

# Paul: The Principle of a Passionate Life

*Acts 26, Ephesians 3:7, 1 Timothy 1:12-15*

Good morning, men. So we're in this series How God Makes Men. But, before we get started this morning let's do a couple of shout outs. First to the Kirkland Men's Group, 8-12 men meeting Sunday mornings at 9:00am before church at Kirkland United Methodist of Kirkland, IL. They are lead by Ronald Johnson. Welcome guys.

And then also Men With Impact, a group that is just starting up of 16 men that just finished No Man Left Behind and are beginning the Journey to Biblical Manhood. They meet at MT Louisa House of Praise in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. They are lead by Graham Wood.

So I wonder if you would join me in welcoming these guys to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. One, two, three hoorah! Welcome guys, we are glad to have you with us.

Okay, you should be at Acts 26. Men, listen to me. We live in a city that is literally bulging with bold men who are passionately living for the glory of Jesus Christ. These men are just literally overflowing with a sense of purpose, of meaning and joy, though not without struggle nor opposition. These men are absolutely convinced that their lives are making a difference. You might be one of these men. Are you? Maybe you were one of these men and you lost that passion. Are you? Or maybe you are a man who has seen some of these other men and you want what they have, but you have not yet found it. We're going to take a look at leading a passionate life this morning, the principle of a passionate life. That's the subject for today. The title of the message is *Paul: The Principle of a Passionate Life*. And this is the Big Idea for today:

**God makes men by igniting and sustaining a passion within us to love and serve Jesus.**

## **The Passion of Paul**

Now, no man in the Bible is more bold or passionate than Paul. In fact, when you think about a man that leads a passionate life, it's very likely if you're a Christian that the name Paul would be one of the names that would come to your mind. He was an on fire, fight the good fight, finish the race, do your duty, let's go get it, can't keep it in, got to let it out kind of a guy. A very passionate man. And so we want to look at the passion of Paul and get an idea of what this looks like. Here are some of the verses that seem to capture his passion. I'm not going to give you any references, you don't need to look up anything, just listen to this:

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. For me to live in Christ, to die is to gain, for I am compelled to preach the gospel. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! I'm not ashamed of this gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. I have become all things to all men, so that by all means possible I may win some, for Christ's love compels us. But whatever was my profit, I now consider loss for the surpassing glory of the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

This was a passionate man. Where did this passion come from? We go right back to this text in Acts 26. He is once again telling his personal story, his testimony, and his conversion

experience. Paul was breathing out these murderous threats, he was going to different cities, he was arresting Christians, he was putting them in prison, and he was obsessed with persecuting Christians. We don't know if that obsession was ideological or personal ambition, but he was obsessed with persecuting Christians. He hated Christians. And it says:

Acts 26:12: On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus, with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, oh King, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

And then I asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

And the Lord replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

You know the story, he was blinded by light, and he was taken into the city. Three days later he was given the rest of this message. So then, converted by Jesus, he began to take seriously the teachings of Jesus. If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. I am among you as one who served. I have come to seek and to save the lost. And all of the texts the go along with the life of Jesus. How did he respond to this? He responded to this by receiving the love of Jesus Christ and developing an intimate relationship with Jesus that grew and grew over the years. And then by serving God in every conceivable way that he could think of to bring glory to him. That's how he responded. He fully surrendered his life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He made a full, total, complete surrender of his life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. And the irony of surrender is that it leads not to defeat, but to victory. So he lived this incredibly victorious life. He became a servant of God.

Keep your finger there and turn to Ephesians 3:7:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace, given me through the working of his power.

So he became a servant of God, and he would write these glorious sentences about the love of God. How we are more than conquerors through his love. And he would write these exquisite prayers because of his relationship, his walk with God. He would have this incredible relationship with Christ. And then, in addition to that walk with God, he would have this incredible work for God. He would take the gospel to Gentiles everywhere, and he would have an enormous impact on their lives. He figured out how to balance this walk with God and work for God. So how did it work out for him? You should still be at Acts 26. This is his legacy; this is how it worked out. In verse 19 he says:

"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven."

Then at the end of verse 20:

"For I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."

I was not disobedient to the vision of heaven. He was a man who lived a life of obedience. Listen to this, I wrote this on a Facebook post. Obedience is its own reward, that's the title of the post.

The only people who feel weighed down by the commands of Christ are those who don't practice them anyway. Ideas like taking up your cross, self-sacrifice, being treated like a servant, persecution for your faith, thankless service, denying yourself, faithfulness, holiness, spiritual disciplines, and neighbour love are only a hardship for those people that want a gospel that rewards them for doing their duty. But those of us who have tasted the salty tears of repentance, and have been overshadowed by the gift of faith have a gratitude that leads to the obedience that requires no additional compensation.

