

Developing a Passion for God

2 Samuel 6:1-11



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Would you describe yourself as a passionate person? You say, that depends on what you're talking about. If the subject is my children or grandchildren, you bet! If the subject is nature—walking on the beach, watching a sunset, working in the garden—again, you bet! Most of us are passionate about something. The word “passion” is one of the richest words in the English language. Take a look at how its definition: Passion is an extreme, compelling, intense emotional drive or excitement. A passionate person is someone who is filled with “intense feeling, an ardent, blazing, burning desire.” We all get passionate about something—we can be passionate about a person, a place, a job, a hobby.

Many of the mothers I have met or read about are passionate about their children. They would do anything for them and are devoted to their well-being. While up in Alaska last week I read a *New York Times* best selling novel, “*Snow In August*.” The story takes place in Brooklyn in the 1940s. A single mom whose husband was killed in World War II is trying to raise her young son in a poor, crime-ridden neighborhood. Eleven year old Michael Devlin and his friends had just finished shoveling snow for a neighbor who gave them a dollar for their efforts. They were eager to spend their hard-earned wage so they ran over to Mr. G's candy store.

Michael's friend, Sonny, was examining the comics on the wire rack when Frankie McCarthy, the leader of a street gang called the Falcons, entered the store. Frankie came up to Sonny and said, “What's in your pocket, kid?” “Nothin’” Sonny replied. But Frankie pressed him. “You're lying to me, kid. Hand it over!” Mr. G was at the counter and said “Leave the poor kid alone. I don't like extortions going on in my store.” Frankie

turned to Mr. G and said, “You old Jew. How'd you like me to turn this place into a parking lot?” And with one hand he swept the tiered rack of candies off the glass-topped counter. Then Frankie saw Mister God lifting a telephone and leaped for him; he hammered Mr. G with the phone. Michael tried to move to the rear of the store but Frankie yelled out, “Stay right there, kid. I wanna show you how to deal with a Hebe like this. Then his eyes widened into a kind of frenzy as he knocked Mr. G to the floor and kept kicking and stomping at the fallen man. As a final gesture of rage he jerked the huge metal cash register from its moorings, raised it over his head, and hurled it down on Mister G. Then he turned to Michael and his friends and said, “You didn't see a blanket-blank thing, did you, kids?” Then Frank and the rest of the Falcons left.

Within a few minutes an ambulance came and the police along with it. They tracked down Frankie and arrested him, then interviewed those who had witnessed the crime. But Michael and his friends but they were too frightened to talk. A few days later as he was walking home from the church he and his mom attend where he had performed his duties as an altar boy, some members of the Falcons spotted him.

Michael was crossing the street beside the factory when they reached him. They grabbed his arms and shoved him hard against the picket fence. Then he was twisted around and one of them drove a punch into his stomach. He couldn't breathe or feel his legs. “Jew-lover,” they yelled. “This is from Frankie; he sends you his best!”

Kate Devlin, Michael's mother, met the ambulance at the hospital. She was sitting by the side of his bed when Michael awoke after being unconscious for two days. Her cool hand touched his cheek and he said, “Hello, Mom.” She exhaled and said, “Thank God! As they talked, she asked, “Who did this to you, son?” “Frankie and the Falcons.” “Did they use a club on you?” “Yeah. On my leg.” “Well, said Kate, “They'll not hit another boy around here, she said, I promise you that.”

They took the trolley home, Michael hobbling on his crutches. He felt as if he would fall but Kate held his hand as the trolley approached their stop, and took a deep breath and felt safer. She went first out first and then helped him down the steps. She looked around, but the Falcons were no where to be found. “If they lay another hand on you they'll go away for a long, long time.” Don't let them scare you, son. That's how they win.”

But the Falcons were not finished yet. One day after school when they arrived home Michael and his mom found a large black swastika painted on their front door. Kate immediately called the police.

When two detectives showed up at their apartment to investigate they said, “That's a nice looking swastika. Whattcha want us to do about it, Lady? Clean it off?” Kate Devlin wasn't like some of the Irish, who she felt were far too docile in the presence of police. Michael watched her with a kind of awe. “Don't get sarcastic with me, Officer,” she said. “You're here as a civil servant. You'd better be civil and you'd better be a servant.”

Over the next few months Michael hobbled along on crutches, with his lower right leg encased in a heavy plaster cast. He felt awkward,

clumsy and defenseless. So every time he went outside his mother was right by his side. She rearranged her work schedule so she could drop him off and school and pick him up and escort him anywhere else he had to go—because the Falcons seemed to be everywhere. Then one morning Michael awoke to some news his mother couldn't wait to tell him. She had found a new job in a nearby town where they would be far away from the Falcon gang. Even better, she had put money down on another apartment—one with a garden. Kate Devlin was like a mother bear and you'd better not get between her and her cub.

