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STOP WITNESSING and START LOVING

Paul Borthwick



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ISBN 1-57683-233-3

Cover design by Dan Jamison

Cover photo by PhotoSpin

Creative Team: Don Simpson, Brad Lewis, Nat Akin, Laura Spray, Glynes Northam

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Borthwick, Paul, 1954-

Stop witnessing, and start loving / Paul Borthwick.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-57683-233-3

I. Witness bearing (Christianity) I. Title.

BV4520 .B59 2003

248'5--dc21

2002015678

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 07 06 05 04 03

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DEDICATION

I begin this book with a deep sense of appreciation. I'm thankful to the kind editors at NavPress. They not only dedicated hours to improve my writing and make this book more readable, they also kindly granted me grace as I completed it.

I'm thankful for my friends who encouraged and, in some cases, inspired, the completion of this book—Richard Rhodes, Steve Macchia, the guys in our men's small group, and our prayer supporters.

Most of all, however, I thank God for Christie—my best friend, life partner, and wife. Her heart for the lost, especially expressed through her prayers and her diligence in lifestyle witness, have inspired me to persevere. I gladly dedicate this book to her.

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FOREWORD

Why is it when we lose something very precious to us that we frantically muster up every ounce of available energy to find it once again?

While speaking at a conference recently, one of the attendees shared with me that his 15-year-old granddaughter had been missing for nearly 24 hours. He was uncertain if he would be staying at the conference since his mind was so distracted with this news, and all he wanted to do was leave immediately, drive 250 miles to his daughter's home, and participate in the search.

I assured my new friend that he would be missed, but that everyone present would certainly understand his compelling reason for leaving. He was in tears as I prayed for his broken heart, his family, and most specifically, for his lost granddaughter. I was drawn into his pain as a father, remained prayerful in his behalf as a concerned brother in Christ, invited others to pray for the lost child, and anticipated all the potential heart-wrenching options if she were not found.

Within a few hours, this gentleman entered our seminar room and with gleeful exuberance interrupted my teaching with an enthusiastic “thumbs up”—the lost had been found! We all rejoiced together with great sighs of relief, offered a prayer of gratitude to God, and celebrated with this jubilant granddaddy. The all-out search for a precious lost soul had been successful, and the family of God gave thanks.

Why is it, on the other hand, when we know there are spiritually “lost” people scattered across the globe—and even across the street—that we don't muster up every available ounce of Spirit-empowered energy within us to reach them (no matter the cost) with the life-changing

gospel message of love in Jesus Christ? For the committed believer, this is the heart of the matter.

God's heart is for the lost. And, his heart can be reproduced within us. Paul Borthwick, my long-time friend and accountability partner, offers us a thorough understanding of why lost people matter so much to Almighty God and, frankly, why they should matter to us! Through biblically sound teachings and examples that speak clearly of God's heart, Borthwick provides for the reader a healthy theology of evangelism. This theology is plentifully illustrated with practical, relational application.

When you discover a book with passion, zeal, excitement, boldness, and overflowing heartfelt witness, you want to read it cover to cover. This is one such book, especially when the author is unashamed to call lost people lost—as Jesus himself calls them—without concern for being politically correct. I know from firsthand experience that what Paul Borthwick writes is from the depth of personal convictions that have been borne out of anguish over the lostness of those he loves. His concern is not for political correctness—it's for missional effectiveness.

As one who has been rescued out of darkness, my friend and brother in Christ is compelled by the gospel to reach out to others with the love of Jesus. As a result, he has seen incredible victory as well as disappointing heartache. He writes to all of his readers out of his own earnest desire to infiltrate his world as a powerful witness for Christ. Because of the urgent need to reach the lost, he calls us out of our lethargy and urges us to become conspicuous Christian witnesses in a dark and needy world. Get ready for the challenge. Borthwick pulls out all the stops and doesn't hold back!

Does it matter to you that lost people are heading to eternal damnation if they are not reached with the gospel? If so, then rekindle the fire within you and rebuke your excuses for avoiding evangelistic

“divine appointments.” With gratitude of heart, respond to his call, serve as a catalyst for his grace, and watch how God’s transforming hope comes alive through you to love the lost within your reach!

