

Apostolic Passion

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What is apostolic passion?

The term "passion" is used to describe everything from romance to hunger pangs. I don't know what it means to you, but for me passion means whatever a person is willing to suffer for. In fact, that's the root meaning of the word. It comes from the Latin *paserre*, to suffer. It is what you hunger for so intensely that you will sacrifice anything to have it. The word "apostle" means a sent one, a messenger. "Apostolic passion," therefore, is a deliberate, intentional choice to live for the worship of Jesus in the nations. It has to do with being committed to the point of death to spreading His glory. It's the quality of those who are on fire for Jesus, who dream of the whole earth being covered with the glory of the Lord.

I know when apostolic passion has died in my heart. It happens when I don't spend my quiet time dreaming of the time when Jesus will be worshiped in languages that aren't yet heard in heaven. I know it's missing from my life when I sing about heaven, but live as if earth is my home. Apostolic passion is dead in my heart when I dream more about sports, toys, places to go and people to see, than I do about the nations worshiping Jesus.

I have lost it, too, when I make decisions based on the danger involved, not the glory God will get. Those who have apostolic passion are planning to go, but willing to stay. You know you have it when you are deeply disappointed that God has not called you to leave your home and get out among those who have never heard His name. If you will not suffer and sacrifice for something, you are not passionate about it. If you say you will do anything for Jesus, but you don't suffer for Him—then you aren't really passionate about Him and His purposes on earth.

If you don't have it, how do you go about getting this thing called apostolic passion? Is it like ordering pizza—at the door in 30 minutes or less, guaranteed? Is there an 800 number to call? Or better yet, just send us your special gift of \$15 or more, and we'll rush you some passion, express delivery, overnight mail. If you're like me, you need help figuring out how to grow this thing called passion. I am motivated by reading how the apostle Paul got it. He chose it.

Paul says in Romans 15 that it is his ambition—his passion, if you will—to make Christ known. It began for him with a revelation of Jesus that he nurtured all his adult life.

Paul not only encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, he kept on meeting Jesus every day. This revelation of Jesus, and his study of God's purposes, gave birth to Paul's apostolic passion. Knowing Jesus and making Him known consumed the rest of Paul's life. He "gloried in Christ Jesus in his service to God" (Rom 15:17). By comparison, everything else was dung, garbage, stinking refuse. Paul's ambition was born from his understanding that God longed for His Son to be glorified in the nations. It was focused so that the "Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16).

Human enthusiasm cannot sustain apostolic passion. When God invests His own passion in you—the desire to see His name glorified among all people—you must build and develop what God has given you. Four things will help:

1. Apostolic Abandonment

Too many people want the fruit of Paul's ministry without paying the price that Paul paid. He died. He died to everything. He died daily. He was crucified with Christ. This strong-willed, opinionated man knew that he must die to self. He knew that in his flesh, he couldn't generate the revelation of Jesus; he couldn't sustain the heart of Christ. So he died. He abandoned his life. He abandoned himself.

We live in a world of competing passions. If we do not die to self and fill our lives with the consuming passion of the worship of God in the nations, we will end up with other passions. It's possible to deceive ourselves into thinking we have biblical passions when, in reality, all we have done is to baptize the values of our culture and give them Christian names. We will have chosen apostolic passion only when our hearts are filled with God's desire for His Son to be worshiped in the nations.

May I encourage you, dear friend, to give up your life? I challenge you to pray this prayer: "Lord, be ruthless with me in revealing my selfish ambition and my lack of willingness to die to myself." I guarantee that He will answer your prayer—and quickly.

2. Apostolic Focus

The greatest enemy of the ambition to see Jesus worshiped in the nations is lack of

focus. You can run around expending energy on all sorts of good ministries, and not get one step closer to the nations. I don't have anything against all the projects and ministries out there—God's people do them, and I don't question their obedience to God. But the Church has an apostolic calling, an apostolic mission. God has called us to the nations. We must focus, or we won't obey.

