

Our Passions—What God Has Put on Our Hearts to Do— by Pastor Larry Hoskins—CMF Board of Directors

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From a mere human perspective, I fell into investing my life into others quite by accident. When I was in 8th grade, I was involved in a program our church held for young boys called Christian Service Brigade, a sort of Christian version of the Boy Scouts. Different “military” ranks were given to each of us who participated, and my rank carried with it the responsibility of leading the squad devotions. I found that I liked the responsibility and that I liked teaching. But I was only beginning. Additionally, for a number of years, my parents had me going to a Christian camp, Miracle Camp it was called, that required Bible memorization. The first year, they compelled me to go. I did not know what camp was, but I knew that it involved leaving home, and I liked being at home. They made me go anyway, and I discovered that I liked it. I went back for years. The camp staffers were called Whitefeet, and again I had the privilege of teaching a cabin full of boys a devotional each night of the four weeks that I worked as a Whitefoot. They seemed to enjoy learning God’s Word, and I found that I enjoyed teaching and seeing them learn.

Trying to integrate my faith with my belief system, I found that I struggled with certain issues. For example, I knew that Christians were supposed to look forward to the return of Christ, but I discovered that I didn’t want Him to return too quickly. I wanted to get married and have children and be a grandparent. I remember talking with a counselor at camp about it. I can’t remember exactly what he said, but I imagine that it was something like how heaven would be so wonderful that the things we value on earth won’t matter nearly so much then. I was beginning to get my head around how one could resolve apparent conflicts.

As I began to increasingly own my faith as my faith, not just that of my parents, I realized that I needed to explore the realm of ideas, to think through issues and their ramifications and to seek to develop an integrated faith that looked at origins, science, history, and facts to develop the questions, answers, and implications of my faith so that I could articulate it and defend it to the best of my ability. During my college days, even though I knew much of the Scripture by then, some of the high school students in my Young Life ministry began asking me questions in my small group Bible studies for which I did not know the answer or even where to look to find it. Even having been raised in the church and having gone to a Christian college, I knew that I needed to be better equipped. My lack of knowledge motivated me to spend four more years in seminary. It was also during this time of high school and college that I began to share my faith more boldly. God’s Word said that it was my responsibility and it was commanded, so I took it to heart and did it. I don’t think I have ever felt more alive than when I am sharing my faith with someone.

Originally, I had planned on going into Christian camping as my vocation. However, as I learned about the role of a camp director, I realized that I would be fundraising for the camp and constantly recruiting summer staff. Additionally, the relationships would be shorter—one week for the campers, a summer for the summer staff, and some kind of annual revisit for returning campers. I realized that I preferred long-term relationships. Then, as I began to see seniors from my Young Life group graduating, I began to realize that they were floundering a bit after high school. My Young Life ministry had connected some of them to Christ, but not to His church. It was then that Christ’s words to Peter rang in my ear, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” The church was God’s plan for continued connection and for continued growth. It ministered to every age group and to every level of spiritual maturity. It had a built-in organizational structure and leadership responsible to resolve conflict and to protect from error. I began to develop a new appreciation for the church and for what it offered.

Over time, I began to discover a love for God and His Word, a love for people, a heart to pass along what I was learning, a vision for evangelism and discipleship, and a passion for God's church. All the while, God had been moving in my heart and through my life circumstances to bring me to a place of surrendered and passionate service to Him. At first I began working with youth, and I thought I would grow into an old man while continuing to work with students. But as I grew older, had three children, and grew tired of the busyness of youth ministry, I also began to teach more substantively. God created a restlessness in my heart that did not cease until I decided to leave the youth pastorate and pursue the solo pastorate that focused more on adult ministry.

When Nehemiah was nearing the end of the 70-year Babylonian Captivity, he heard about how Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, was in ruins and how its gates were burned. He loved his homeland and was so distraught that he sat and mourned for days (Neh. 1:4). He then prayed to the Lord about it, confessing his own sins and those of his nation and asking God to bless his plan. As the cupbearer, Nehemiah made a plan to go to the reigning Persian king, Artaxerxes, and ask his permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. The King granted Nehemiah permission, safe passage, and supplies to make the necessary repairs. Once there, Nehemiah went out to survey the damage and all that needed to be done. His account reads, "And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem..." (Neh. 2:12). Later he commissioned the people in Israel to rebuild. He wrote, "So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. (Neh. 4:6) when opposition arose from their enemies, they not only prayed, but they had people stand guard, "I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows." (Neh. 4:13). Eventually the wall was completed, and Jerusalem was restored. The people of Israel repented of their sin, and they reiterated and renewed their covenant relationship with God.

Why did I tell you my story and that of Nehemiah? In a word, they are stories about passion. God put into Nehemiah's heart a passion; consequently, he led the people of Israel, who themselves became passionate about rebuilding Jerusalem. The builders were most passionate about rebuilding Jerusalem. The builders were most passionate about protecting their families whom they stood ready to defend as they rebuilt the walls. I became passionate about investing my life in others through teaching. It's a passion that has directed my life, my career, and the lives of many whom I have had the privilege to teach.

One of the great things about passion is that it directs us to make important decisions and to distinguish between lesser things and even to separate from sinful things. After the Israelites had finished taking the Promised land after well over a decade of war, the "general" who led the campaign, Joshua, laid out his passion and challenged the Israelites to follow him in it. After recounting God's faithfulness from the call of Abraham to the Egyptian plagues and exodus and through the taking of the land, he said, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:14-15)

Likewise, the Apostle Paul had a clear passion. He had been educated in the most prestigious school of his day, and mentored by one of the most well-known teachers of his day. He had become so zealous to follow the Lord that he became a strict separatist, a Pharisee, and a strict adherent to the Law. He had all the credentials and lifestyle credibility to become an exceedingly influential religious leader. But after the Lord Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, Paul totally changed the direction of his life. His passions were two that I can find in Scripture:

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and

reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:7-14)

“For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND.'” (Romans 15:18-21)

Those passions eventually cost Paul his life, but what a legacy he left behind, and what a reward awaits him in heaven!

Today, so many things call for our time and attention. In such an environment, if we are not careful, our passions, no matter how well-intentioned, may become misplaced. For those whose passions are focused on the things of God, it becomes clear that He impassions us with the very concerns that are on His heart for each of us to accomplish. Sometimes we are content to live an unimpassioned life—letting life just happen to us—while we ebb and flow with the currents around us. I would like to hear of your passions. What is it that God has put into your heart to do? You know deep inside that you must do it and are willing to sacrifice lesser things to make it happen. Let those of us in CMF know so that we may pray and encourage you. Perhaps you'll find others to join with you, and together, we can leave behind our own legacy, looking forward to our reward, as we live our time on this earth in the center of the abundant life our great God has laid out for us.