

Developing Passion & Power

One day Jesus came to the village of Bethany and decided to stay at the home of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10:38-42). Mary had such desire and affection for the Lord that she sat at his feet listening to all that he said. It was dinner time, but she preferred to listen to Jesus than to eat.

According to the normal rules of hospitality in the ancient Near East, Mary was responsible, along with her sister Martha, for serving Jesus and his disciples a meal. But she felt a stronger desire to listen to him and be with him than to serve him. Her affection for the Lord overpowered the normal rules of etiquette. I am sure that if Jesus had told Mary to go and help her sister Martha, she would have done it in an instant. But there was no way she was going to leave his presence unless he commanded her to do so.

When Martha attempted to get the Lord to rebuke Mary for her lack of help in preparing the meal, Jesus not only refused to rebuke Mary, he commended her. Mary had chosen him, even above service to him, and the Lord said that she had chosen the best part, the one thing that would never be taken away from her.

Preachers often use this incident as an argument for the necessity of Bible study. Yet Mary wasn't studying the Bible; she was sitting at the feet of her favorite person and listening intently to everything he said.

Mary's deep passion for the Lord was also seen six days before Jesus' last Passover. He knew that he had only six more days before his cross. Where do you think he chose to spend these last six days? He passed over all the "politically correct" people and places in Jerusalem and went to the town of Bethany, about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. He chose the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Why? Because this was the place his heavenly Father had chosen before the foundation of the earth to anoint his Son for burial.

To whom would God give the honor of anointing his Son? It happened like this.

Mary walked in during the middle of dinner with a pound of pure nard, a perfume worth at least a year's wages. Then she "wasted" that expensive perfume by pouring it on the feet of Jesus. Next she let down her hair and wiped the feet of the Lord with her hair (John 12:1-3).

This was an extraordinary act. It was also an improper act. Mary interrupted the dinner, she approached a male guest, she let down her hair in the manner of an immoral woman, and she did the work of a slave. What led her to humble herself and transgress the bounds of propriety?¹ What led her to such an extravagant waste?

It was this: she recognized the greatness of Jesus, and she knew that he was worthy of all of the extravagance she could lavish on him. He was worthy of the deepest humiliation she could suffer on his behalf. Mary was driven by a holy passion for the Son of God. She wasted that perfume on Jesus, and she would waste her entire life on him if he would give her the opportunity. The gift was extravagant, but the gift only reflected the extravagance of her feelings for Christ.

Both John and Luke give us these "snapshots" of Mary because they are presenting her life to us as a model to be copied. How do we copy such a life? How do we develop the same passion and devotion that Mary had for Jesus?

Developing a Passion for Jesus

There are three simple steps to developing passion for Jesus. The first step is obvious. You cannot love someone or have passion for someone you do not know. Like Mary, we must take time

take time

to get to know Jesus. The more we sit at his feet and listen to him, the better we will know him. And the more we know him, the more we will love him.

We must set aside a regular time for personal meditation in the Scriptures and prayer. We must never allow this time to become mechanical or ritualistic. We must remember that it is possible to read the Bible like a Pharisee and never hear the voice of God (John 5:37). It is possible to let our prayer time degenerate into nothing more than taking a shopping list to God.

In our regular times of meditation and prayer, we must remind ourselves that the purpose is to meet with a real Person. This Person speaks, guides, encourages, reveals, and convicts. He gets angry, and he forgives. We are capable of grieving him or making him rejoice. These are things the Scriptures teach us about this God we come to in prayer.

We should not presume that because we can read we can enter into his presence. A mechanical reading of the Bible or a ritualistic prayer will not get us into God's presence. The psalmist asked God, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps. 119:18). He knew that without the presence of God to illumine the Word, he would never "see wonderful things." Ask for God's presence; don't assume it. Come to his Word desiring to meet and talk with a Person. Listen as you pray and meditate.

These are things that we all know. We have been taught them from the time of our conversion. The problem is not that we don't know them; the problem is that we don't do them. When I was the pastor of a Bible church, my main exhortation to the people was to read the Word and pray. The number-one confession I heard as I counseled people from my church was that they didn't read the Word, and they didn't pray on a regular basis.

For almost ten years now I have been traveling widely in the body of Christ. I would have to say that the majority of pastors and church members I meet do not have consistent personal times of meditation in the Bible and prayer. I have found this to be true in all branches of the church.

