

CONSUMED BY A PASSION

Johnny Hunt

INTRODUCTION

Johnny Hunt pastors a continually expanding church. I sharing his words with you.

Today I want to speak to you on a very serious subject. I want to talk to you a little bit about what it means to have a passion. So I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 5:14. I believe there is a reason that the Apostle Paul had such a mighty ministry. I believe it is because he had such a passion for God. He loved doing what he did. There is an inner drive and motivation in his life. I am grateful for all the outward help I have received in my life and ministry. But the key to a great work is what God does in your heart. So I have entitled this lecture, "Consumed by a Passion".

2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead." I want to major on the first part of that verse. "For the love of Christ constrains us."

Let me give you a definition of the word "passion". It is an intense emotion compelling action. It is a strong devotion to some object, activity, or concept. I believe that the key to my ministry is having a passion for what God has called me to do.

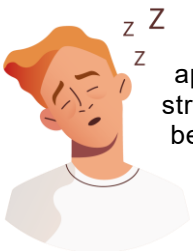
I. WHY DO PEOPLE LACK PASSION?

A. They have allowed something precious to become familiar.

Let me talk to you about why people lack passion. Many have allowed something very precious to become too familiar. They were excited about what they were doing when they first began. But after a while, things just became common.

A preacher wrote a book that described this. He tells how he almost lost his two-year-old daughter because she fell into a swimming pool. He said it happened because he took things for granted and was not careful. I want to read you some of his words that he wrote down after this almost tragedy. He said, "It was only a matter of minutes, maybe even seconds, and we almost lost our two-year-old daughter. The thought was numbing and convicting. It was a little bit like somebody was attempting to hang me. The stool was kicked out from under my feet, and the rope jerked around my neck just long enough to remind me of what really matters in life. It was a divine slap. It was a gracious knock on my head. It was an act of severe mercy. Because of it, I came face to face with the devil's most tricky agent. That is the agent of familiarity. His commission from the black throne is clear. Take nothing from your victim. Cause them only to take everything for granted. He has been on my trail for years, and I really never knew it, but I know it now. I have come to recognize his tactics and to detect his presence. And I am now doing my best to keep him out."

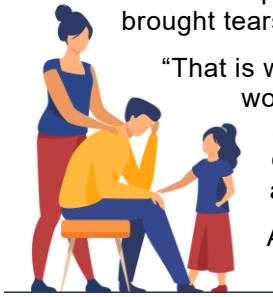
The key to a great work is what God does in your heart.



"His aim is deadly. His goal is nothing less than to take what is most precious, and to make it appear most common. He is an expert in robbing the sparkle and replacing it with the drab. His strategy is deceptive. He will not steal your salvation; he will just make you forget what it was like to be lost. You will grow accustomed to prayer, and thereby not pray. Worship will become commonplace, and study optional. With the passing of time, he will infiltrate your heart with boredom, and he will cover the cross with dust. So you will be safely out of the reach of change."

"He will not steal your home from you. He will do something far worse. He will paint it with a familiar coat of drabness. He will scatter the dust of forgetfulness over the wedding album. He will not take your children away from you; he will just make you too busy to notice them. His whispers to procrastinate are very seductive. He will make you forget that your children's faces, which are now around your table, will soon be around tables in their own homes."

"Books will go unread. Games will go unplayed. Hearts will go unnurtured. Opportunities will go ignored. All because the poison of the ordinary has deadened your senses. Before you know it, the little faces that brought tears to your eyes when they were first brought into this life become very common.



"That is what happens when something precious becomes too familiar, and we lose our passion. I wonder how many times we come to our worship services. We come to the pulpit to deliver a message. We come to the choir to sing a song. We come to our Bible Study to lead a discussion. And we have this attitude; 'I have done that before, I have been here before' and it is all too familiar."

And so the first reason that people lack passion is they allow something that is very precious to become all too familiar.