Jesus said in Luke 17:10:

"When you obey me, you should say, 'We have simply done our duty, we are unworthy servants.'"

Obedience, it turns out, is its own reward. So when you see men around the community who are filled with purpose, meaning, and joy, it's because they are leading lives of obedience to our lord and saviour, Jesus Christ. They have responded to his grace, they have responded to his love. They have believed, but they have also come to know some things that we've yet to talk about today.

You can leave Acts and turn with me to 1 Timothy 1:12. So now Paul is a grey haired man in his sixties. For thirty years he's lived a life of obedience. He has encountered incredible opposition. He's had enormous struggles. He's had unbelievable successes, and he's discipling a younger man. He says in verse twelve to Timothy:

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst among them."

At the end of his life, he understood the grace, the power of God's mercy and love. Look at verse 14 again, "The grace of our lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. And so, the men who are in this town and the cities where you are listening to and watching this message and in all of the cities around the world, there are men leading passionate lives because they've come to understand what Paul understands. That the value of this grace, the value of this love, the value of this salvation is so surpassingly greater than any other thing that any man could ever aspire to.

The Big Idea today: **God makes men by igniting, and then sustaining, a passion within us that leads us to want to love and to serve Jesus.**

So loving God, serving God and balancing that with our walk with God. Let's talk a little bit about each of these.

### **Your Walk With God**

So how does God ignite and sustain our passion to walk with God, to love God and to love Jesus? I want to give you a number of ways to do something here. There are an infinite number of ways that he can do this, but the starting point for every man is his conversion experience. We all are going to have different experiences in the same way, if that makes sense. There are no two Christmas trees that look quite exactly alike, but every Christmas tree is well known to be a Christmas tree. So there's some categories here that every man will experience, and the first one is your conversion experience.

Paul treasured his conversion experience. I encourage you men, dwell often, think about often and talk often about your conversion experience. Tell other people how you came to Christ, and men if you haven't come to Christ, I hope you'll become born again. I hope you will have that conversion experience today! Don't leave here without it! The starting point for a passionate life is the conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. Who does that? The Holy Spirit does it. He draws us to himself.

I was watching a movie called *The Machinegun Preacher*, rough language, but he is a preacher, and he's a biker. What he did was he ended up rescuing orphans in Sudan. When he got out of prison, his wife had become a Christian and she ended up leading him to Christ. He said, "Oh no, you found Jesus." And she said, "No, he found me," and that's how it happens! Just like it happened for Paul, we don't find him, he finds us! All we do is simply respond to this grace and this mercy. And this is one reason a lot of men don't lead passionate lives, it's because they think that their salvation is something that they did! That they're doing God a favour! You had nothing to do with your salvation! It says in John 6:44:

No man comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

And the Greek word there for draws actually translates better as drags. No man comes to me unless the Father who sent me *drags* him! And you think about your life when you were not in Christ and you were worldly and you were enjoying the things of this world, you were engrossed by them. We all by nature are objects of wrath. And you think that in that state of mind that one day you woke up and said, "Oh, I think I'll give God a chance." No way. No way, and that's what Paul understood. He understood the grace of our Lord was poured out on me. The grace was poured out on me abundantly, along with his faith and his love, so that I could be in Christ Jesus.

So the first thing is the conversion experience. And then most of us do what I did, most of us try to have our cake and eat it to. We try to have the best of a Christian life and the best that the world has to offer. God helps us grow. We're baby Christians, we're infants. Who has not had an infant who acted stupid? And so we do stupid things, but we're growing. And he keeps bringing more grace to us in our walk with God. And we keep growing and growing. There comes a point where our appraisal of God is beginning to get higher and higher, and we look around one day and we say, "You know, I'm not such a big deal after all." And our own appraisal of ourselves gets lower and lower and lower. Then there's this gap between us and God and it just keeps growing bigger and bigger. I call it the "awe gap," and one day the gap just gets to be too big, and we are overwhelmed with reverence and awe and a sense of God's transcendence. And we can't take it anymore. We're humbled, we can't even

look up. We fall to our face, and we come to the second piece, a full surrender to the lordship of Jesus.

So the first thing we do is we have a conversion experience, and then he begins to equip us and we begin to grow. Then we come to this place where we begin to understand verses like, "If any man would come to me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. You cannot be my disciple unless you get rid of everything." Well, how do you deal with that when you're a young Christian? You just ignore it. Then as the awe gap gets bigger and bigger, some of these sentences still don't necessarily make sense, but man they begin to sound attractive! You start to think, man, I would love to have that kind of life! But you don't know how to get it, and so God creates a crisis for you. For me, it was a business crisis. For you, it could be a marriage crisis, a health crisis, a money crisis, whatever it is. He creates a crisis for you, just for you. He passed the Tax Reform act of 1986 just for me! Just for me, to get my attention, to bring me to a place of full surrender. Of course, it took me two and a half years after he got my attention to bring me to that point, but I started wanting it. I was reading the Bible; he gave me this hunger for his word. I was reading it all the time, like an idiot, when I should have been at appointments. Matthew 13:22:

But the seed that fell among the thorns was like the man who hears the word, but the worries and riches of this life choke the word and make it unfruitful.

