

## ***Get Your Passion Back***

I heard a story this past week about a pastor of a very large church. He was explaining how he was saved in college. He went from being the typical frat boy living for parties and girls until he met Jesus. Everything changed in his life. Very early on in his relationship with God he felt called to become a pastor. The problem was that he had no experience and graduated with a business degree not a degree in Theology. But he would never forget his first opportunity to participate in a pastoral role. He was attending a Methodist church, and the pastor invited him to lead the service in the Apostles Creed. He was so excited about it that he invited his parents, his in laws, his college buddies to all come and listen to him deliver the Apostle Creed. He was able to do this faithful for years. Around the third year, he was heading to church with his wife and said, "I am so tired, but I have to go do the Apostles Creed." The wife began to laugh and then challenge him saying, "Do you realize that the thing you were once praying for is now the thing you are complaining about?"

Isn't it amazing how easy it can be to lose our passion and zeal for the Lord and His church? Everyone in this room has dealt with moments in your walk with God where you felt dry, distant, or that you were no longer passionate about your faith. There are thousands of books, devotionals, and conferences designed to refresh you and help keep the fire going. And as we are now ending the month of February or as I like to call it, "National give up on your New Year's Resolution month," I want to encourage you today on how to get your passion back for the Lord.

Why do we lose our passion in the first place? The first reason is pretty obvious...sin. You go to the things of the world rather than God when you are stressed or tempted away. Sin is like splashing water on the flame you are called to tend to. The second reason we seem to lose our passion is impatience. When we fail to surrender to God's timing, we then try to make things work out for ourselves. We come up with our own solutions or give up all together. The third reason why we lose our passion is because we are bored. It's been four months since our two-year-old puppy tragically passed away. Last Sunday we brought home a new puppy. Here is a little picture for you. Her name is Pam. I'll let Nikki explain to you why she named a miniature schnauzer "Pam." But when a new puppy gets introduced into your home, everything changes. Before the puppy, my one-year-old dog had everything dialed in. If she needed to go potty at 3am she would walk downstairs and go out the doggy door, do her business, and then come back up and snuggle with me again. But with a new puppy, I am the doggy door. One thing about puppies is that they constantly need new things to chew on and play with. You have to keep reintroducing new things to keep the dog entertained so that it doesn't go after your shoes or electrical cables. I have a concern that the church of Jesus Christ has gone from Holy Spirit breathed encounters to entertainment-driven services. Pastors fear losing members, so they keep coming up with new ways to attract people with methods that look like the world but are not. If people get bored, then they will leave the church. So rather than create an atmosphere where God's presence and power is intensified, they turn to proven methods and programs to "one up" the church down the street. LED screens, smoke machines, and skinny jeans. It bothers me so much. I know of so many churches that do this gimmick called "At the movies." They take secular movies and turn them into teaching series. They have costumes and popcorn and the whole point is to bring your unsaved friends and family to a non-offensive environment where they can ease their way into the church. I'm sorry but we live in a world where we have to fight

to not have drag queens reading to our elementary aged kids. Do you think they create non-offensive ways to ease people into LGBT? I grew up next to a gang leaders house in Southern California. I lost friends to shoot outs and gang wars. Do you think the Vista Homeboys have a program to ease people into their gang? No. You join a gang by getting jumped in. They beat the snot out of you to prove your loyalty to the gang and the only way out is death. If you join a gang, you know what you are signing up for. The church of Jesus Christ is putting up a front and telling people that church is a fix-all country club that requires no inconvenience or responsibility. I'm sorry but Christianity is a call to die to yourself, forsake all things of this world, face persecution, and love for one thing, which is the presence of God.

You can tell that you have had an encounter with the presence of the Living God by how you respond to things on Monday morning. It is so nice to get Holy Spirit goosebumps in worship. It is so nice to "amen" the preacher during the sermon. It is so nice to drink coffee and catch up with your spiritual family. But if you had an encounter with God on Sunday, Monday should look different. Monday won't intimidate you.

A year and a half ago Nikki really wanted to go to a specific conference. The church of one of her favorite worship artists was hosting the event. I will be really honest with you; I didn't want to go. The church was a young church meaning it was going to be loud, everyone would be all about sneakers and fashion, and it was one of those aerobic churches. The kind that run and dance non-stop. A little holy mosh pit. I just made myself sound so old. I didn't want to go. But I am so grateful I went. It was there that I discovered what a church would look like if everything about the church was presence-driven rather than entertainment-driven. For three days I lingered in the presence of God and heard one sermon after another all about living a life that ministers to Him. Let me tell you, that moment with God marked me to the point where I have given the rest of my life to pursue this one thing. I am pastor and have preached for over 20 years. I have been to every conference and read every book and I am telling you every time I go to another church or a conference, I want to be in a service that will help me to encounter God. If someone preaches a sermon to me, I want it to be about having a deeper encounter with God. I want to be moved. And here's the thing. I want to be moved by the presence of God not another program.

I love the story in 1 Samuel 5 where the Philistines defeat Israel and capture the Ark of God (which was the very presence of the Lord). They put the Ark in the temple of Dagon and discovered the next morning that Dagon had fallen over, almost in worship of the Ark. They set their god back up (how sad when you have to help your god when he has fallen). The next day Dagon had fallen again only this time his head and arms fell off and just his trunk remained. The Philistines began to fear God and after a series of rats and tumors they sent the Ark of God back on a new cart with offerings and gifts. Fast forward several decades in 2 Samuel 6 King David want to house the presence of God to have a place of 24/7 worship and ministry to the Lord. So, David called for the Ark to be brought back to Jerusalem. You see, here was the problem. David brought the Ark back on a new cart. The new cart was not a God idea it was a Philistine idea. The Old Testament has very clear instructions on how to move the Ark. It wasn't supposed to be moved on a cart, it was supposed to be carried with golden poles on the shoulders of the priests. David had the right intentions on bringing the presence of God back where it belonged, but for some reason decided to use secular methods to do so. Then Uzzah reaches out because this "new cart" was tripping and he tried to steady it. The result was that he was killed because he did not

revere the Ark. I hope you are seeing it. You can have the right intentions, but if you use worldly methods the result will be death.