B. They want acceptance and approval.

There is a second reason why people lack passion. It is because we want acceptance and approval. God uses passion to draw people. But passion also repels people at the same time. Sometimes when people see someone that has a real passion, they want to run out of the room. They are afraid of someone that is so excited. It may be our tendency to turn down the heat of passion in our hearts in order to seek to be normal, to be average, or to be like other people. And so, many people have lacked passion because they desire acceptance and approval.

Please listen to this preacher. If you become everything that Jesus Christ desires for you to be, you will not be liked by everybody in the organized church. But God will use that passion, because He will set you on fire for Himself. And He will use you in a mighty way.

C. Our society is passive.

There is a third reason that people lack passion. It is because our society in general is passive. Do you know why some people stand out as being very special? It is not because they are so special. It is because the average Christian is so passive. My society is very passive. Your society is very passive. Our churches in our country are by and large very passive. Some of you have said that the church that you attend is very passive. You must not allow their being passive to keep you from having a passion. They must not become your excuse for not being what God would have you to be. I encourage you to have a passion for God! Love Him, and never be ashamed. Love Him, and never apologize. Our society is passive; that is one of the reasons people lack passion.

D. Apathy tends to increase with age.

But I have also found that there is another reason that people lack passion. Apathy tends to increase with age. Some of you used to have a passion when you were younger. When you first became a Christian, you were on fire for God. You were very zealous. But now, you have grown older, and apathy tends to increase with age. Johnny says: I am now forty-one years old, and I have to fight this tendency. As I grow older, there is a tendency to allow my passion to become low.

It can happen in my relationship with God. Now, I may not love Jesus like I used to love Jesus. It can happen in my relationship with my ministry. When God first called me to my church, I could have said, "This the greatest day of my life!" I had so much joy to be their new pastor. Oh, there was such a passion in my heart for that ministry. But then after serving there for a few years, there could be the tendency to allow that passion to become low.

It not only happens in my relationship with God. It not only happens in my relationship to my church and ministry. It can happen in my marriage. We can love our wives very much when they first become our wives, but then it is very easy to take your wife for granted, and you no longer show her passion like you used to show her.

The same thing can happen with our children. It is a very wonderful day when God gives us our children. We take their pictures around and show them to everyone. But then we just begin to take our children for granted, and we no longer have the passion for them as we ought to.

May God give us passion for Jesus! May God give us passion for service! And may it not become familiar! But may it be fresh and new every single time! May we see every day as a new opportunity! It is a day we have never lived! May God give us a passion for life!

One Bible writer said these words, "If you only have one talent, do not bury it in the ground." Try to live so as to be missed. There is far more to be done in twelve hours than most people have ever done in any single day in their life. It may be true that wise young believers are very rare but it is no less true that zealous old believers are very rare also.

Never allow yourselves to believe that you can do too much for the Kingdom of God. For one man that does too much, I will show you one thousand that do not do enough. Lay to heart the words of a noble man. When he was told he ought to rest for a little while, he asked this question, "What should we rest for? Do we not have all eternity to rest in?" And so apathy is another reason for no passion.

***Never allow yourselves
to believe that you can do
too much for the Kingdom
of God***

E. We have no purpose beyond ourselves.

Another reason that we lack passion is, we have no purpose beyond ourselves. The average Christian asks this question, "What is in it for me? What will I get out of this?" I believe that Jesus blesses the life that is not always so concerned about what they receive, but who are thinking, "What can I give?" Or, "What can I receive to give?" We have no purpose beyond ourselves. People who live for themselves are in mighty small businesses.

Let me give you the number one factor for credibility in the church. It is ***the passion of the pastor***. If that is true, it also will work in other areas.. The number one factor for credibility is the passion of the leader. If you do not have passion, your people will never have passion! There is a difference in a choir that will sing and a choir that has passion. A choir that just sings is more concerned about the words. But a choir with passion is more concerned about their hearts. And so we have no purpose beyond ourselves.