The Christians I talk to believe that the Word and prayer are important, and they actually want to meditate and pray, but they just don't. In most cases this is not due to a moral failure in their

lives. Rather, they do not meet with the Lord because of a simple mechanical failure—they fail to schedule time with him.

People tend to live under an illusion that they will always have time to pray and meditate on the Word. That is one of the Devil's most successful lies. The Devil knows that if he can keep you out of God's presence, he will defeat you. Even if you have vast quantities of biblical knowledge, you will only become proud and clever at hurting people if you do not consistently come into God's presence. Even if you have powerful spiritual gifts, you will only wreak havoc in the church if you not come into his presence on a consistent basis. We will never grow in passion for the Son of God, nor be ultimately profitable for his service, if we do not come into his presence on a consistent basis.

There is not one biblical hero who did not come in to the presence of God on a regular basis. Follow Joshua's example and meditate in the Word day and night (Josh. 1:5-9). Follow Paul's example and pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). Follow Mary's example and sit at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). In order to follow their examples, we must learn to set aside a regular time, or we will never come before God on a regular basis. If we do these things on a regular basis, expecting to meet a Person, that Person will not disappoint us.

Here is the second key to acquiring passion for the Lord Jesus. In every relationship from time to time barriers are erected through misunderstandings and sometimes through wrongs. It is no different in our relationship with the Lord. Whenever we sin, that creates a barrier between us and him. The guilt of sin can keep us from going into the presence of the Lord. This is true in our horizontal relationships also. When I hurt someone that I love, I cannot really enjoy their company until that hurt has been made right.

There is only one thing that will remove the barrier between God and his disobedient children. It is the blood of his Son.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is

faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7-9)

The guilt of sin is taken away whenever we confess that sin, trusting in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ to forgive us and cleanse us.

This is another truth that we have been taught from our conversion. Yet I encounter so many Christians who are weighed down by the guilt of sin and seem to spend more time living under condemnation than in the freedom of Christ. Many people tell me that they confess their sins and don't "feel" forgiven. It is not enough simply to say some words about our sin; we must trust in the power of the blood of Jesus to forgive us. We will never be holy enough or disciplined enough to get into God's presence and be forgiven apart from the blood of his Son. The only thing the Father has given us to take away sin and guilt is the blood of his Son. Our good works, reformed lives, and best intentions will never take away the guilt of sin.

One more thing is absolutely essential if we are ever going to be consumed by passion for the Son of God. Most of my Christian life I have been making the same mistake over and over and over. I keep putting my confidence in my discipline, in my good intentions, in my knowledge of the Bible, in order to produce love for God. Yet I always end up in legalism and self-righteousness when I place my confidence in these things.

One day the Lord interrupted all of this when a dear friend of mine, Mike Bickle, told me that he had never recovered from the shock of something the Lord had said to him: "If you ever make it in the Christian life, it won't be because you are a good follower. It will be because my Son is a good leader. Put your confidence in his ability to lead you, not in your ability to follow." That divine revelation pierced my heart. I realized why self-righteousness and legalism were able to consistently get such strongholds in my life.

Please don't misunderstand me at this point. I'm not saying that we don't need discipline, or knowledge of the Bible, or godly behavior—we do. Nor am I saying that we are to be passive and simply let God do it all. I'm talking about our attitude and our confidence. We must do the right things, but we must never put our confidence in our ability to do those things. Our hearts are

incredibly prone to deception (Jer. 17:9), and our feet are equally prone to wander off the path of righteousness (Rom. 3:10-18). In light of this, how could we ever trust in our ability to follow Jesus?

I have come to the point in my life where I realize that if I ever get passion for the Son of God it will not be because I earned it; it will be because he gave it to me as his greatest and most gracious gift. After all, isn't that how the greatest things come to us—as gifts? James says, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). The greatest gifts that God has to give us are ours for the asking. We can have anything from him that we are willing to labor for in prayer. I encourage you to spend more time asking God to grant you passion for the Son of God than you do asking him for anything else.

One prayer has done more to generate passion in my heart for the Lord Jesus than anything I have ever done before. This prayer is found within what is perhaps the greatest prayer in all of the Bible. I am referring to the high-priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17. I have turned the last verse of that prayer into my own personalized prayer.