And I said, "Wow, that's me!" And then I ended up writing in my Bible. This Bible! It's been recovered several times because I won't give that Bible up. I wrote in the front of that Bible, I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God. I made a full, total, complete surrender of my life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. When I wrote that, I really meant it, and I still do. And I never wavered.

Now, I sin every day and I make mistakes every day just like Paul sinned and made mistakes. Paul said, "I was the chief of sinners." I'll stipulate to that, but I have never wavered. And some of you men here have made that commitment, a full surrender, a complete surrender of your life. I was sitting around not long after that and said, "Oh wow! Gosh, this is going to be great! Now that I've fully surrendered my life, things are really going to get better!" Things went to hell! So I'm sitting around in the rubble of all this and the chaos, and the greatest lesson I've ever learned I've shared with you before, and I'll share it again. This is the thought, there is a God we want and there is a God who is. They are not the same God. And the turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking this God who is. And so, Morley what were you doing? Did you really think that any amount of you wanting to reinvent God in your imagination to be the God that you wanted him to be was going to have one iota of impact on his unchanging nature and character? And so I realized that what I must do, because I am a rebel, as most men are, at least every man in this room. I must come humbly each day, each and every morning, to the foot of the cross. And there, make a full, total, complete surrender again of my life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's the deal! You want to have a walk with God? You want him to ignite and sustain the passion? You ignite with conversion, but you sustain it with a full surrender.

The Big Idea today is this, **God makes men by igniting and sustaining within us a passion to love him, to walk with him, and then to serve him, to work for him.**

**Your Work for God**

So let's talk a little bit about your work for God. Are you born again? Have you made a full surrender? I hope so! I hope you're born again! I hope you made the full surrender. If you're not ready to make the full surrender, I get that. Keep coming, keep growing. If you're not born again yet, I get that, I understand. But listen, you don't have to keep coming to do that, you can do that today. You should do that today. You've been coming, why do you think so? You've been coming because you want to be born again. I know there are some men in this room who have been coming for years and still don't know for sure whether or not they want to love Jesus. He wants to love you, he does love you, that's why you keep coming. So why don't you go ahead and start loving him back? Just give up! You're not going to understand. What are you waiting for? What are you trying to understand? I've read through this Bible every year, cover to cover for twenty five years, and I've probably read it fifty, sixty, seventy five other times and I have told you before that I put M.A., the initials for Mystery Abounds at the bottom of every page in the Bible where there was something I didn't understand or found confusing or raised more questions. Do you remember how many pages I put M.A. on? Every single one of them, and that's after walking with God for decades! So what are you waiting for? If you're waiting to know as much as me, I have a seminary degree in this stuff. Unless you want to surpass me in education, surpass me in teaching, and surpass me in every way so that you'll know more than I know, so that you can know enough so that you can become born again, why don't you just go ahead and do it now? Just go ahead and get born again, because he is calling you to himself. He wants to ignite in you this passion that you see in other men that will keep you coming back. He wants you to be born again!

All right, your work for God. I was not disobedient to the vision of heaven, but I preach that they should repent and turn to God. There it is. Repent, that's subtraction, subtracting sin. Turning to God, that's addition, that's adding your salvation. And then, prove your repentance by your deeds, that's multiplication! God wants you to be involved in all elements of the mathematics of the Kingdom. Multiplication. So, what do you do? You just do what you can do. You do what lies before you. You do the thing at hand. You cultivate a sense of the immediate presence and power of Jesus Christ in your life. I'm never in a room alone. I never think to myself in a room alone. When I'm making love to my wife, I never think that we're doing that in a room alone. I always have the presence of Jesus in mind, always! Now that's a mature position. I've been at this for a long time. I don't have sex boys, I have holy sex. But the idea is, wherever you are there Jesus is. You are his hands, you are his eyes, you are his feet, you are his mouth, you are his ears, you are his arms, you are his legs. Go where Jesus would go, do what Jesus would do. Just do the thing that lies before you.

