness. Four things rob people of their passion and leave them adrift in lifeless religion:

- A lack of understanding. Some experience God's love briefly, but never understand how to live in

that love. Instead of letting God live through them, they try to do things for him. That approach will allow the seeds of God's life to be snatched away by our own religious fervor. We cannot embrace God's life and passion by our own efforts. They will leave us empty.

- Trouble or persecution. Others find joy in God as long as times are good. Whenever difficult times come, they withdraw in fear that God will not be big enough to get them through it and change them in the process. In every circumstance we will always have two options either to entrust ourselves to God or to save ourselves from the discomfort he would use to teach us to depend on him. Those who chose comfort over the cross will find dry times ahead.
- The worries of life. They wear on us, don't they? Our jobs, family responsibilities, relationships, fears and uncertainties can take up the whole of our life if we let them. Whenever we slip into survival mode just getting through another week the demands of this life will choke our our passion just like weeds. Instead of sitting at his feet in trust that he'll take care of us, we will scheme to make things work out our way. Passion dies when we live to necessity and we'll always wonder where it went.
- The deceitfulness of wealth. "If I just had more money..." is at the root of wealth's deceit. You don't have to be rich to fall under it's spell. It is just as powerful for those who don't have enough, and think their lives would be fuller if they did. Jesus warned us that whenever we mix God and mammon, God's best for us is swallowed up by our need to survive. We'll do what our financial wisdom tells us is best and miss out on God's fullness.

C.S. Lewis said it best in *The Screwtape Letters*: "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that he is 'finding his place in it,' while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance build up in him a sense of really being at home in earth, which is just what we (demons) want."

Do you see any of these things disarming your passion? Join the club. These are the battles every believer fights, and those we cannot win. If you recognize yourself in these words, please don't try to change things on your own. Run to the only one who can restore your passion.

Passions Restored

If you've ever tried to restore your passion, you know there are lots of places to try: participate in the right church, read a good book, absorb a new tape series, attend a conference or retreat, or even follow someone else who has it. But you also know none of these will work. Yes, they might let you soar for a short time, but they cannot take you far.

I've only found one place to rekindle my spiritual passion at the feet of Jesus. Take a long walk, or sit down in an undisturbed place and pour out your heart to him. Tell him that the passion you desire to be the center of your life has faded away and that you want his help in uncovering it again.

Pray the scariest prayer of all: "God, whatever it takes, I want to know you with all my heart and live in an open, passionate relationship with you."

What? You're not feeling anything yet?

Good. Passion is not a feeling. It is not something he will just do at some given point. He wants to unwire you from ways you think about yourself and him that disarms his work in you. This will take some time, so don't despair in the process.

Just keep going to him; day after day, week after week, if need be. Sit in his presence. Tell him what you're really thinking. Learn how to see him again and how to recognize his heartbeat. Stop trying to get him to do what you want and trust that he knows well enough what needs to happen in your life and willingly surrender to whatever he wants to do.

Then, as if you heart were coals in the fireplace, his breath will fan you into flames again. Slowly your passion will begin to rise. You'll begin to see him in the smallest things. You'll see things about your life that you never thought could be there both your failures and his gifts. With either, you'll know you are safe enough to explore them in his presence and see what he has in mind for you.

Treasure each revelation of his with thanksgiving. Notice the conversations he leads you to, the people he puts on your heart to pray for or to contact. When he stirs your heart to do something, do it. When he challenges you to be still and do nothing, then do that.

And keep coming to him. Breathe a prayer in the shower. Talk to him while you're driving or walking down the hallway at work. Let him show you how to live in him every day not just for a brief time but every day for the rest of your life.

Going the Distance

Life in God is not a sprint. It's a long-distance run. Passion is what you need to get to the end of it.

I am encouraged to know that the same struggles I have staying passionate also infected the early church. The book of Hebrews was written to a group of believers who had been more passionate in their early days than they were when he wrote them.

He reminded them how they had faced persecution with joy, even when their property was taken and they were arrested. They didn't shrink back in fear, but stood boldly, knowing that their inheritance was not in this life, but in God himself.

But time had taken its toll. They were older now, but also far less passionate. The author sends them back to the only place they could find that boldness and confidence again to risk life with God. Like children

who needed to learn how to swim again, they needed encouragement to let go of the deck and trust their teacher to keep them afloat.

So he reminded them with a great roll call of faith men and women who had braved the harshest of circumstances because their vision of a more enduring city burned deep within them. That passion allowed them to go through anything and only grow in their love for God and by doing so only further demonstrate that they were not at home in the world at all.

Then he called them to the highest place: "Fix your eyes on Jesus..." Get them off of your comfort in this age. Get them off of what other people are doing or what they think of you. Get them off of yourself and your own failures. Behold the living God!

He both began the work in you and will perfect it concerning you. Read the story of his life again and again, seeing how he endured such hostility because of a greater joy before him. Watch him love the Father more than anything this life offered him and how it drew him ever-closer to his Father. See him enthroned at God's right hand, already victorious, and know that nothing about God's will concerning you need ever be in doubt again.

Today a fresh call has gone out from the Father's heart. He seeks a generation of men and women who will allow him to enflame their hearts with his love so that he can demonstrate his glory in the earth.

Do you hear him calling you? Listen to him. Put down this article and just wait in his presence. What do you hear him saying to you?

If you've never known such spiritual passion in your every-day life, now is the time to turn your heart toward him and ask him for it.

If you're one of those who've tasted it before, come drink again. You, who were pioneers in earlier days of renewal, don't think he's shelved you now. God has a place for you alongside younger men and women who hunger to see what you have already seen.

Allow Jesus to fan you into flame againblowing off the ashes that have covered up your passion and letting his Spirit re-ignite the depth of your love for him. Let him lead you through disappointed expectations, personal failures and places where other believers hurt or rejected you.

This is a time for people to arise who are passionate in their love for God. The finest hour of his work does not have to lie behind you. He has greater plans ahead.

Come with me, will you and let's run after him with joy all the way to heaven's gate.

Quote:

"Let me just tell you what Jesus is all about. It's about unconditional love and being willing to be crucified. And if you don't like the game, join another religion." -- Tony Campolo Quoted in On Being Magazine

Sidebar #1: Church or Jesus?

A friend recently told me about a conversation he was having with another believer whom he had just met. They had spent an hour sharing about Jesus and the impact he was having on their lives. Toward the end of the conversation the other one asked my friend what church he went to.

My friend paused a moment, certain his new acquaintance wouldn't understand the nonstructured environment with which he now gathered with other believers. He finally said, "We've spent the last hour talking about the one who unifies all things in himself. Do we really want to switch now and talk about the one thing that has caused the most division among his followers how we gather for church?"

I don't think so!

Sidebar #2: Tribulation for Breakfast?

The church has been through many a plague, famine, fire and sword in the last 2,000 years. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is no "cry baby." She is the toughest lady in the universe, and eats tribulation for breakfast. She does not fear. She is feared!

What kind of Christian teaching depicted this lady as afraid of anything? This woman, the Bride of Christ, the daughter of God, is afraid of nothing!

What kind of God have you? That is the wrong question. What kind of church have you? This lady, named Ekklesia, is the scourge of Satan, the terror of demons. This lady- and never forget this- this is the gal who kicks down the gates of hell.

This lady shines in adversity! This woman, the fiancée of Jesus Christ, is made for trouble. She uses famine, pestilence, war, recessions and depressions to show forth her triumphant Lord... and to bring glory to His name. She had done so before, she will do so in this (coming) depression. This is her hour!

--- From Economic Doomsday By Gene Edwards

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