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Passion and Purpose. Hope and Charity Part I

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A slogan entitled “Passion,” which hangs in my office, states: “Many things will catch your eye. Only a few will catch your heart. Pursue those!” As men and women hurl themselves headlong into life, they are mostly driven by necessity, that which immediately appears to be essential, rather than by passion, which is birth of one’s purpose for and in life. In fact, Americans have become so unaccustomed to the caring manifested by passion, they often associate passion with irrationality, bigotry, fanaticism or extremism. When most people think about “passion,” they envision some steamy scene from a television sitcom. But, passion is not simply sexual excitation, although the word can be used in that way.

Passion in its essence is an “intense, driving feeling; a strong liking for or devotion to some activity or concept.” Passion is what makes a person get up early in the morning, work hard all day, and go to bed late at night looking forward to the next day. It is a cause of great sadness that today’s society is so devoid of true purpose-driven passion. Speaking to a group of young people, I told them, “If I could give you one gift, it would be the gift of passion: the caring about something with such enthusiasm and intensity as to give purpose and meaning to the rest of your life.” Many Americans only vicariously experience passion through the eyes and lives of athletes, movie stars, or musicians. Ultimately, passion and purpose are what make life worth living.

How does a person develop passion? Passion is not an end product, because it is a derivative of purpose. A passionless person is purposeless, and a person with a purpose for life will by the nature of their purpose be passionate. In another age, the Apostle Paul said, “For my determined purpose is...” The entirety of Paul’s life was directed toward his purpose, which he could identify and which he could explain to others. And, his purpose gave direction, drive, determination and definition to his life. Paul’s purpose was that he might know – that he might have personal, intimate knowledge of his God and his Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul’s confession points out that only one’s God is worthy to be one’s purpose for life from which purpose comes one’s passion. Everyone has a God whom they serve, even if they don’t know it. Actually, passion and purpose can be directed toward good or evil. Terrorists have a purpose and a passion, but it is evil and misguided, no matter what the goal. Compulsive gamblers have a passion, driven by a senseless purpose, which destroys their lives. And, each person, whether or not they know it, worships the object of their passion, whether a habit, an organization, a government, an ideal, or a Being.

In her book, *The Temple Bombing*, Melissa Fay Greene chronicles the October 12, 1958 bombing of the Reformed Jewish Temple in Atlanta, Georgia, which was portrayed in the movie, *Driving Miss Daisy*. Opposite the title page of Greene’s book there is a quote from

Gates of Heaven; it states:

“The gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And a person will worship something, have no doubt of that either. One may think that tribute is paid in secret, in the dark recesses of his or her heart, but it is not. That which dominates imagination and thoughts will determine life and character. Therefore it behooves us to be careful what we are worshipping, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

It is true: one’s passion, determined by one’s purpose for life, will be reflected in one’s countenance, conduct, character and companions.

Also, hanging in my office are four etchings by Dale Rayburn. Entitled, *Southern Disciples*, the etchings depict four men’s worn faces which reflect the image of the god they served. One entitled, *Tequila*, portrays the deeply furrowed brow of a man whose best friend is a bottle. The furrows reflect the scars and ravages of alcohol in one whose life was lived serving that god. Another entitled, *Dinner in the Park*, depicts a lonely man, eating a cold meal from a can, having lived in service to the gods of indolence and sloth. A third entitled, *Echo*, reflects the shadows of the life of a man who now sits alone on a retaining wall, looking over an empty valley. His life and face “echo” the emptiness of a life lived in the worship of the god of self, in neglect of personal relationships, in one who is alone in the world. The fourth, entitled, *Blind man’s Bluff* shows a man strumming a guitar, with sun glasses concealing the emptiness of his eyes, which can no longer see the dimensions of the passion of his youth, eyes which stare but cannot see. These disciples of strange gods reveal the truth that purposelessness in life leads to a life without passion and without hope.

Each human being will give his or her life to something, whether worthy or not. The sad reality is that even passivity can become one’s passion, when purpose in and for life is neglected long enough. Out of such passivity come depression, despondence and ultimately death. Often that death is not physical, but is found in the death of one’s dreams, hopes, aspirations – of one’s purpose for life -- which at one time seemed so focused, but which was lost through fear, sloth, or lust. These images of vacuous lives and faces reveal that passion and purpose are not possible without hope. Neglected long enough, one’s purpose and passion give rise to hopelessness, which is the death knell of joy, peace and vitality.

Purpose, passion and hope are not synonyms, but they are interdependent, for you cannot have one without the other. “Purpose” gives dimension and definition to life, but the power to pursue purpose is provided by hope and is sustained by passion. Without hope, purpose will not be pursued, and passion will not be experienced.

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