

**Today I want to talk with you about PASSION.** By PASSION I don't mean what you see in a soap opera on television. Instead, I'm referring to a different kind of passion, which is a desire that God gives you to serve Him and others in a specific way.

**What is PASSION?** The dictionary defines it as *a strong enthusiasm or desire to do something*. Jay McSwain defines it this way: PASSION is *where you would give your time to serve people if money or the opinion of others were not factors, something that energizes you to the point that simply doing it is your reward*.

**One way God reveals His unique purpose and calling in your life is through YOUR HEART.**

**Your heart helps you know WHERE God wants you to serve Him...just like your spiritual gifts help you know WHAT kind of service God desires of you.** God will give you a burning desire to serve Him in a particular way, and thereby show you the unique contribution He wants you to make in His Kingdom work in this world

**To identify your God-given passion, ask yourself these questions:**

1. *What do I love to do?*
2. *What do I really care about?*
3. *What is important to me? (NOT to somebody else but to you!)*

**Let me try to illustrate what I mean by PASSION. Six of my passions are Levi, Jonah, Caleb, Rian, Jack, and Kylie--my six grandchildren.** They live in Kansas, Maryland, and Massachusetts. I will pay \$500 to fly and see them for just two or three days. I would almost never have spent that money on airfare before they were born, but I do now. Let me take it a step further...

**I'm going to confess something now...I HATE video games; I'd almost rather go to the dentist than play a video game. It's probably because I'm not very good at it.** Now I don't have anything against video games personally, except when they're too violent. But you know what?

If one of my grandchildren asks me to play a video game, I'll play that video game with him all day if they want to. WHY? Because I am passionate about sharing life with my babies' babies!

**God will give you an enthusiasm and energy for doing what He has uniquely created you to do.** Our word "enthusiasm" comes from two words meaning "God in you." The Lord will give you motivation to fulfill the special purpose He has for you.

**What comes to your mind when I say these names? James Dobson. Billy Graham. Mother Teresa. Martin Luther King Jr.** To me it's quite obvious. They all have had a passion for serving God and others in a particular way. They all had a dream, a calling, a burden to do something for God.

**For James Dobson, it was the family;** for Billy Graham, it was the lost; for Mother Teresa, it was lepers and abandoned children; for Martin Luther King Jr., it was civil rights for his people.

**Let me ask you something: Is there ANYTHING or ANYONE in this world that God doesn't care about passionately?** Of course NOT! But you and I cannot care about everyone and everything like God does. We're not gods; we can only be in one place at a time.

**Since God has chosen to work primarily through His people, He gives each of us a piece of His heart, a driving concern for some part of His creation and work.** It is God's design that each of us cares more about some things than other things. If all of us had the same passion for the same thing, a lot of needs would go unmet. God gives each of us a compelling desire to make a difference in this world SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, for SOMEBODY. This is part of His plan and purpose for us.

**It might be helpful for you to think of your God-given PASSION as an AREA where you can make a difference for God.** It may be a passion for a PEOPLE GROUP like the homebound or the homeless, like children or the elderly, like migrants or the unchurched. It may be a passion for a PARTICULAR ISSUE OR CAUSE like the environment or abortion or world hunger and poverty. It may be a passion for a particular MINISTRY or PROGRAM in the church or the community, like small group ministry or tutoring or mentoring at-risk students—which is a great need at Greenfield Elementary School right now. It can also be a passion for a PARTICULAR ROLE or FUNCTION like prayer, worship, mediation, or trouble-shooting.

**Allow me now to share MY JOURNEY OF PASSION.** As far back as I can remember, I've always found joy and fulfillment in helping others. My mother was a nurse, and my father was a medical aide during World War II. By age nine, I had decided I wanted to be a physician, and after high school I began pre-medical studies at the University of Virginia.

**During my last semester of pre-med at UVA, I finally admitted to myself something that I had been denying: I DID NOT LIKE MEDICAL STUDIES AND THE FIELD OF MEDICINE.** This threw me for a loop. I had taken and passed my medical college admission tests and was soon going for my final interview at the UVA School of Medicine. I didn't know what to do. I just kept praying that God would close the wrong doors and open the right door for me.

