

If you struggle with identifying a clear and compelling vision for your ministry, then look to your spiritually shaped passions for clues.

How to Cultivate, Refuel, and Increase Passion

Would you like to cultivate a greater spiritual passion? If you or I want long-term staying power in ministry, we need to identify ways to refuel and increase our passion by the power of the Holy Spirit. God will supply the motivating passion we need in the following ways:

1. Passion often comes out of where a person met God and where he or she has been touched spiritually. People who found Christ through New Hope Community Church, the church my wife, Margi, and I started, when it met in an outdoor, drive-in movie theater tended to have a passion for helping the drive-in ministry succeed. Someone who came to Christ in a small group often shows a passion for small groups. People who met God in other places have a passion for those other ministries.

2. Ongoing passion also comes from quiet times with God. As you walk with God, do you continually ask yourself, “What would Jesus do in this situation?” or “How would Jesus feel now?” Are you passionate about what Jesus is passionate about? What breaks Jesus’ heart likewise should break your heart and mine. The more times of oneness we have with God, the greater our passion will be.

3. Passion also comes from spending time with others who are passionate. They’re contagious! I have a videotape from Bill Hybels on his vision for Willow Creek Community Church. He shares his unashamed passion for evangelism, the “fire that burns in [his] bones” (Jer. 20:9, TLB) for seeing every unchurched Harry and Mary in metro Chicago come to Christ and become fully devoted followers. I can’t watch that video without having my passion rekindled.

4. Another way to renew passion is by taking time away to dream. A vacation is sometimes needed to stoke passion. Attending a conference can be an investment in renewal. For many years Margi and I journeyed to the Robert H. Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership. Often we brought along a group of leaders from the church. There at the Crystal Cathedral we heard pacesetters who had dared to dream a great dream for the glory of God through the expansion of His kingdom. These gifted communicators inspired their hearers to think big. We left invigorated with the greatness of God and renewed in our passion to be difference-makers. Like Abraham when told to count the stars (Gen. 15:5-6), our sights were lifted to new heights, beyond our ability to imagine or think. We inevitably caught their God-instilled passion for how to reach lost people.

What About Adversity?

Adversity refines passion. I don’t know if a Christian can have passion without some suffering. There’s no gain without some pain. I’ve never seen anybody take a church to the next level of ministry without paying a price.

One of the core ideas in my book *Dare to Discipline Yourself* is this: You have to deny lesser things to gain greater things.

Also, nothing quenches passion as quickly as sin. I remember a friend confronting me about my response to a painful disappointment in my life. “Dale, you’re bitter,” he said frankly. He was right. I had allowed a lack of forgiveness to dim and color my passion for the things of God.

I needed to learn that surrender to the Lordship of Jesus included not only my will but also my pain, ill feelings, rights, and whatever else would steal passion from what God had called me to do. A focused passion is impossible to maintain without a sense of surrender to the Holy Spirit. There is no mission without surrender. For some people, such as E. Stanley Jones, the best biblical term for this kind of surrender is *sanctification*.

Finally, in the surrendered life, we are willing to make whatever changes are needed along the way, both in ourselves and in the churches we lead. I heard Bill Hybels speak about endurance in ministry, explaining that leaders sometimes must make painful changes in order to have long endurance. For example, suppose a staff person who has been with me a long time needs to move on. The change will be painful. However, if I don’t make the change, the situation will drag me down and keep me from enduring.

Saddleback and Willow Creek as Examples

Is there a scriptural and practical foundation for this idea of passion? Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Community Church, which has one of the largest worship attendances in America, calls it “heart.” He’s referring to whatever we love to do.

“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23).

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4).

Others who emphasize the idea of passion include the team of Willow Creek pastors who created the ministry mobilization tool known as *Network*. They draw from the motivations of people like the apostle Paul:

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man” (Gal. 1:15-16).

“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (Rom. 15:20).

Both of these great congregations have built the concept of passion into their training curriculum. Passion, according to authors Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels in the *Network Participant’s Guide*, answers the “where you’re moti-

Passion Destroyers

Any of the following actions or attitudes can keep you from having the passion that God wants to stir in your heart.

- Bitterness
- Disobedience
- Distraction
- Ego trips
- Lack of focus
- Physical fatigue
- Selfish greed
- Unwillingness to make painful changes