Passion is the energy of the soul. It's what God has done deep within the recesses of my heart and life. It is not how people are trying to conform me; it is how Jesus Christ has ***transformed*** me. I am often asked this question, "Where do you get all of your energy? How do you stay motivated? How do you get a lift every morning? Are you never really down? How do you get joy in your Christian experience? How do you keep your ministry from becoming dull?"

***Passion is the energy
of the soul.***

God has given me ***a passion for souls***. He has given me a purpose beyond myself.

II. THE QUALITIES OF A PASSIONATE PERSON

Let me give you some of the qualities of a passionate person. Listen carefully as I list these.

A. A passionate person is goal-oriented.

Having goals and strategies in your life.

B. A passionate person is a visionary.

You are always dreaming about what you can do to enhance the kingdom.

C. A passionate person is a self-starter.

He has a positive, optimistic attitude. He is not always looking on the dark side. He does not wake up with a gloomy view of life. You view life from the perspective of God's grace. You acknowledge that if God gave you what you deserved, you would be separated in a devil's hell. And you realize that anything short of hell is grace. You give a hundred percent all the time. You only want to be involved if it will be an opportunity to do your best.

D. A passionate person strives for excellence.

Never be satisfied with mediocracy. You will never hear a passionate person say these words, "Well, I guess that is good enough." No, you will only be satisfied when you have done your very best. He is creative. He wants to get things done well, no matter what. He has a "whatever it takes" attitude. He is not overcome by obstacles. He accepts responsibility. He does not make excuses, and he does not shift the blame.

E. A passionate person is one that believes in people.

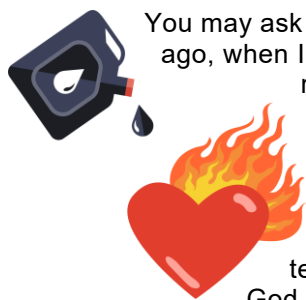
He inspires others to do their best. And he always rises to leadership. Is it because he is a better leader? Is it because he or she deserves it? No! It is because they have a passion! Jesus Christ made it clear. He does not always choose the wisest person, but he chooses that person with a passion, the one that really has a desire. That whatever it takes, I am going to do my very best. Not that other people can see me, but because deep in my soul, God has given me energy to do my best. And I am convinced in my life, Jesus Christ is worthy of the best I can do.

III. WHAT IS PASSION?

A. Passion is the first step to achievement.

Now, I told you why people lack passion. Let me talk to you about what passion is. Passion is the first step to achievement. ***Desire determines destiny.*** Some people will never go anywhere in their ministry because deep in their heart, they really do not care. They have no desire for excellence. If you find yourself lacking in persistence, this weakness may be remedied by building a stronger fire under your desires. Sometimes people refer to it as "a fire in your belly" or "a fire in your soul." So, passion is the very first step to achievement.

It does not matter how small your ministry is or how large your ministry is, you ought to give that ministry your best. And when you are faithful over a little, God has a way of putting you in charge over much. If you are not faithful in the little things God has committed to you, not only will God not give you more, God may take from you what you already have.



You may ask me the question, "How do I feed my passion?" Let me talk to you out of my heart. Years ago, when I was a young man, I sensed that God wanted me to be a preacher. I made my mind up right then, I wanted to be the best preacher I could be. I read about John the Baptist in the Bible. The Bible says he drank neither wine nor strong drink, but he was strong in the sight of the Lord. As a very young preacher, I began to pray a prayer like this, "Oh, God, make me strong. Not strong in the eyes of my people, but strong in the sight of God." I was inspired by other people's stories. I would read about other great men of God. I would read about many of them in my Bible. I would read where the Bible teaches this truth, "God is not a respecter of persons." If God will do it for them, maybe God will do it for me. God can do it for you, also.

And so I went to my very first church. It was out in a very rural country area. There were probably only one hundred families anywhere close by. We had forty people that were coming to our church. After I had been there just a few weeks, I began to say, "We need to have fifty people here!" We need to begin to pray that God would prepare the people's hearts. And then I began to teach my people how they could teach others about Jesus. And then we would go to the houses in the community. They would invite us into their homes, and I would tell them what Jesus Christ had done in my life.