**One spring morning I was walking down the Lawn behind the Rotunda for an early morning class at UVA, and I had a SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.** It was not audible or visible, but I felt God's presence. In the depths of my soul, the Lord said to me: *ROY, I WANT YOU TO BE A PASTOR.* It was that specific and just as real as my talking with you today...*ROY, I WANT YOU TO BE A PASTOR.*

**I wasn't able to understand this new calling rationally.** All of my studies had been in science and math. And as I told you last week, I was scared to death of speaking publicly in front of people. It just didn't make sense to me. But in the ensuing weeks, I decided to enter the Christian ministry.

**Not long after my experience with God on the UVA lawn, I got a call from a little church in Greene County, Virginia, asking if I would come and supply preach for them.** I did and in two months they called me to be their pastor.

**Now I was as green as green could be.** I had not been to seminary and had no pastoral experience. I hadn't even had a single class in religion or biblical studies.

**But you know what?** Those people loved me, supported me, and guided me. In 18 months there, we baptized more than a dozen people, and church attendance doubled. Much more significantly I loved what I was doing. It was very natural to me, and God even began empowering me to preach. It wasn't a burden like medicine had been. It was a joy. I found fulfillment in what I was doing. In time I finished college, went to seminary, and was pastor of three different churches over the next 35 years until I became an intentional interim minister seven years ago.

**Every day I sought to do the most ministry for the most people the best I could.**

Through a study of Ephesians, I came to see that my primary job as pastor was NOT to do ministry; it was to train ministers. It was to equip church members for ministry. Still today it gives me great joy and fulfillment to help others discover the unique purpose and ministry that God has designed them for. THAT'S WHAT THIS SERMON SERIES IS ALL ABOUT—helping each of you discern more clearly what God has uniquely created you to do for Him.

**More than a decade ago, I learned about INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY.** I had never planned to leave the installed pastorate, but God just kept keeping it before me. In 2005 I resigned my position at the church I had served as pastor for 28 years and went back to school at the Center for Congregational Health at Wake Forest University Medical Center.

**And guess what? I love intentional interim ministry.** God has given me a real passion for this kind of work. My life mission now is to help churches and individual Christians become more healthy and missional and discover and do the unique calling God has for them. BOTTOM LINE: I've learned that God really does give you enthusiasm and energy for what He wants you to do.

**I also need to tell you that there are people who will hinder your pursuit of God's unique purpose in your life.** Sometimes other people can cause you to suppress your passion and God's call when they say to you:

- *Why on earth would you want to do that?*
- *You're not smart enough (or old enough or spiritual enough).*
- *But you're a woman! You've got children!*
- *What would your family think?*
- *You're too old. You don't have enough education.*
- *You don't have the money.*

**Don't let other people push you into something ...and don't let them hold you back either.**

Your purpose is not to please people; it is to please God and serve Him.

**Stephen Covey is the renowned author of the book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.** He has also written another book entitled **The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit**. In it Covey says that all of us have an innate desire to leave a legacy, to make a difference in the world before we die. It is an inner longing to live a life of contribution. It's when LIFE BECOMES A MISSION and NOT A

CAREER. It is finding your inner voice and helping others to find theirs. I call this "God's unique calling in your life."

**God will give you a strong desire and energy to serve Him in the place and way that He wants you to serve Him.** And how can you know what YOUR passions and interests are? LISTEN TO YOUR HEART. Complete an assessment tool like the one you received when you came into worship today. I encourage you to work through the questions on this PASSION ASSESSMENT. Your homework and personal reflection will be more important than anything I might say to you as you search for God's unique passion and purpose in your life.

**This isn't rocket science. If you have a passion for children, work with children.** If you have a passion for older people, work with senior adults. If you have a passion for music or art, find an avenue to glorify God and edify others in these ways.

**And don't worry...God will show you where and how He wants you to serve Him and others.** He has written it on your heart. So listen to your heart!

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank you that you have put in each of our hearts a passion to know you and serve you. In these days ahead, continue to clarify your unique purpose for each of our lives and lead us into that unique service you want us to do for You. We pray in the name of Jesus, who came not to be served, to serve. Amen.

**Invitation:** God has both a common calling and a unique calling in your life. His common call is for you to trust and follow Jesus Christ as the way of and to God. You may come forward today to say YES to Christ, to ask for baptism or church membership, or to share a prayer need in your life.