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. (John 17:26)

Jesus said that he had declared the name of the Father to his disciples; that is, he showed them what the Father is like. Jesus did this for one overriding purpose: *he wanted his disciples to love him like his heavenly Father loves him*. He wanted the love that his Father has for him to be in his disciples.

I read this verse many times before I understood it. The first time I actually understood what Jesus was saying, I found it difficult to believe. How could I love Jesus like God the Father loves his very own Son? Of course, no one can love anyone to the same degree or quality that God loves them. But on the other hand, neither can we be as holy as God. Yet God says to us, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). It is through the power of his Spirit in us that we can walk in holiness. By that same power, we can live our lives with a consuming passion for our Lord.

The Father loves the Son more than anyone or anything else. He is devoted to the Son. His eyes never leave the Son. All that the Father does, he does for the Son. Jesus prayed that we would be driven by that same holy passion.

I have paraphrased John 17:26 in order to pray it like this: "Father, grant me power from the Holy Spirit to love the Son of God like you love him." I pray this in the morning when I get up; I pray it during the day when my mind slips into neutral; and I pray it when I fall asleep at night. My heart has been captured by this prayer. When I pray it, I am confessing to God that if he does not grant me a work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I will never acquire passion for the Son of God. I am confessing to him that my godliness, my discipline, my knowledge of the Word, though all good, are insufficient to produce passion for the Son of God. I can change my mind, but only the Holy Spirit can change my heart.² Divine love can only be divinely imparted.

If you begin to pray this prayer on a regular basis, passion for the Son of God will start flowing into your heart. It may take you months, even years, before you notice a significant difference. In fact, you will probably never be able to point to the day or the hour when you began to be consumed with passion for the Son of God, but others will notice. They will say you have changed; that you seem different. They will say there is a kindness, a gentleness in you they hadn't noticed before. There is an infectious quality in your love for the Son of God that didn't seem to be there before, and they will want to know what you have been doing.

Don't be passive about acquiring passion for the Son of God. Make it the focus of your life. Put your eyes on the Son of God and leave them there (Heb. 12:2), and you will find yourself becoming like him. You will find yourself falling in love with him as you ask God day after day to consume you with passion for his glorious Son. *And that passion, as it begins to occupy your heart, will conquer a thousand sins in your life*. You will begin to love what he loves and hate what he hates.

Passion & Power

What does all this talk about passion have to do with power and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit? Simply this: passionate

love for God is the key to power. The apostles of the Lord Jesus were famous for miraculous power. The secret of their power is found in their call:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

In Mark's version of the calling of the apostles, Jesus appointed the twelve for three purposes: (1) that they might be with him, (2) that he might send them out to preach, and (3) that they might have authority to drive out demons. The order of these purposes is highly significant. Before they attempted to minister for Jesus in preaching and casting out demons, they were called "to be with him." Out of that intimate experience of being with Jesus, he gave them power to preach and to drive out demons.

The most powerful people on earth are those who have been with Jesus (cf. Acts 4:13). Intimacy with Jesus, "being with him," always produces passion for him. Think about the most powerful people in the Scriptures. People like Moses, Daniel, Peter, John, and Paul were powerful in miracles, or in revelation, or in both. They were also people who were consumed with passion for God. As we have seen, however, passion and power are not confined to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Consider one more episode from Mary's life.

When Lazarus, Mary's brother, died, Jesus came to their home four days later. Martha was the first to greet him. She said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). Jesus responded to Martha by giving one of the greatest theological teachings in all of Scripture: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25, emphasis mine).

When Mary met the Lord Jesus just a few moments later, she said to him the very same words that Martha said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). When Mary said these words, however, Jesus wept. Then he walked to the tomb and raised Mary's brother from the dead. A person like Martha could get a great theological teaching out of

Jesus. But a person like Mary could break his heart and move him to raise someone from the dead.

People who have Mary's passion for the Lord Jesus can move him in a way that others cannot. Passion for Jesus gave Mary access to the power of Jesus.

Let me give you a dramatic, contemporary example to illustrate what I mean.

Mahesh Chavda, an evangelist who is widely known for healings and miracles, faced a horrible dilemma in May of 1985. His son Aaron had just been born four months prematurely. The doctors gave Mahesh and his wife, Bonnie, no hope for little Aaron's survival. Death was certain and imminent. The physician said that even if he did survive, his brain had no chance to develop properly and that he would be a "vegetable."