And God began to save many of them. And they would come into our church, and every week I would watch our numbers begin to grow. That was like pouring petroleum on the fire in my heart. I began to believe that I could reach everybody in that community. And **when you have a passion to do that, nothing stops you.** And you go out, and you begin to reach everyone. I kept a notebook on my desk, and I would write down

the name of everyone that would get saved, and beside it, I would put, "Praise the Lord!" I could stand up on any given week and tell you how many people had been saved in our church. But I was never satisfied. I always wanted to see one more. That was many years ago. We only had forty people back then. In 1999 we had over 5000 members! And I still want to see one more. Recently my friend, Ron Redwine, told how his little girl got saved on Sunday. I was there when she came forward. She said these words to me, "Dear pastor, I prayed and I asked Jesus to come into my heart." And it blessed me all over. And then when I heard the story again from Ron, it blessed me again. I have never gotten tired of seeing people's lives being changed! It is a passion of my soul!!! And if you do not have a passion for God, you are in the wrong business! **Go for souls!** Invest your life in something that will last! Passion is the first step to achievement.

***Invest your life in
something that will last!***

B. Passion increases willpower.

The key to willpower is **want power**. What I want. What I desire. My desire is what drives me. Sometimes a person is driven by wanting to make more money. Some have a desire to acquire more degrees. Some have a desire to write a book. Others have a desire to do what God wants them to do. People who want something badly enough can usually find the willpower to achieve it.

Florida is in the southern part of the United States, and just ninety miles away from there people live in the country of Cuba. Those people live under communist domain. Many of them want to leave that communist domain. Some of them want to leave as much as they want to live. Often times, a very large number of those Cubans will get on a very small boat. The boat is not big enough for all of the people. The boat is in much danger of sinking. But they want to come to America so bad that they are willing to risk their life at sea. When a person wants something bad enough, they will find the willpower. The energy of the soul. A passion to see it happen.

C. Passion also changes lives.

Many people that have greatly impacted our world are men that died at a very young age. I read about one man that died when he was twenty-nine years old. His name was Robert McShiney. He was a mighty man of prayer. He once said these words. "A man is no more than what he is when he is on his knees in the presence of his God." He was raised in a small Scots town. Often times Christians travel there to see where he lived. Not long ago, a traveller went to this town. He wanted to study about Mr. McShiney.



The caretaker came and said, "Did you come to study Mr. McShiney?" Then he said, "Have a seat here in this chair, take this Bible, it was his Bible." Furthermore he said, "Place your face in the Bible." "Now, begin to weep, that is the way Mr. McShiney always started before he preached." I know something about Robert McShiney. Robert McShiney had a passion. I believe he prayed over the people that he would see in his congregation every week. If he was one of our leaders, he would probably pray with passion over his team, over every one of his workers, over every one of his members. And his passion changed lives.

I want to tell you how passion changed me. Let me tell you four ways it changed me:

1. A passion for souls will change your priorities.

I have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. I do not wish to live another day without telling somebody about Jesus. I want to talk about Jesus every day of my life until God calls me home. In the United States, I will go to a restaurant for lunch. I put in my pocket a little booklet that talks about Jesus, and when a person comes to serve me, I give them the little booklet, and I tell them about Jesus. I want to talk about Jesus every day of my life for the rest of my life. A passion for souls will change your priorities.

2. But passion for growth will change your methods.

A passion for pastors has changed my ministry. Do you know why I came to this country? Jesus has given me a passion for pastors. Do you know what I did over in Romania? I talked to three hundred pastors. I spoke in a seminary some time ago. There were three hundred future pastors there. I have had to change my ministry. Now I must have time in my schedule to talk to pastors.

