



Hurry Up and Wait

I. PEOPLE WANT PASSION

Have you ever seen a grown man wear cheese? What about a dress? Or next to nothing at all - in the snow? If you have, then I can say with confidence you have either 1) been to our youth group, or 2) to a big NFL contest. There's a quality virtually oozing from the pores of football fans (and it's not beer) - it's passion. All of us without exception want passion in our life. We want it in our sports, our spouses, our movies, our music, and hopefully our faith. We may not always find it or even remember it, but it's the carrot dangling out in front of all our noses.

II. A PASSIONATE FAITH IS CONTAGIOUS

I've noticed something else about passion, it's contagious. Take another glance with me back at those NFL fans. Thousands of regular guys might hug, or cry, or even riot because 12 guys (or sometimes just one) are playing with passionate energy and emotion.

And it's even more true for our faith. If you saw the pictures on the screen a few moments ago, then you saw, among other things, photos of a trip we took last summer to Catalina Island. We gathered 150 high school strangers to worship to strange songs with a strange worship leader, no less. You'd be hard pressed to find a more insecure/self-consciousness bunch anywhere. But one group among us had a passion for worship. They were excited and inspired and so, eventually, were we. By the week's end most all of us were raising our voices and hands with them in passionate worship. Because a passionate faith is contagious.

As we continue to work through our series on the book of First Thessalonians, I think you'll see that they had experienced this very same thing. If a passionate faith is contagious, then the Thessalonians had it bad! Paul himself, admits that their love of the brethren surpassed

even his instruction saying, "you have no need for anyone to write you." In fact, it seems that their passion for brotherly love sprang right from the very heart/will of God's Spirit in them. When Paul notes, "you yourselves are taught by God" he actually uses just one, Greek word literally meaning "God-taught."

"Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; or indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia"

(1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

If you know our brother, Dudley Weiner, then you'll likely know just what this means. I don't think Dudley could make it down a street or out of a café without God leading him to pray for this person or share with that person. And these people inevitably respond with the same passion for Christ that Dudley shows them. That's the kind of faith that can extend throughout all of Macedonia not to mention little old Foster City or San Mateo. That's the kind of faith that should extend throughout our entire lives. But if we're not careful, that's also the kind of faith that can easily burn out or burn out of control. This is why Paul doesn't stop at verse 10.

III. A PASSIONATE FAITH ISN'T COMPLETE

"But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your own hands, just as we commanded you..." (1 Thessalonians 4:10-11).

I love this. "You have no need for more words on this, but I'm going to keep going anyway!" It's like mom or dad asking, "Now, what did I tell you?" and the child answers back verbatim. The child might be right, but you know it hasn't sunk in. Paul keeps going because he

knows his words are essential to healthy growth. Remember, this Thessalonian community is not very old, spiritually. In fact, their youthful exuberance is very much like the emotional high most of us experienced as new believers, and it was beginning to lead them astray.

But what could possibly be wrong with a passionate faith? I'll tell you what, it's incomplete. Like a sports car without the brakes; like a sprint without the stretch; like a high school dance without the chaperone; like a crackling fire without the screen; like a credit card without the limit - a faith based on passion alone will land you into much trouble.

Pitfall number one, for example - passionate Christians can tend to become **super-spiritual**. The miracle of our new life in Christ is often full of extreme drama and emotion. We feel close to God, freed from awful burdens, part of a close, new family. If you've been there, you know that you wanted those feelings to last. So did the Thessalonians. But those extreme feelings and moments began to define the whole of the Thessalonian faith. With passion alone to guide them, they felt that the only meaningful faith must be a deeply moving or miraculous one. In the end the only way this moved other people was to confusion and alienation.

This is why Paul urges the Thessalonians to "lead a quiet life." The implication is really just to "relax," "calm down," and "come down out of the clouds." Not every day will be mountain tops and miracles. When you see water, for example, think swim, not walk!

It's only natural for a super-spiritual person to look down a little on the rest of us stumbling after Christ, so Paul adds to his warning with "mind your own business!" This is the second pitfall of a strictly passionate faith - being **super-critical**. As new, excited Christians some of the Thessalonians must have been painfully and pointedly aware of the quote/unquote weaker brothers who didn't think or live as perfectly and spiritually as they did: How could they let their kids behave like that? Can you believe they

bought that brand new donkey?! Did you notice they didn't make it to church once last month?! Legitimate concerns, maybe, but all from an illegitimate heart/attitude.

As a young believer, I remember my dismay at seeing some CPCers actually taking a smoke during a service one Sunday. My innocent and arrogant zeal had no room for anything but perfection - aside from my own, judgmental heart, of course. (Come to think of it, what was I doing outside that service, anyway?!) Paul knew that the only people we can or should even hope to change are ourselves, not everyone else. Blinded by spiritual passion, the Thessalonians had lost sight of this.

Now let me throw a question at you: what do you suppose is the only kind of job for such a super-spiritual, super-critical group - at least in their minds? You got it... full-time ministry! At least that's what they called it. This bunch seems to have completely bailed on their day-jobs to enjoy the "truly" spiritual work of doing absolutely nothing at the sole expense of their other Brothers who still clocked in every day. (Now don't pretend you don't already think that's what I do! You don't know how many times I get asked the question by kids and parent alike, "So what do you do anyway?")