Mahesh had given his word almost a year before to conduct several crusades in Africa. His wife and baby were in the hospital, and he was scheduled to leave for Africa. He felt that the Lord was telling him to go to Africa and keep his commitment. Yet his emotions told him to stay. How could he leave Bonnie to bury Aaron alone?

Bonnie persuaded Mahesh to go. "Your job is to go when the Lord has called you to go," she said. "It doesn't matter whether or not you're here, but whether the Lord is here. And I know he is here. If Aaron lives, it will be because God intervenes, not because you are home."

Mahesh left Bonnie and walked over to the intensive care unit where his tiny son lay fighting for his life. At this time Aaron weighed one pound and three ounces. Mahesh slid his hand under Aaron. He was so small that he fit easily within the palm of his father's hand. Mahesh watched Aaron gasp for each painful breath with his partially formed lungs. Then he anointed him with oil and prayed over him. Finally, he looked down at his little son and said, "Aaron, it looks as though I may not see you again. I want you to know that your daddy loves you. But Jesus loves you even more than I do. If I never see you again here on this earth, I know I'll see you in heaven." With that good-bye, he turned and left for the airport.

Weeks later, when Mahesh had finished the crusades in Zambia, he was finally able to reach Bonnie by phone, but only once. Miraculously Aaron was still clinging to life. Mahesh got

on a plane for Zaire and landed in its capital city of Kinshasa on Sunday, June 9, 1985.

Mahesh did not know the local organizers of the crusade in Kinshasa, and he had received no word about the preparations for the meetings. He expected a small crowd of 700-800 people. On Monday morning at the leaders' meeting 2,300 people showed up. At the close of the meeting, an elderly woman whose body was covered with cancerous tumors was instantly healed in front of everyone. The tumors had completely disappeared.

The news of this miraculous healing spread like a forest fire in an August drought. That evening 100,000 people came to the meeting! They came with every disease imaginable; some were even brought in wheelbarrows. That night so many people were healed that even witches and sorcerers who had come to disrupt the meeting were converted, publicly repenting and declaring their faith in Jesus. By Wednesday, June 12, the morning crowd had swelled to 30,000.

That morning Mulamba Manikai was standing in the crowd, and although his heart had been crushed, he was listening to Mahesh intently. Unlike most of his neighbors on Lumbi Street in the Mikondo section of Kinshasa, Mulamba and his family were Christians. When Mulamba had returned home from the meeting on Tuesday, he found his six-year-old son, Katshinyi, paralyzed and comatose. Mulamba and his older brother, Kuamba, carried the little boy to the medical facility at Mulamba's company. He was diagnosed with cerebral malaria, and Mulamba was told to take his son to the Mikondo Clinic for treatment.

At 4:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning as they neared the Mikondo Clinic, the six-year-old Katshinyi had a spasm and stopped breathing. Then his heart stopped beating and he died in his father's arms. Inside the clinic a physician gave the boy an injection and tried to revive him, but it was useless. "Your son is dead," the doctor said to Mulamba. "I can do nothing for him. You must take him to Mama Yemo Hospital in Kinshasa and get a death certificate to bury him."

When they brought the body to the hospital, the boy was again pronounced dead. Mulamba left his son's body at the hospital with Kuamba so that he could go borrow money to buy a burial permit.

As he stepped into the street, Mulamba began to pray that the Lord would raise his son from the dead if it would bring glory to God. Just as he remembered the story of Peter raising Dorcas from the dead, Mulamba heard God speak these words, "Why are you weeping? My servant is in this city. Go to him."

Mulamba knew the Lord was referring to Mahesh. He rushed to Kasavubu Square where Mahesh was preaching to 30,000 people. Mahesh was just concluding his message. At exactly 12:00 noon, eight hours after Katshinyi had died, Mahesh stepped back from the microphone.

Suddenly, Mahesh felt as if God had taken him into another realm. He was no longer aware of the throngs of people. He was enveloped in silence. The gentle voice of the Holy Spirit spoke clearly and unmistakably, "There is a man here whose son died this morning. Invite him to come forward. I want to do something wonderful for him." Mahesh spoke these exact words to the audience.