3. A passion for discipling will change your goals.

I do not just think about what I can do, but I think about what God can do through me and place into your life. And then what God can do through all of you. If I help any of you this week, then on the Lord's Day I will not just be ministering in Woodstock Baptist church, I will be ministering all over this wonderful land. I will be ministering all over Romania. I will be ministering in the public schools, and any place that you go.

4. *Passion makes impossibilities possible.*

Man is so made that when anything fires his soul, impossibilities vanish.

I became a Christian when I was twenty years old. I told you that I was a teenage alcoholic. I had quit high school two years before finishing. I did not care about education. I would just live to see another weekend come, so I could go out with my friends and get drunk and have a good time. But then one Sunday night, somebody told me about Jesus, and Jesus Christ changed my life. He made impossibilities to become possible.

I went back to school at night and finished my high school. Then I went off to college for four years. I not only went to college, but I also pastored a church the entire time. Then I went off to seminary for three years, and there I pastored a church the whole time too. I have received many recognitions. How can a teenager that is a drunkard later be used to preach to preachers all around the world? Because God takes impossibilities and God makes them possible.



Today you may say to me, "Preacher, I am in an impossible situation." I will say to you, "Get alone with my Heavenly Father. Take nothing with you but your Bible. Abstain from eating, and say, 'Oh God! More than breath I want you to fire my soul. Give me a passion for Jesus, and a passion for my service,' and do not leave until God gives it to you."

I can remember many years ago, my passion seemed to be fading. I went away to a quiet place and I began to seek the face of God. I did not eat for several days. And God began to speak to my heart. He took me and my Bible to the Kings of the Old Testament. He told me about a mighty prophet by the name of Elijah. He told me about his successor. His name was Elisha. He said, "Elisha, I am going to take Elijah up to Heaven. He is going up in a chariot of fire. He said, 'If you see him go into heaven, you can ask anything that you wish, and I will give it to you.'" Elisha said, "Oh, God! Give me a double portion of the spirit that Elijah had." And then, I began to make it my prayer. "God, I will not be satisfied with anything less than a double portion of the spirit of Elijah!"

D. Everything great accomplished was fueled by passion.

We need to always follow our passion, and not another's perceptions. Passion will always set you apart from others. Your passion has more influence than your personality. But let me tell you something else about passion.

E. Your passion for God protects you from doing wrong.

Passion will be shown by a great desire for personal holiness. In other words, anything will be sacrificed that prevents Christian growth.

IV. HOW CAN A PERSON POSSESS PASSION?

Now, I realize I have given you a lot of information, but now I am going to answer a very important question. How can a person possess passion? I am going to mention seven things.

1. Believe that passion is the deciding difference in your life.

A great preacher warned the church of the danger of losing its passion for the Gospel, treating it instead like a piece of information. Passion is replaced by description. You can describe passion, but you will not have it. "The results of the church," he said, "could be compared with reading a cookbook to a person who

is hungry.” But let me tell you what passion will do. Passion will allow you to hear these words from Jesus. To the hungry heart, Jesus said these words, “I am the bread of God. I am the water of life.” You will see your ministry as that which is needed in every person’s life that comes to hear you. So, believe that passion is the deciding difference in your life.

2. Realize that God desires passion in Christians.

Write these two verses down. Titus 2:14. Romans 12:11. Let me read these verses to you. First of all, Titus 2:14. “*God, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do his will.*” The word “eager” translates “zealous”. It is a word that means to be set on fire. Let me read Romans 12:11. The Bible says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.”

Be fervent and have zeal. So, realize that God desires passion in Christians.

3. Pray for passion.

If you begin to pray for passion, it will become a normal part of your prayer. Every Thursday morning, very early, I meet with a group of preachers to pray. One of the preachers has not known me very long. He and I enjoyed a meal together the other day. He said these words to me, “I cannot believe what I heard you pray.” And went onto say, “I heard you ask God to give you a burden for souls.” Then he said, “Preacher, I feel that you already have a burden for souls.” I said to him, “I was not aware that I prayed that, but I always want to be praying for more passion.” So pray that God will give you energy of the soul. Say, “Oh God, give me passion.”