“The light that shines the furthest shines brightest close to home.”
May it be so for you!

Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

President, Vision New England

Author, *Becoming a Healthy Church*

INTRODUCTION

DRY BONES OR CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS?

A heart for lost people can change your life!

Before I read the book *How to Be a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelburg, I loved the title. I said, “Yes, Lord, that’s what I want to be—a contagious Christian.” I want my life to spread the love of God like a positive, hope-filled virus that can spiritually infect other people for the better.

Don’t you?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans about being eager to preach Jesus Christ to lost people. I read that verse and I echo the prayer, “Yes, Lord, that’s what I want to be—eager to preach Christ, enthusiastic about my faith, and overflowing with the joy of being forgiven.” I want to be good advertising for new life in Christ.

Don’t you?

But when I do some self-evaluation, I find flaws and shortcomings as a witness for Jesus in my daily life. Rather than being an effervescent, overflowing Christian, I find myself prone to spiritual deadness. I’m like the people of Israel that Ezekiel called “dry bones.” Rather than being a contagious Christian in society, spreading the love of Christ like a virus of hope, I find myself more like the spiritually self-satisfied people in the church of Laodicea whom Jesus called “lukewarm.”

I think I’m not alone. Many followers of Christ feel like failures as

witnesses. We belong to the people of God, but our lives testify to an apathy, complacency, or boredom about the faith.

Consider the various ways we refer to ourselves in the church. Technically, the term *Christian* should be able to stand alone without adjectives. It means a follower of Christ, an imitator of Christ, one who belongs to Christ. But, over the centuries of Christianity, we've added a host of adjectives. These include positive phrases like "born-again," "charismatic," or "Bible-believing" Christian.

But we also include negative phrases like "nominal," "backslidden," or "carnal." Most of us would agree that adding adjectives to create combinations like bored Christian, nominal Christian, lukewarm Christian, or apathetic Christian should be oxymoronic—opposites that are mutually exclusive—when referring to devotees of the Lord Jesus.

Then we go to church. There we find it easy to know everything about doctrine, all the while ignoring the needy. Would Jesus compare us to "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27)?

We might come from the family who started the church, and we might enjoy power and influence in church politics, but if we never witness to the love of Christ to those outside the faith, would Paul describe us as a person "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5)?

Some of us have experience as veterans of service on a thousand committees, but our spiritual lives are dull. Would Ezekiel call us "dry bones" (see Ezekiel 37:1-11)?

Maybe the last time we actually led someone else to Jesus Christ was twenty years ago. Now we seldom speak of our faith at work or in the community. Would Jesus identify us as "lukewarm" (Revelation 3:16)?

When we examine our own spiritual vitality, especially as it pertains to our love and zeal for outreach to lost people, we fall short. We're pre-occupied with peripheral issues. We're distracted from reaching out to

others. We grow cold in our faith. And we fail to present to our nonreligious friends the abundant life Christ promises.

So, how do we resurrect our desire to be contagious Christians? How do we get excited again about following Jesus Christ and sharing his love with others? What will reignite an eagerness to tell others about God's love? In other words, how do we regain our heart for the lost?

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

If you picked this book up to learn 101 new techniques for witnessing, you'll be disappointed. If you're looking for a new resource on how to answer difficult questions from those outside the Christian faith, sorry, this isn't it.

This book isn't about technique or apologetics. It's about heart. It's about our basic desires, motivations, and perspectives as Christians in contemporary society. It's about the "what makes me tick?"—type questions of life.

A couple of years ago, my supervisor at church took a group of staff to Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois—one of the largest and most famous churches in North America. I went against my will—I already had strong opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of this church, so I objected with a don't-confuse-me-with-the-facts resistance. But that conference changed my life. An excellent program, fine materials, and more content than I could digest in a year. But that's not what changed me.

