



You Have a Gift!  
A Passion that Burns Within  
Romans 12:1-13  
October 16, 2005

Many of you remember Jeroon, the student from Holland who visited Roger and Carol Bullard this summer. He was a real hit around there, because he thoroughly enjoyed himself. He was enthusiastic about being here. That is usually the case with international students, except for one girl. I don't remember her name; I just remember that she never smiled, never frowned, never giggled, never anything. Her hosts, Ron and Maryan Brown, would shake their heads, bewildered: "She...she has no affect!" She showed no emotion, no *passion*, whatsoever.

Too many times, churches are like that. On Saturday nights, Garrison Keillor has a radio show that features stories about his imaginary town called Lake Wobegon, "the town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve." Sometimes he'll mention one of the churches in town, named "Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility." That name says it all, doesn't it? There are times when being in church is more duty than passion, more about sustaining programs than growing spiritually. Too often, church is where a dutiful soul will burn himself out on duty and responsibility. By the way, burnout does not come from working hard for a long time. Burnout comes from working hard for a long time and you don't see any meaning in it, only duty.

Thank God church doesn't have to be like that. Thank God that, in church, people are not always weighed down by duty, but are lifted up by a holy passion. I've seen that more than once just this week. Carol Bullard has been in India for a month now, working in a children's home with overwhelming needs and few resources. But in all her letters to us, she has not once said anything about being tired...for the children are so precious. It is hard work, but it is work full of meaning, and so there is no thought of burnout. Last Sunday night, I had pizza with the youth and heard an adult youth worker tell how jazzed up he was -- by going out with youth monthly to visit older folks, or to help at Wesley Shelter. He was not weighed down by duty; he was lifted up by the passion to do something meaningful. This week I heard Lynwood Boykin tell what it's like to direct Hope Station. The need there seems endless. Often the old fire station is filled to standing room only with people needing food, fuel, and clothes. But soft-spoken, low-key Lynwood says, "God put me here." And the way he says it, you know he means it.

What's the difference between people weighed down by duty, and people lifted up by passion? Listen to the apostle Paul describe his passion in life:

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the*

*renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)*

On a scale of 1 to 10, Paul's passion is about a 9.5 here. You can't get much more passionate than offering your body as a living sacrifice. Paul is also passionate about having the kind of transformed mind that can think clearly about what God wants. So Paul is totally focused, with all of his best thinking, with all of his deepest feelings, on the will of God. And he says that when you discover that passion within you, it will lead you to discover that there are some spiritual gifts just burning within you. Read Romans 12:3-8...

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us;*

*prophecy, in proportion to faith;  
 ministry, in ministering;  
 the teacher, in teaching;  
 the exhorter, in exhortation;  
 the giver, in generosity;  
 the leader, in diligence;  
 the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

God has placed spiritual energies within us, gifts of the Spirit. God gives different gifts to different ones of us. But all of them are just burning to be used.

Notice how Paul has moved directly from the passion of being a living sacrifice to the gifts of the Spirit. That gives us a clue about how to figure out what spiritual gift God has given each of us. Would you like to find out what your spiritual gift is? Find out your passion, and then you will find your gift. Whatever passion burns within you will lead you to the gift that burns within. Those of you who have been studying this in your classes – you have been asked to list ten things that burn within you and give your life meaning. What gives you passion to live? What restores your energy? What calls forth the best in you? (*Patricia Brown, SpiritGifts*)

One thing that does all of the above for me is doing a baptism as I did for Chris Fitzgerald today. It is one of the most fulfilling things I get to do. I have the best view in the house for every baptism. I get to be with people as they make this life-changing commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord. I get to see the expression of complete peace as they go into the water (most of them). There is nothing like it for me. Another thing that really moves me is being with college students, such as doing a Bible study with Barton's BSU this Tuesday night. I don't get to do that much, but I still get to be excited that we are close to a college and help with an important ministry there, thanks to Tom Riley and Daniel Heath and others. Another thing I have a passion for is serving where the action

is. I frankly don't have much interest in a church that cowers behind four walls. I love being with this church that fans out each week to meet human need -- in Gulfport, with Habitat for Humanity, in the Middle East. All of that moves me, does something deep within me, stokes my passion for life and for living for God.

I love how this church has always had a passion for missions and is positively exploding in missions and ministry this year. We pray, AND we give, AND we go! This church has always had a passion for children in the Baptist Children's homes. Lately that passion has extended halfway around the world to the Precious Children's Homes in India. And our passion has taken us to the Middle East, to Gulfport, and who knows where it will take us next?

Frankly I find that you are a curiously unique church, so low-key in so many ways, and yet in this church are passions that run deep and powerful. I think it takes a special kind of people to make up this congregation at the corner of Nash and Pine. Not everybody would feel called to the kind of ministry required here. Some, frankly, would be a little scared. To minister here on this corner takes a passion for mission, a passion for the heart of the City of Wilson, a passion for being mixed up among all different kinds of people. That's not for everyone. But for some, such as many of you, you thrive on it!

I am concerned, though, that some people come here with different expectations. Some folks may come here because they think it is a big church in which they can hide and not be expected to do much. Do not let our size, or perhaps even our style, mislead you. Look on the cover of our worship folder where we note who the ministers of the church are: the members. We believe it is God's dream, God's expectation, yes even God's will, that every single member here discover what your passion is, and then let your passion lead you to discover what your gift is. We trust that wherever God gives us a passion to do something, God will also give us the gift of power to do it! And then knowing what your gift is, we believe it is God's will that you employ that gift in ministry. Maybe that ministry will be here on this corner, maybe that ministry will be far beyond this corner.

We are a passionate people. We may not necessarily be a loud people, but don't let that fool you. We are determined to follow our God-given passions, we are determined to discover our God-given gifts, and then to put them to use for this community and this planet. I pray that passion will continue to spread.

This holy passion comes from one source, the passion of Jesus. Jesus was passionate for the Kingdom of God. Jesus was passionate in his battle against evil powers. Jesus was passionate in his unconditional love for the unloved and the outcast. In fact, we call the last week of his life the Passion with a capital "P." The Passion, the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the central fact for the apostle Paul in this scripture. How could it be possible NOT to be passionate before Jesus' death and resurrection? Before the death and the resurrection of Christ, you cannot just be a spectator. You either have to be a rebel, or a subject. *(Robert Wall, New Interpreter's Bible Commentary on Romans, p. 706)*

So, our passion leads us to discover our gifts. And, curiously, when we use our gifts, those gifts lead us to experience more passion. Listen to what happens when we use our gifts for each other:

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

When we follow our passions to our gifts and put our gifts to work, then what happens? We unleash more passion among us! For example, we release love that is genuine. I like how the Greek puts it: *agape anhupocritos*, un-hypocritical love...love without masks.

Let Christ inspire your passion. Let your passion lead you to your gift – it could be prophetic speech, it could be teaching, it could be compassion, there's no limit to what it could be. And then use that gift so it will inflame more passions of love and hope and more among us all.

-- Douglas E. Murray