***Oh God give me
passion!***

I have heard about an old country preacher. He believed in his bones that the Word of God is a two-edged sword. One Sunday morning, he came to the pulpit, and he offered this prayer. He said, “OK, Lord, give Thy servant this morning the eyes of the eagle, and the wisdom of the owl. Illuminate my brow with the Son of Heaven. Possess my mind with

love for the people. Turpentine my imagination. Grease my lips. Electrify my brain with the lightning of your Word. Fill me completely full with the dynamite of Thy glory. Anoint me all over with the kerosene of Thy salvation. And set me on fire.” He was an old country preacher, but he knew just what he needed. Let me show you a fourth thing about possessing passion.

4. Return to your first love.

Apathy is not a state of the mind. It is a state of the heart. We know this by looking at the word. The word “apathy” is formed with the prefix “a”. The prefix “a” means without. Apathy is formed from the root word “*pathos*”. “*Pathos*” is where we get our word “passion”. The word “apathy” means “no love”. If you have apathy and not passion, it is not a state of your mind, it is a state of your heart. Sometimes we feel that we cannot be intellectual and have a passion for Jesus.

But I believe that the wisest decision that the intellect will make is to be in love with Jesus. So, return to your first love. Jesus had the same warning for the church at Ephesus. Jesus acknowledged their accomplishments, their hard work, their doctrinal purity, but Jesus looked them in the eyes, and He said, “You are doing all this work in my name, but I do not think you love me anymore.” You can do some things mechanically, and do it without passion, but you will never enjoy it, unless you are doing it from your heart.

5. Activate your spiritual gifts.

If you increase your passion, you release your spiritual gifts. Let me give you a sixth thing.

6. Associate with people of passion.

I do not spend much of my time with apathetic people. I spend my time with people that have a passion for God. I find someone that likes to talk about Jesus. I was with a group of preachers that I knew. They said, “Let us get our wives together with us, and let us go somewhere on Friday night for fellowship.” There were going to be around ten preachers and ten preacher’s wives. They said, “But we have decided we are going to have some guidelines.” They said, “Since we are out there in ministry all week, let us not talk about our ministry.” I cannot help but talk about my ministry. It is what drives me. It is who I am. Let me tell you the difference in religion and Christianity. Religion is a way of life. Christianity is my life. The Bible says when

Christ shall appear, I shall be like Him. The Bible says Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ is inside of me. I cannot help but allow Him to come out. Spend your time with passionate people.

But let me give you the seventh truth.

7. Always remember what God has done for you.

Never forget what Jesus has done, and that will keep fire in your soul. That will give you passion. It will become part of every conversation. It will be part of every paper that you write, of every lesson that you teach. It does not matter where you are. There are people in my church that are very young. Sometimes in high school, they will be asked to write an essay. Several youth have written my life story. They tell the teachers and students how Jesus changed their pastor's life. They can write that story because they have heard it so much.

CONCLUSION

Let me ask one more question, and take a moment to answer it. If God gives me passion, where should I place my passion? I want you to look at one more Bible verse with me. Turn to Galatians 4:18. The Bible says, *"It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, and not just when I am with you."*

I want to make two statements about passion:

1. Passion is good if it is for a good purpose and good cause.
2. Passion is good if it is consistent.

Inconsistency confuses, it discourages, and it demotivates. Consistent passion comes from within. It is not dependent on changing circumstances.

I place my passion in four places:

- (1) I have passion for God.
- (2) I have passion for my wife and my two daughters.
- (3) I have passion for my calling to be a preacher.
- (4) And God has given me passion for the next generation, if Jesus Christ does not return.

I close with this final word. The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on. May God send every one of you a double portion of passion. Amen!

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

➤ From the questionnaire, copy your Answers to the following questions:

1. Which of the qualities of a passionate person would you most like to have?

☐

2. How can you start gaining those qualities?

☐

3. Apply these ideas this month.

☐