My life was changed because the speakers helped me regain my heart for lost people. It wasn't through some seminar or how-to talk. It emanated from their lives. They told stories about winning people to Christ—and none of the stories were more than six months old. They prioritized outreach to others in spite of the busyness of church schedules and demands.

When they talked about people who hadn't come to faith in Christ, they wept. I could tell these leaders ached to see others come to new life and forgiveness in Christ.

My life changed because they exemplified Christians living with a heart for the lost. Their example became a wake-up call for me. Two months after this reawakening of my own heart for the lost, I left the security of twenty-two years of employment in order to dedicate myself more fully to serving lost people.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

At this point, you might be thinking you'll just put down this book. You're thinking to yourself, *I'm not sure I'm ready to upset my life quite that much to rebuild a heart for lost people.*

I can't promise you that this book will do for you what the seminar at Willow Creek did for me. But I can promise you this: It will challenge you. I hope it will challenge you to renew your passion to know Jesus Christ. I hope it will stir you to look at people around you with a fresh, biblical vision. And I pray that I can encourage or challenge your understanding of yourself as God's agent for change in this broken world.

And if God uses something I share in these pages to rekindle your heart for lost people—even to the point of leaving twenty-two years or more of security so you can serve lost people—I'd love to hear about it.

Paul Borthwick

Lexington, Massachusetts

Our task as laymen is to live our personal communion with Christ with such intensity as to make it contagious. —Paul Tournier

HEART BUILDER #1:

REKINDLE YOUR PASSION

Passion for outreach is not
our first priority.

You might think that a book like this would start with a call to be zealous to reach out to those outside of the Christian faith. But zeal for outreach is not the starting point. Passion is. Your core passion. The thing that gets you up and keeps you going. The thing—when you confront it—that causes you to conclude, “Yes. This is what I’m living for!”

So . . . what’s *your* passion?

Social observers say that we live in a passionless age. Observers of our pluralistic culture conclude that our main value seems to be total acceptance of everything and commitment to nothing, even referring to the early twenty-first century as the “age of indifferentism.”

The editors of *Leadership* magazine captured this in a cartoon. A pastor is speaking to a group of adults—obviously calling them to a life of higher commitment and discipleship. A fellow in the back raises

his hand and asks, “Pastor, is it possible to *audit* this class on total commitment?”

We live in a culture of halfheartedness. We fear passion because we’re against obsessive-compulsive behaviors. Yet ironically, every weekend, millions of Americans will sit and watch sports figures passionately battle it out! And passionate fans scream, color their faces, and brave extreme weather in order to support their favorite athletes. We’ve developed the ability to be passionate about things that don’t matter eternally while being apathetic about the true meaning of life.

WHAT IS PASSION?

Before exploring *how* we might rekindle our passion—either for Christ or for lost people—we need to understand what passion looks like. One dictionary defines passion as “fervor, enthusiasm, zeal, an intense emotion compelling action.”¹

The biblical word for passion takes it a step further. The Greek word *pascho* literally is linked to the verb meaning “to suffer,” translated as “[Christ’s] suffering” (Acts 1:3). If you’re from a liturgical background, you understand this connection; the week between Palm Sunday and Easter is Passion Week—the week of the suffering, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Combine the dictionary definition with the biblical meaning related to suffering, and we come up with a fuller understanding of passion:

Passion is something we’re so intensely committed to that we’d be willing to suffer or die for it.

So, I need to warn you up front: there’s no such thing as pain-free passion. There’s no passion-lite, no partial or halfhearted passion.

Passionate people pay the price, absorb the cost, and go after their purposes with sold-out zeal.

John Henry Jowett, a British pastor of a century ago, described a life of passion when he exhorted people to live life to God's fullest and to avoid stagnation:

It is possible to evade a multitude of sorrows through the cultivation of an insignificant life. Indeed, if a person's ambition is to avoid the troubles of life, the recipe is simple: shed your ambitions in every direction, cut the wings of every soaring purpose, and seek a life with the fewest contacts and relations. If you want to get through life with the smallest trouble, you must reduce yourself to the smallest compass. Tiny souls can dodge through life; bigger souls are blocked on every side. As soon as a person begins to enlarge his or her life, resistances are multiplied. Let a person remove petty selfish purposes and enthrone Christ, and sufferings will be increased on every side.²

IMAGES OF PASSION

It helps us understand passion when we see images of passion.