Mulamba ran forward shouting, "It is I! It is I!" Immediately, Mahesh placed his hands on Mulamba's head and prayed, "Lord Jesus, in your name I bind the powers of darkness and death that are at work in this man's son, and I ask you to send your Spirit of resurrection to bring him back to life."

The crowd parted as Mulamba turned and began running to the hospital.

Here is what happened at the hospital at 12:00 noon, June 12, 1985, while Mahesh was praying over Mulamba at Kasavubu Square. Back at the Mama Yemo Hospital, Kuamba was holding the body of his brother's son in his arms. At noon he felt the body move, and then the boy sneezed. Katshinyi sat up and asked for food. Then he began to call for his father. God had brought him back from the dead.

Needless to say, the hospital was in an uproar. Mulamba walked into the room as Katshinyi was calling for his father. Mulamba grabbed his son and began to shout praises to God in the hospital room that just a few minutes earlier had served as the morgue for his son's lifeless body.

News of this great miracle spread through the city, and that weekend over 200,000 came in the evening to hear the gospel. Many were saved and healed.

I have seen a copy of the death notification for Katshinyi Manikai with its official seal and signed by Iwanga Embum. A skeptic might claim that Katshinyi's death had been misdiagnosed and that he was only in a coma. However, this would not explain the timing of the revelation (that a man's son had died and that God was going to do something for him) given to Mahesh eight hours later and the boy's immediate recovery.

I know Mahesh Chavda personally, and I am convinced of his integrity and the validity of his ministry. But so are thirty thousand residents of Kinshasa, Zaire, who witnessed the miraculous events of June 12, 1985.

Mulamba's brother, Kuamba, became a Christian after witnessing the power of God that morning. The Manikai family still lives at 26 Lumbi Street in Kinshasa.

God rewarded Mahesh for his faithfulness in two ways. First, he let him participate in a miraculous raising from the dead. Second, God remembered Mahesh's little Aaron and completely healed him. Today Aaron Chavda is a healthy normal eight-year-old.³

Spiritual maturity is not possessing vast quantities of Bible knowledge or possessing the most powerful spiritual gifts. Carnal people can have both of these things. Spiritual maturity is sharing the affections of God and discerning his voice. It is loving what God loves and hating what he hates. Spiritually mature Christians love God and his people passionately, and they hate anything that takes them away from God. Only in the context of such love will Bible knowledge and the gifts of the Spirit ever achieve their divine purposes. The power of the Spirit can flow unhindered through passionate love for God and his children.

Among the women in the Bible, I think Mary is the one who most exemplifies this passion for the Son of God. Among the men, it would have to be the apostle John. John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The Living Bible refers to John as "Jesus' closest friend" (John 13:23). That is a great translation. John was always one of the three disciples who were permitted to be on the "inside." But of the three, he was the closest to Jesus, and everyone knew it.

At the Last Supper, Jesus startled all the disciples when he told them that one of them was going to betray him. They were dying with curiosity to know which one it was, but no one had the courage to ask Jesus—not even Peter. So Peter turned to John and said, "You ask him." Peter knew what everyone else around that table knew, that John could get something out of Jesus that none of the rest of them could. Without a moment's hesitation, John turned to Jesus and put his head on Jesus' chest and asked, "Who is it, Lord?" Jesus answered John immediately by giving the piece of bread to Judas. You see, John really was Jesus' best friend.

The next day, Jesus was hanging on a cross and looking out on a universe from which every visible trace of God seemed to have disappeared. All but one of his disciples had deserted him. Only John and four women were standing at the foot of the cross. Jesus looked down and saw his mother. Who would take care of her now? His brothers? The apostles? No, they had all deserted him. Then he looked at John. It is as though he said in his spirit, "John, you're the only one I've got. No one else will do for my mother." With tender affection, Jesus said to Mary, "Dear woman, here is your son." Then he said to his best friend, "Here is your mother."

John really was Jesus' best friend. But John doesn't have to be the only one who is his best friend.

We all have only one brief hour on the earth, and then we will stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives. Why not be like Mary and choose the best part, the one necessary thing, so that we can stand before him in confidence on that day? Why not be like John and make Jesus our best friend? The heart of Jesus is big enough to accommodate many more best friends and many more Marys.

Why would you want to settle for anything less?

JACK DEERE

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