Focus on what? I believe God wants a people for Himself. Activity without a desire that God have a people for Himself is just activity—not missions. You can have evangelism without missions. Short-term ministries are great, as long as they focus on raising up workers to plant churches. You might say, "I'm not called to plant churches." Yes, you are! It's always the will of God to have a people who worship His Son in the nations. You'll never have to worry about making God mad if you try to plant a church. It seems crazy to me that people are under the delusion they need a special calling to save souls, to disciple them, and to get them together to love Jesus. Whatever ministry you are with, you must understand one thing: church planting is not for us, it's for God. We do it so God will have a people to worship Him!

3. Apostolic Praying

A young man in Bible school offered to help David Wilkerson years ago when he was ministering on the streets of New York City. Wilkerson asked him how much time he spent in prayer. The young student estimated about 20 minutes a day. Wilkerson told him, "Go back, young man. Go back for a month and pray two hours a day, every day for 30 days. When you've done that, come back. Come back, and I might consider turning you loose on the streets where there is murder, rape, violence and danger...If I sent you out now on 20 minutes a day, I'd be sending a soldier into battle without any weapons, and you would get killed."

You can get into heaven, my friend, without a lot of prayer. You can have a one-minute quiet time every day and God will still love you. But you won't hear a "well done, good and faithful servant" on one-minute conversations with God. And you certainly can't make it on that kind of prayer life in the hard places where Jesus is not known or worshiped.

Here's a challenge for you: Read everything Paul says about prayer, then ask yourself, "Am I willing to pray like that?" Paul said that he prayed "night and day...with tears...without ceasing...with thankfulness...in the Spirit...constantly...boldly...for godly sorrow...against the evil one."

4. Apostolic Decision-Making

If you live without a vision of the glory of God filling the whole earth, you are in danger of serving your own dreams of greatness, as you wait to do "the next thing" God tells you. There are too many over-fed, under-motivated Christians hiding behind the excuse that God has not spoken to them. They are waiting to hear voices or see dreams—all the while living to make money, to provide for their future, to dress well and have fun.

The Apostle Paul was guided by his passions. Acts 20 and 21 tell of his determination to go to Jerusalem despite his own personal anticipation of suffering, the warnings of true prophets, and the intense disapproval of his friends. Why would Paul go against his own intuition—let alone the urgings of prophets and weeping entreaties of close friends? He had a revelation of greater priority, of greater motivation: the glory of God.

Apostolic decision-making starts with a passion for God's glory in the nations, then asks: "Where shall I serve you?" Most people do the opposite. They ask the where-and-when questions without a revelation of His glory in the nations. Is it any wonder they

never hear God say "go!" They have not cultivated a passion for the passions of God. All kinds of lesser desires can be holding them captive. They might never realize it.

Present your gifts, vocations and talents to the Lord. Press into God. Stay there until you long to go out in His Name. Remain there and nurture the longing to see the earth bathed with His praise. Only then will you be able to trust your heart if you hear God say, "stay." Only those who long to broadcast His glory to the nations have the right to stay.

If you have apostolic passion, you are one of the most dangerous people on the planet. The world no longer rules your heart. You are no longer seduced by getting and gaining but devoted to spreading and proclaiming

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the glory of God in the nations. You live as a pilgrim, unattached to the cares of this world. You are not afraid of loss. You even dare to believe you may be given the privi-

lege of dying to spread His fame on the earth. The Father's passions have become your passions. You find your satisfaction and significance in Him. You believe He is with you always, to the end of life itself. You are sold out to God, and you live for the Lamb. Satan fears you, and the angels applaud you.

Your greatest dream is that His Name will be praised in languages never before heard in heaven. Your reward is the look of pure delight you anticipate seeing in His eyes when you lay at His feet the just reward of His suffering: the worship of the redeemed.

You have apostolic passion! ❖

Study Questions

1. McClung implies that passion has more to do with values than emotions. How is this different from the way the word "passion" is commonly used?
2. McClung suggests that everyone is called to see that churches are planted among all peoples. Is he saying that everyone must make an effort to go as a missionary? Or is he saying that God's desire for glory summons every believer to do all they can for His glory?
3. What relationship is there between passion and willingness to suffer?