The cover story of an April 1997 issue of *Sports Illustrated* featured an exposé of drug use in sports.³ To set the tone, the writers surveyed 196 Olympic athletes and asked, "If you knew you would not be caught, would you be willing to take performance-enhancing drugs or steroids if you knew that they enable you to win a gold medal?"

Guess how many said they'd take these drugs if they knew they'd win and wouldn't get caught? One hundred ninety-two of 196 (97.9 percent)! Their zeal to win obviously suppressed any ethical or moral issues that could have stopped them from cheating.

The second question, however, really illustrated the passion that these Olympians had to win a gold medal. The *Sports Illustrated* reporters asked,

“If you knew that you could win a gold medal, and wouldn’t be caught—but you would die in five years—would you still take these drugs?”

More than 100 of the 196 (51 percent) surveyed said that they would still take the drugs—even if they’d die in five years! Sound warped? I suppose so, but passion never looks normal to the passionless. We might think these athletes have lost all perspective on their lives and sports—but they provide a powerful picture of the sacrifices people will make when they’re passionate about a higher goal.

A second picture of passion comes from a June 1994 *National Geographic* article entitled “King of Fibers.”⁴ The feature article didn’t intrigue me at all, but a sidebar describing the ordeals the author and photographer endured in order to present the article did. For this story (that most of us would find a tough topic to get passionate about), the author and photographer:

- Made 160 contacts for interviews.
- Researched 65 books.
- Traveled to eleven countries.
- Carried fifteen tons of equipment in 171 crates, including a lab, a boat, and other machines.
- Suffered relationally (one of the contributors got divorced), personally (they were jailed, beaten, and robbed), and physically (suffering both malaria and dysentery) as the article was completed.
- Racked up hardships parallel to Paul’s lists (in 2 Corinthians 6 and 11) of his own turmoil in preaching the gospel.

They went through this for one article and about seven photos that were published—on a relatively boring topic such as cotton. But they were passionate to get published, so they paid the price.

Young lovers who promise to “climb the highest mountain and swim the deepest sea” understand passion. A professional athlete who has a dislocated finger amputated so that he can play in the big game

understands passion. One computer company's slogan summarizes their stated passion to satisfy their customers: "Whatever it takes!" Whatever it takes to reach the goal, to accomplish the mission, to complete the race. That's passion.

After my wife and I gave up years of job security to pursue what we understood as God's purposes for us, a young woman at our church wanted to affirm our passion to serve Christ. She came to us and stated simply, "Go crazy for God." She understood a whatever-it-takes passion.

Bill and Judy love Jesus Christ. Their lives testify to their passion to make that relationship the top priority of their lives. Their passion has led to bold and sometimes outrageous witness for Jesus—especially focusing on international visitors in their community from the Peoples Republic of China. They go on prayer walks around town on Saturday morning asking God to guide them to Chinese visitors. In the winter, they move their outreach indoors to the Chinese-foods section of the local supermarket. On any given Sunday, you'll find Bill and Judy sitting in church with two or three Chinese communist visitors they've met over the weekend—visitors who are hearing the good news about Jesus for the first time. Bill and Judy's outreach flows out of their love for Jesus Christ, and that love overflows to the people they touch.

Fred retired several years ago, but now—at age seventy and beyond—he dedicates every summer to short-term mission service, teaching English and reaching out to people in a country closed to missionaries. Fred's friends think he's crazy. He is! He's passionate about his relationship with Jesus Christ, and he wants to make Jesus known—whatever it takes.