The story in our Old Testament scripture from 2 Samuel 6 this morning offers us a kind of parallel to the passion God has for us and God wants us to have for him. The story is basically a three-act drama and each act has a central character. In Act I, a priest by the name of Uzzah *dies*. In act two, King David *dances*. And in act three, David's wife, Michal *despises*.

But before we look at who these people are and what happened to them, let's set the stage with a little background. Back in the days when David had been anointed as the second King of the young nation of Israel, the tabernacle was the focal point of the people's worship. Under the reign of David's predecessor, King Saul, worship in the tabernacle had been sadly neglected and the most important symbol of God's presence was missing: The Ark of the Covenant. But David is now king. And he brings it back to Jerusalem. It was a rectangular box just about four feet long and a little over two feet high. Constructed of wood and overlaid with gold the inside the ark contained three items: the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed, a jar of manna from the years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, and the rod of Moses' brother, Aaron. Now the ark wasn't some kind of magic box or source of mysterious power that the Israelites could just plug into. But it was a visible reminder of God's holy promise and presence. It would have great significance. Yet it was considered to be so sacred that no one was supposed to touch it, or even to look into it or they would die.

And that brings us to Act I: the death of Uzzah. After sitting around collecting dust for over 30 years, the ark was to be return to Jerusalem. David entrusted his priests with the task and the person in charge of this mission was a man named Uzzah. He and his brother were supervising this operation. They placed the Ark on a cart and began to move it. But as they were taking it down a hill, they began to lose control of the cart.

Uzzah reached out to steady it—it was just a reflex action to protect the Ark—and he was killed instantly. It was the equivalent of touching a downed power line and having thousands of volts of electricity surge through your body. In an instant, Uzzah was dead.

Now admittedly, it sounds rather odd that God would allow something like this to happen. When I was a boy and would visit my grandmothers' house she would always warn her twelve grandchildren not to touch the porcelain *Hummels* she had carefully place on doilies around the living room. “Touch them,” she said, “and the wrath of God will be

visited upon you!” And we all believed grandma, so we stayed far, far away from those little dolls.

But does God make the same kind of threats on our lives? If we make a mistake will we get zapped? Eugene Peterson helps us understand God’s response to Uzzah’s actions. He reminds us that this was not simply a mistake of the moment. More likely, it was a piece of Uzzah’s life-long obsession with managing the ark. He was trying to take control of God and had lost sight of who was really in charge. Further, if Uzzah had bothered to read the instructions clearly laid out in the book of Exodus, he would have noted that the Ark was never intended to be transported on a cart—only carried on the shoulders of certain select people, holding it with golden poles.

The ark itself wasn’t supposed to be touched by human hands. Why all the fuss? These were all gestures of reverence. We can so easily lose sight of appropriate reverence and awe for God’s commands. We’re pretty casual about many things and can decide, in effect, to stop caring about what God cares about. Not only loving God, but loving people. We don’t want to bother with the details of obedience by taking the time to get out the poles and putting them on our shoulders.

I can related to Uzzah. Sometimes I’m tempted to take shortcuts. I’m in such a hurry to go visit someone at the hospital that I don’t take the time to look deeply into the eyes of the members of my own family and tell them I love them. Where are you most like Uzzah? God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Whenever we pick and choose which commands to obey, and which ones to politely ignore; whenever we treat sacred things and sacred moments lightly; whenever we try to put God in a box of our own making, seeking God only when it’s convenient or when we’re in trouble, we do what Uzzah did. It’s important for us to understand that belief without obedience is a way of mocking God.

David saw what happened to Uzzah and was angry at God. He was probably thinking, “Here I was trying to do a good thing for you, God, why did you have to go and ruin everything?” So he went home and sulked for nearly three months while the ark stayed in storage. Then he began to think about what had happened and examined his own heart.

If you skip over to 1 Chronicles 15 and pick up the story in verse 12, you’ll find that the second time around David got it right. He said to them, “You are the heads of the Levite families; you are the ones specially chosen by God for this important task. So consecrate yourselves and bring up the Ark of the Covenant to the place I have prepared for it.” So they did as David commanded.

Now we move to Act II in this drama: David’s dance. Verse 14 tells us that when the ark finally arrived in Jerusalem David danced before the Lord with all his might, and there was singing and shouting and the sound of trumpets. David felt such great joy in his heart that he danced. He even replaced his royal robes with a garment called an *ephod*, the priestly dress made of fine linen. David usually had other people, subordinate servants, dance before him. He was the king after all. He was accustomed to doing the watching, not the dancing.