Well, herein lies the third pitfall of a passionate faith, being **super-lazy**. So far Paul has told them to "calm down" and to "mind their own business." But this time, it's personal. "Get a job!" he says. More specifically he tells them, "Forget church work. Work with your hands, do something that will get your fingernails dirty, that will make you sweat!" There's purpose and value in every job. I've cleaned too many yards, bent too many nails, loaded too many UPS trucks to think otherwise.

But, I can kind of understand their laziness, too. As young believers we often model our faiths after the most influential people in our lives, and these are often church staff. I know I looked up to Jeff Farrar and my college pastor, Dave Nystrom, two full-time church guys. Now just think about it, the Thessalonians had the Apostle Paul as their model! Couple that with a high-minded disdain that Greeks had for manual labor, and why wouldn't they assume that the only job for them was working for God?! Only they weren't working. They were just looking down their noses at the poor, unspiritual world around them. Their job was being lazy; lazy for the Lord. Ironically, even Paul in his passion to

serve Christ, wasn't above making tents for a living. And he wasn't about to let them be, either. They were going to have to lose their spiritual pride and laziness and find a job.

IV. A MATURE FAITH BALANCES PASSION AND PRUDENCE

So whether you've been worrying or maybe even hoping that I was going to convict you about going off somewhere private to do some navel gazing, relax! As good and wise as a quiet, simple life can be, that is not Paul's instruction here. In fact, it was the abuse of these very things - intentional or otherwise - that had become the Thessalonian's problem.

God certainly does call us to extremes in our faith - Paul was the king of that (a priest and prisoner, from mercenary to missionary to martyr), but the Thessalonians were letting the passionate fires of their faith burn out of control. And Paul's instructions make it clear that a mature, excellent faith balances passion and prudence. To borrow an old phrase, we must never be so heavenly minded that we're of no earthly good.

V. A MATURE FAITH CHANGES EVERYTHING

I suppose all this talk of balance sounds like a lot of work. Is it even worth it? Picture my little redhead, Toby, to answer that question. He's got a great sense of balance. He was using a scooter by the age of two and riding his bike without training wheels by three. Still, it took a lot of patience and desire and work (on both our parts!). Was it worth it? Without a doubt. A whole world has opened up to him that he didn't even know existed before. We can hardly keep up with him anymore.

It's no less true with a mature, balanced faith. It does require great effort and courage, but it changes everything - where we're headed, how we'll get there and why. All these change, and for the better. Read with me and see. Paul concludes our passage by saying, do all these things **“so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need”** or as the NIV says, **“so that you will win the respect of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.”**

Now the NIV is a little confusing here. It sounds like

Paul has a problem with dependence on the body. But Paul is not condemning the need for Christian charity here. He's condemning irresponsible, Christian free-loading. I think John Stott sums it up well: “...it IS an expression of love to support others who are in need; but it is also an expression of love to support ourselves, so as not to need to be supported by others” (*The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p. 90).

So a mature faith will change us, then the body to which we belong. It will change people's motives, attitudes, relationships, and goals.

And a mature faith also changes the very world in which we live. But we don't grow in order to “win their respect” as the NIV implies. We grow and mature because it is proper. It is right and consistent and fulfilling, and that cannot help but win the respect of the world, maybe even change it.

CONCLUSION

So how does this apply to us? I've had to wrestle with this question. Is our body filled with religious zealots or super-Christians? I don't think so; however, anyone's faith can quickly and quietly swing out of balance with everyday decisions between passion and prudence.

And why does God have me preaching this passage? Believe it or not, I'm a passionate guy. And I'm an idealist, full of extreme hopes and dreams, black and whites. Is God trying to balance me? Probably, but I'm beginning to think He might be hoping some of my passion rubs off on you! Paul hasn't disallowed a passionate faith here. He just requires we balance it with prudence. If you've already got that down, then maybe it's time you fanned the flames of your faith. In fact, do that right now. What are the passionate dreams God has given to you? Should you follow your gifts into a ministry? Should you give more than you're comfortable giving? Would you wade through the mud of a mission to Mexico with us? Or should you make your office or your family your mission field? Maybe you should find a job you actually like. Do it, just do it with His direction.

If you don't already know it, my family and I up and moved onto a sailboat almost three years ago now. Lots of things concerned people about this. We heard it all: boats are small, they fall apart, boats depreciate, they sink, or it's just weird! On the surface, we were being totally extreme - all heart and no head. But we had been considering and praying and planning this out for at least two years before we did it.

God gave us this dream, and he gave us a passion for it. But God would never take us down any road without giving us a direction; without warning us of the pitfalls. When I start thinking how big a sacrifice we made to live aboard, I am God-taught to sacrifice my pride. When I start looking with excessive frustration at the enormous wealth surrounding our humble home, I'm God-taught to be more humble and mind my own business. God does want us to follow Him everywhere with passion - He made us that way. But our lives and our church won't ever mature spiritually until we heed His wisdom as well.

A heart full of passion, a head full of prudence - may God bless you with both. That will change everything.

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