If you have lost your passion for the Lord or if you have good intentions but have been using worldly methods, I have good news for you today. The good news is that Jesus has given us the recipe for getting our passion back. If you have your Bible, go with me to the book of Revelation chapter 2 beginning at verse 1:

*“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’ – Revelation 2:1-7 NASB1995*

Most commentaries say that the “angel” is really the pastor of these churches in the first chapters of Revelation. Jesus is literally giving a personally letter to these churches, which I find so fascinating. Ephesus was doing well. They were doing good works for the Lord and not tolerating false prophets and have not grown weary in persecution. But Jesus says, you have lost your love. Your passion has died down. Your affections have turned to other things. Then Jesus gives them a recipe almost to get their passion and love for Him back. They are the following:

#### **POINT #1 – Remember where you have fallen.**

When you were a kid and you lost something, I bet you went to your mother and asked if she knew where it was. Most moms would say something like, “Well, where was the last place you remember seeing it?” Moms will try to help their kids work through the problem by helping them to think and remember. If a kid loses something, he didn’t really lose it...he *left it* somewhere. Christians don’t really lose their passion, they leave it. The church at Ephesus was doing all the right things but, in their hearts, they had lost their passion. Jesus tells them to remember where they had fallen.

If you want to get your passion and love back for the Lord, it is going to take a little work. Proverbs 11:2 says, “with pride comes dishonor, but with the humble comes wisdom.” Beginning your journey of getting your passion and love back to the Lord begins with humility. You need to understand you made an error and then humble seek the Lord for revelation on the matter. Luke 6 tells us that a good tree will produce good fruit and a bad tree will produce bad fruit. If you are producing the bad fruit of losing your passion, you need to seek the Lord in prayer and discover what the root of that bad tree was. As I mention at the start of this message, there are many different things that can lead to losing your passion. Maybe you have falling into a bad sin pattern, and it has led you to lose your passion. Maybe it is a fear that you have nursed in your

heart, and you have given all your attention to the fear and not the Lord. Maybe there is an offense you are holding onto, and it is killing the passion you have for the Lord. Whatever it may be, you need to identify it so that the Lord can speak to you about it.

## **POINT #2 – Repent of your failure.**

Once you establish what led you to lose your passion you can then repent. Repenting means turning away from what you were pursuing to then pursue God. It also includes renewing your mind. You confess your sin, renew your mind, and purpose yourself to follow the Lord. I have mentioned almost every week that sin will not make God love you any less, but it will make you love God less. Another word for passion is “enthusiasm.” This is a compound word made up of “en” which means “in” and “Theos” which means “God.” To be enthusiastic literally means to be in God. When you repent of your sin, you turn back to God and the result is that passion begins to be built up.

You can pray and fast all day and night for passion to be restored in your heart, but if you do not do anything about it, it will never come. The Scriptures say, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Notice that you are the one taking the initiative. Because we have free will, it is up to us to decide to get our passion back. But the good news is that God has given us the promise. If we will resolve in our mind to pursue and draw near to Him, we will find what we are searching for.

## **POINT #3 – Redo the good you did before.**

In addiction therapy they say recovery is easy. It is like eating tiger soup. The hardest part about the whole process is catching the tiger. The tiger is a symbol of taking that first step is stopping. Once you are all in and have committed the rest is downhill. From there it is maintenance and focus. The same as riding a bike...the first pedal is very difficult and moving is slow at first. But once you get a little speed, continued pedaling is very easy. I love that Jesus shows the church of Ephesus their fault in losing their passion. And what is absolutely amazing to me is that Jesus doesn't tell them to start a prayer service. He doesn't tell them to fast. He doesn't preach a sermon to them. What Jesus commands them to do, is to do something. Oh, you are struggling with being consistent in your prayer life. Great, pray right now. You are struggling to read the Bible every day? Great read a chapter right now. Jesus tells them to do the deeds they did at first.

If you are serious about getting your passion back, you need to get serious about your deeds. Here's an example, I have said multiple times that I am a get all the hard stuff done so that at the end of the day I can rest with a clear conscience. Usually that's about 7-8pm for me. That's when I snuggle with my puppy, watch a show with Nikki, and then put my headphones in and get lost in YouTube. You can learn so many things and research so many interesting things on YouTube and I could do it for hours. And you know what? I earned it. But I want to be serious about my passion for the Lord. So, I do the 50/50 rule. If I spend 15 minutes on Youtube, I need to spend 15 minutes on “Jesus content.” I'll watch a sermon, conference session, worship music, or podcast. Then I go back to my exploring. I've done all my studying for the day. I've said all my prayers. I've worked in the office all day. I don't have to keep studying more of the Lord...but I

want to increase my passion and preach message that mean something. If that is my desire then I have to put in the work of going above and beyond.

If you don't change anything in your given day, then nothing will change. Wow, mind blowing right? Here's the encouragement. Start small. When you go on errands play only worship music. If you watch TV with commercials, have an open Bible and read during the commercials. If you are struggling in a specific area in your life buy a book on that topic and study up. Make a phone call every week to a someone more mature in the faith than you and talk life for a half hour. You will be absolutely amazed at how fast things can change when you apply small deeds. One of the greatest feelings in the world is the feeling of joy over the fruit you produced in your life by going hard after God.