And so if you're in business, here's what I did. When I was in business, I started praying God what do you want me to do? He said join the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce. I said okay, and I did. I said okay, now I'm here, what do you want me to do? They said would you like to be on the program committee? I said well, okay. Then I said God why am I on the program committee? And I prayed and prayed and nothing happened. And then six months later the program committee chairman quit and they asked me to take his place. I said okay. Then I asked God why am I program committee chairman for the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce? And a couple months later, God gave me the idea for the leadership prayer breakfast. It's now thirty five years old. Literally thousands of leaders in our community have professed faith in Christ at that prayer breakfast because I joined the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce. I'm in a room full of leaders, all of you have stories like this, but some of you are not there yet. Some of you are young in your faith. Some of you may not have the confidence that you can do it. Follow me as I follow Christ, that's what Paul said. I'll say it too. Follow me as I follow Christ. Do the thing that lays in front of you.

Then we did a series of leadership conferences. Then we did the Black White Fellowship where we had racial reconciliation as an issue here. Then we did executive ministries, and out of that we started this Bible Study. And then, out this Bible Study so many other things have sprung for my ministry. But it all started one day with a special calling from God; you will get this, you already have this. Some of you who don't have this will get it too. Every calling will be different, but in the same way.

I was having hard day. I got a letter from one of my regional managers down in South Florida. We were in a meltdown state in our business. Everything was just chaos. I had to let this general manager go. He was a Christian, and it hurt, and he and I prayed together. I prayed for his wife since she was sick and he writes this letter and it starts out Dear Mr. Morley. And what followed was the most vitriolic, acerbic, accusatory, derogatory, mean spirited letter that I've ever received. I thought to myself oh my gosh on top of everything else, I'm going to become a bitter man because I feel so bitter about this. I left that afternoon and got in my car and said God please, on top of everything else, please don't let me become a bitter man. Protect me from that. I've never been a bitter person, I don't want to be a bitter person. And then I began thinking about the ministry of R.C. Sproul and how he talks about the holiness of God. I was struck by the idea that when men are at the low point of their lives that the message that they need is not just that God is holy, but that God is love. And I heard a voice. The voice said I want you to take my message of love to a broken generation. I knew it was God. I became very emotional as I continued to drive home. I got to 17/92 and Lake Avenue to turn left on 17/92 and I was sitting at the traffic light. I put sunglasses on because I didn't want anyone to see how emotional I was. As I was sitting there by the railroad track, I heard a voice again. It said, I want you to take my message of love to a broken generation. It was God. He said exactly the same words two times! I completely lost it! I'm not even sure how I got home! When I got to the driveway, I sat there and I worked until I had wrote those words down on a piece of paper, so I had them exactly like I heard them, so I would never forget them. I would never forget them anyway. That was my calling. It took another nine years to understand what the heck that was all about. God doesn't seem very interested in processing time the way that we do. You are a little flea, brother. You're half a worm; you're a little speck of dust on the cosmos. Eighty years! It's an inch, men! He has plans that are so much bigger and so much greater than the things that we're worried about today! He will give you a passion, will ignite it, and he will sustain it to work for him, if you let him.

What's the Big Idea again? It's this: **God makes men by igniting and sustaining within us a passion, a holy passion to love and to serve Jesus.** So, you might be that man. You're living the life of obedience. Remember this; obedience is its own reward, keep doing the things that he puts before you, both in your walk with God and your work for God. Second, you may not have found it yet, this passion, but do what you don't want to do and you will become what you want to be. Sometimes you have to substitute discipline for a lack of natural interest. And men, if you're not born again, the message for you today is this, become born again! Do that today! Invite Jesus to come into your life, ask Jesus to forgive you, ask Jesus to give you eternal life. Put your faith in him! And then, the third group of guys, those of us who have known this passion before and somehow we have lost it. I hope this morning you feel the Holy Spirit tugging at your life! The message for you if you have lost it, do those things that you did at the beginning. Return to your first love. Get that passion back! Let him sustain you because you appreciate the weight of the gospel and his grace. Not because you want to do God a favour, but because you understand the priceless treasure that you have. God makes us by igniting and sustaining this passion in us to love

him and to serve him. You're thinking, well he hasn't done that for me. Oh yeah he did, he just did it! He spent thirty five minutes doing it! So don't keep questioning God, he sent help, here it is, take it! Let's pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly Father, our dearest Father. Lord, we want to be men who lead passionate lives! We know that you ignite in us, sustain in us this passion to love you and to serve you. And so, Father, I just pray that you would speak to each of our hearts. Lord I pray we would not let this day go without responding the way you would want us to respond, however that is. If you're not born again, do it now, you can say this prayer. Invite him in. Lord Jesus, I need you! And if you've gotten away from him, say this Lord Jesus I need you right now more than I ever have! I repent of my sins. I've been lazy, I've been self-indulgent. I've been selfish, I have not been sacrificial. I have been worldly and I am so sorry. I don't want to be this way. I need to stop resisting you. I receive you, or I receive you again if that's the case, by faith. Make my life into a passionate life, one that loves you and serves you. In your name Jesus, and everybody says, Amen!