A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF PASSION

When we think of godly passion—the type we want to rekindle so that we renew our heart for the lost—the picture to consider comes from

Paul in his letter to the Philippians. Writing from prison, Paul articulates his passion.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:7-14)

Paul, the great evangelist and apostle, serves as an obvious example of someone who lived with a heart for the lost people of his world. Here he articulates his supreme passion—to know Jesus Christ in both his power and his sufferings.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

A book on developing a heart for lost people obviously flows from the idea of passion, and you might think that the starting point is a passion to reach lost people. But the apostle Paul describes a different set of

priorities. We don't start by building our passion to reach out to lost people. The sheer volume of people in need and resistance to the good news about Jesus will overwhelm us. We'll lose our passion either because the need is too immense or because the risk seems too large.

We also don't start by building our passion for righteousness or holiness. If we begin there, our own sinfulness and lack of progress will discourage us. Instead, we start by renewing our passion to know Christ.

Philippians 3:7-14 stands as a unique proclamation of Paul concerning his passion. He most likely writes this letter from a prison cell (see the references to chains in Philippians 1:7 and 1:13), and he sets this portion of the letter apart for his readers and for us with some unique vocabulary. He uses five specific Greek words that, in the entire Bible, appear only here in chapter 3:

- “rubbish” or *refuse* (verse 8)
- “becoming like him” or *conformed* (verse 10)
- “resurrection” (verse 11)
- “straining” (verse 13)
- “goal” (verse 14)

Why the unique language? Because Paul wants his readers to sit up and take notice. He's saying something special here. He's articulating his life passion—*namely, to know Jesus Christ!*

Remember, Paul is writing from prison. His pain and suffering help him focus on what he really believes in. When he uses the very strong word *rubbish*, he's telling his readers that all of his former passions (see Philippians 3:4-6) are nothing—rubbish, trash, dung, manure—compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ.

When he says that he's “forgetting what is behind,” he means, “I'm not resting on past laurels, past experiences, past loves.” Instead, he's now “straining” for what lies ahead, like a competitive runner lunging across the finish line.

Paul's example confronts our passion. What are we passionate about? Am I passionate to know Christ and to make that the top priority of my life? Am I like Bunyan's pilgrim in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who, when lured by the securities and comforts of a passionless life, put his fingers in his ears and embarked on his journey, shouting, "Life, life, eternal life!"⁵ Am I passionate for eternal life—which is to know God and Jesus Christ, whom God sent (see John 17:3)?

Or have I grown cold and complacent, like those in the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, who forgot their first love? Am I just interested in enough religion to season my life, like spice for my own self-centered existence?

Witness, evangelism, service—and all other forms of outreach—flow from a passion to know Christ. Out of that passion flows our love for lost people. When we're filled with the love of Christ and understand his love for us, then we overflow and touch the lives of the people around us.

REKINDLE THE PASSION

So the question becomes "How?" How can we rekindle a fire that burns with the desire to know Jesus Christ? How can we fuel the flame with passionate zeal to know Christ—a flame that makes all other pursuits seem like rubbish by comparison? Four exercises can help set us on the right path.

Exercise #1: Pray Psalm 86:11. The psalmist prays, "Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name." In other words, "Lord, I ask you to focus my life and help me stay focused on what is supposed to be my top priority."

I know how to quote Philippians 3:14—"one thing I do"—but I live a life that's scattered. Some days I'm zealous to know Christ, but other days a thousand other interests distract me. Most of these are not evil things. They're just less than the best thing, which is knowing

Christ. I pray Psalm 86:11: “Lord, I’m scattered, distracted, unfocused. Unite my heart. Bring all aspects of my life under the supreme target of knowing Jesus Christ.”

When knowing Jesus is truly my top priority, then outreach, service, and evangelism come as natural by-products. When my life focus is diffused by any number of secondary priorities, top concerns like outreach, service, and evangelism get squeezed out of my schedule.

Exercise #2: Fuel the passion to know Christ by being with “passionate-to-know-God” people. I’ve had the privilege of knowing George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization, over the past few years. George fuels my passion to know Christ. His love for the world and his desire to see people come to know Christ flows from his relationship with Jesus Christ. When my heart grows cold, it always helps to read something George wrote, listen to one of his tapes, or—on a few unique occasions—pray with George personally.