Boy, can I relate to that! I grew up in a culture that frowned on dancing. It didn’t matter what kind of dancing it was: ballroom dancing, folk dancing, modern dancing. The Christian high school I attended didn’t believe in having student dances. We had banquets instead (kind of dull). When I went off to college I was interested in a particular girl, so I went to a dance on campus one night. I was sweating the entire time because it would be a real stretch for me to get out there and wiggle. I felt so embarrassed and self-conscious.

But when she asked me to dance, I set aside my personal feelings, got out on the dance floor, and proceeded to make a real fool of myself! Sometimes the only way you can express your passion is to dance. And that’s what David did. He danced before the Lord with all his might.

Then we come to the third and final act: *Michal despises* in this mini-drama involves David’s wife. Verse 20 says, “David returned to bless his household, but Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, ‘How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servant’s maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!’ David said, ‘It was before the Lord that I have danced.’”

We don’t know what prompted this reaction on Michal’s part. Was it jealousy? Was it social embarrassment like the kind I experience when I was young? Was it her own personal inhibition? Or could it have been an indication that her marriage to David was in trouble? Whatever the reason Michal held back from joining in David’s dance and roundly criticized him for doing so.

So what does all of this have to do with us and how we go about expressing our love for God? Do we hold back or are we able to let go? What keeps you, what keeps me, from uninhibited and passionate worship? C. S. Lewis once wondered why God asks for our adoration. He admitted that one of his early stumbling blocks in coming to faith was the consistent urging in scriptures to praise God. He wondered if God craves our worship like a vain woman craves compliments. Gradually, though, Lewis began to understand that worship is not just a command, it’s the natural response of a grateful heart. “Our praise,” says Lewis, “completes our enjoyment. Worship is a natural response to the wonder of who God is.”

I don’t know about you, but it’s a big challenge for me to turn my mind and my thoughts toward God throughout my busy week. I mean, I’m so easily consumed with the details of my job, my family, and just mundane, ordinary things. Yet it’s so important for each of us to choose regular, albeit, brief moments to intentionally come into the presence of God. To remind ourselves that God desires an intimate relationship with each one of us.

David was far from perfect. He had definitely messed up his life in some major ways, but he also had a genuine passion for God. He put every aspect of his being into his worship—not just his mind and heart, but even his body. And this bring us to his dance. Some of you get a little nervous when you hear dance and worship in the same sentence,

because, like me, you were raised to be more inhibited. The worship postures we were taught were not very expressive.

Here’s how Eugene Peterson described his passionate display: “David danced. In God, David had access to life that exceeded his capacity to measure or control. He was on the edge of mystery, of glory, and so he danced.

When we’re going about our daily responsibilities, we walk. But when we’re beside ourselves with love, shaken out of our preoccupation with self, we dance. David danced. He was worshiping, responding to the living God.”

When you’re really passionate about something, sometimes you’ve got to let out a shout, give someone a “high-five”, or just breaking into a little dance. Richard Foster writes that God calls for worship that involves our whole being. The Hebrew word we translate as “worship” is “to prostrate.” That’s with two R’s. Prostrate. You don’t want to mispronounce that word! The Bible describes a variety of physical postures in relation to worship, including standing, kneeling, clapping, lifting hands, lying prostrate, lifting or bowing our heads, and dancing. Our physical expression should be consistent with the inner spirit of worship.

So, for example, when we come before God with in a humble, contrite heart, this attitude is often symbolized by kneeling or bowing or heads or prostrating our bodies. When, however, we experience the joy of God’s forgiveness and grace, we feel more like kicking up our heels and shouting “whoopie! Sometimes our worship needs to push us outside of our comfort zones to become more spiritually engaged, and emotionally uninhibited. God wants us to be free to worship with our minds, hearts, and bodies.

I come from a rather repressed German background and was never very comfortable with much physical expression that wasn’t sports-oriented. But over the years I’ve begun to appreciate my need to take some little risks along the way and make sure that my focus is not just on preserving my image but on glorifying God. I have come to see that worship without any physical expression is limiting.

So here’s the deal: the next time the Spirit prompts you to uncross your arms, go for it, take one little step. Maybe for some of you, it’s a start just to take your hands out of your pockets or even utter a sound because you think you can’t carry a tune in a bucket. This business of worship is risky, but it’s worth it when you consider the alternative is to end up spiritually or even physically dead like Uzzah.

The church historian of the second century, Irenaeus, said that “the glory of God is a human being fully alive.” David was fully alive. He loved God with all of his heart, all of his soul, and all of his mind. He worshiped with his whole being, dancing before the Lord. Most of us are a bit self-conscious. We’re concerned about what others think. But in the final analysis God is the only audience that really counts. David had his days to praise God. Now it is our day, it is our time on this earth. David had the Ark of the Covenant, but we have the risen Christ. We have the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence in our hearts. So let’s remind one another how great and good our God is. Let’s sing and even dance before the Lord! Amen.