If we want to catch fire with the zeal to know Christ, then we need to be with people who are on fire themselves. Their zeal can ignite us. We all do well to find a friend who helps fuel our fire to know Christ.

What do you do if no one like that is around? If no living person can help you refocus your commitment to know Jesus Christ, then go to the library and find some biographies of Christian heroes who’ve gone before us. Reading great stories of people like Jim Elliot, Amy Carmichael, C. T. Studd, or Hudson Taylor (to name only a few) can stir us to imitate their zeal to know Jesus Christ.

Exercise #3: Don’t waste your pain. This third exercise designed to rekindle passion to know Christ comes right out of Philippians 3:10. Paul writes that he wants to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” All of us want that first part—the power of Christ’s resurrection. But few of us want the second—the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s sufferings.

What’s Paul saying here? Does he advocate a spiritual masochism

where we go looking for opportunities to suffer? Of course not. He's merely stating a theme throughout the Bible—that God uses or allows hardship in our lives to draw us to himself, deepen our character, and intensify our witness.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist observes twice that suffering was good for him because it produced obedience (see Psalm 119:67,71). Paul tells Christians to rejoice in their sufferings because suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character (see Romans 5:3). The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us that God disciplines those he loves, and that even Jesus learned obedience through suffering (see Hebrews 5:8).

Are we willing to allow our disappointments and pains to foster our total dependence on God? Amy Carmichael, whose missionary career spanned more than fifty years, spent more than half those years confined to her sickbed. Yet it was her sufferings that led to many books and poems reflecting the depth of her character.

Growing through pain is never easy. Our human response to any type of pain—physical, emotional, or social—starts with the prayer, “Lord, please take away the pain.” But what do we do when God doesn't take away the pain—at least in ways we would choose? Our second prayer should be, “Lord, if you're not going to take away this pain, then please use it to fuel my desire to know you.”

It's not easy to stay passionate through our pain. Several years ago, after rupturing a disk in my lower back, I was living with greater physical pain than I'd ever experienced before. I couldn't sleep, sit, or stand without constant discomfort. As a reflection of my own “deep spirituality,” I remember praying: “Lord, if you want to use this pain to make me more Christlike, to make me into a deeper man, then I pray for . . . *superficiality*! I don't want to be deep that much. *Please* take away the pain.” I wanted relief far more than I wanted depth.

But Jesus didn't take away the pain. And as I grew, I began to pray,

“Okay, Lord, then use this pain for your purposes. Use this pain to make me more compassionate. Use this pain to fuel my passion. Use this pain to take me to others in pain who need to know your hope in the face of suffering.”

Passion is tough because it’s usually connected to pain. But God calls us to imitate Christ—even to the point of allowing our pain to be used for his kingdom. Are we willing to say, “Lord Jesus, I invite you to use my dysfunctional past, my physical pain, my learning disabilities, my emotional pain, my brokenness—all to fuel passion for you and dedication to your mission in the world.”

Exercise #4: Fire the passion to know Christ by fighting “passion-busters.” We all confront things in life that squelch our passion to know Christ. When we identify these, we can determine to fight against them. I can think of at least three things that smother my passion. Maybe you relate to these, or maybe you have your own list.

Bitterness destroys my passion to know Jesus. Bitterness takes what could be powerful, positive emotional zeal toward Christ and detours it in a negative direction. When I focus on some unresolved hurt in my life—either toward God or another person—it distracts me from 100-percent focus on Jesus Christ.

The irony about bitterness is this: Although I direct my anger or emotion at someone who has hurt me, I’m the one who ends up getting hurt. Bitterness always exhausts and destroys the one who holds it—not the object of the bitterness.

Second, my desire for security waters down my passion. Our addiction to security, safety, and comfort—especially in the affluent world of the West—will almost always overtake the radical commitment that comes from passion. Passion involves risk. Passion involves abandonment of secondary purposes in favor of a supreme goal.

The story I told earlier—about leaving job security to concentrate more fully on reaching lost people—needs to be told with a footnote.

The conference that helped push me over the edge and make the decision to leave was part of a two-year process of gradually releasing my grip on my comfort-zone living. God had been telling me to move on and entrust my future totally to him, but my desire for security pushed down passion for God. I had a secure post, safe relationships, a steady salary—and I hesitated giving it all up.

Then I read a story in chapter 3 of Daniel. As the three young friends of Daniel face the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, they refuse to bow down and worship him. So he stokes the fire even hotter—to the point that those doing the stoking drop dead. But as Daniel’s friends face their own deaths because of their obedience to God, they tell the king, “The God we serve is able to save us from it” (verse 17). They articulate their faith, but then they state their passion to be God’s men by completing the sentence with the condition “*But even if he does not . . . O king, . . . we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up*” (verse 18, emphasis added). Their passion to obey God led them to the inevitable conclusion that security and safety is a secondary issue! When I read that story (that I’d read many times before), I made up my mind. I’ll step out in faith and obey God—whatever it takes!

A third passion-buster I see in myself is materialism. As part of my affluent world of Western society, I can fall prey to the temptation to live for the pursuit of *stuff*. And when I do, my passion for Christ and his kingdom goes down the drain. Our societal desire for more and more, materially, douses the fire of passion. Our desire for increasingly more “things” means we spend our energies on earning and spending, accumulating and collecting. We fill our houses with more and more stuff, which then occupies more and more of our time—so that eventually we don’t have either the energy or time for the passion of being 100-percent devoted toward knowing Christ Jesus.

SO, WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

Dig into the core of anyone who demonstrates a sustained heart for people outside of Jesus Christ and we'll find a passion to know Jesus Christ. Everything gracious and loving that comes from us ultimately flows from our understanding of the gospel and what Jesus Christ has done for us. We'll see more of this in the next chapter. But here, let me restate the point, so that we don't overwhelm ourselves trying to reach out to our lost world:

A heart for lost people flows from our lives as we develop our passion to know Jesus Christ.

HEART BUILDER #1 GO CRAZY FOR GOD

I live in the American suburbs in a beautiful town. Many friends and neighbors hold college degrees, drive nice cars, and present themselves as dignified, respectable citizens. While I know that behind their doors there is relational abuse, alcoholism, and despair, people walk with heads high in my community.

How do I present the love of Christ in this context? I try to fit in. I act dignified, talk intelligently of my faith, and warm others to the gospel. If

someone asks about our international missionary work, I talk about respectable things—like leadership development, well drilling in poor villages, and health care for children.

People listen and clap politely, but none get too excited about the Christ they see in me. They neither act nor react. What am I doing wrong?

When I looked more closely at the examples of Jesus and the apostle Paul as witnesses to God's truth, I

discovered my problem—I'm simply not crazy enough.

Consider Jesus—he started his ministry, performed some healings, drew some followers, and then came home. And there, his family tried to restrain him because people were saying, “He is out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). The religious leaders called him demonized and his own household refused to believe (Mark 3:22,31-35; John 7:5).

Or look at Paul. He gets his big chance for ministerial influence in the political arena before King Agrippa, but rather than softly introducing the story of God's love, he gets right to the point—declaring the suffering Messiah whom God raised from the dead (see Acts 26:23). The listeners quickly observe that Paul, like his Master, Jesus, was out of his mind (see Acts 26:24). He had truly become a fool for Christ's sake.

When I first decided to fol-

low Jesus, we lived in a countercultural era. We followers of Christ happily considered ourselves “Jesus Freaks.” Being out of step with society was a good thing. We saw a little weirdness as evidence that our true citizenship was in heaven.

I wonder if I need to return to being radically different than the norm. Maybe my neighbors would rise up and take notice if I started welcoming the outcasts of the world into my dignified neighborhood. Maybe I should take my neighbors with me to the poorer world—so that they could see the countercultural nature of following Christ.

If I were a little wackier for Jesus, at least my neighbors would be forced to have an opinion—rather than relegate me into the category of a “nice, religious person.” If being crazy for God was good enough for Jesus and the apostle Paul, it should be good enough for me.⁶

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