



ONE HOLY PASSION

Acts 6:1-7

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One of the most challenging books I've ever read is John Piper's book *Don't Waste Your Life*, in which he makes the obvious, yet compelling statement. "You get only one pass at life. That's all. Only one."¹ So, don't waste your life.

Piper tells the story of a couple who was financially able to take early retirement from their demanding jobs in the Northeast. They made their fortune early enough in life to enjoy it for many years. They moved to Florida, cruised around on a 30' trawler, played softball, and collected shells. It was a life that most would envy. But the more he thought about it, Piper thought how tragic such a life would be. He writes, "Come to the end of your life – your one and only precious, God-given life – and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ ... 'Look, Lord. See my shells.'"²

Early retirement and a life of leisure is the American dream, but in reality, it is a spiritual tragedy. And Piper pleads, "Don't buy it. Don't waste your life."³

No one intends to waste their life, but it happens. It happens when a person settles for a busy life instead of a focused life, for an active life instead of a passionate life. Living an active life is not the same as living a passionate life. The goal of Christian life is not to fill it with activity and adventure, with possessions and pastimes. The goal of Christian life is to hear the voice of God and to respond to His invitation. First, respond to His invitation to salvation. And second, respond to His invitation to join Him in the great adventure of His kingdom work.

That's why we are studying the book of Acts. The first century Christians possessed a holy passion. All of their emotion and strength and faith was focused on living lives worthy of the sacrifice Jesus had made for them. And that should be our desire too, to live lives of holy passion. Passion that affects our marriages and our families, affects how we do our jobs and how we do our homework, affects how we spend our money, how we love our neighbors, how we treat our enemies, how we care for the needy, how we pray for the lost, how we do everything in life.

On the first page of Rick Warren's bestseller *The Purpose-Driven Life*, he writes,

"It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose."⁴

I want to fulfill God's purpose for my life and so do you. But it's all at risk when we allow our lives to become too busy and too complex. Living a life of holy passion is at risk when we place too much value on pleasure and comfort, so much so that we fail to do the spiritual work needed to persevere in times of adversity, trust in times of confusion, and endure in times of temptation. Holy passion is like a fire that must be stoked, else the fire dies down and eventually becomes cold. We face challenges and threats to our spiritual passion every day and so did the early church.

The church was growing rapidly and, within a year, 5,000 people made up the church at

Jerusalem. It was a mega-church. And soon the apostles faced a leadership dilemma which threatened the mission to which Jesus had called them. The negative side of rapid growth was that ministry became more complicated and needs were being overlooked. As they faced this dilemma, the apostles were determined not to allow anything to distract them from that one holy passion.

Think about all that had happened in the first few weeks of the early church. The memory of a blood-soaked cross and an empty tomb loomed in the minds. What happened to Jesus was unforgettable. And so were His final words just before He ascended into heaven. “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). He made them responsible for the message of grace, and how they preached that message would set the foundation of faith for generations to come. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the presence and power of God fell upon every believer. And it was with that Spirit that Peter preached the inaugural message of the church and the church was born. The disciples preached in the streets. They healed a lame man right in front of the temple gate as people walked by. They dared to draw a line in the sand and declare, “There is salvation in no one else.” They were arrested, beaten, and “kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). And within days, one of their own would be stoned to death! Living out their faith meant bold preaching, supernatural miracles, and thousands converted. And living out their one holy passion also meant being arrested, beaten, and stoned to death!

Without emotionally connecting to the context of Acts 1-7, Acts 6 looks like a minor issue. But Acts 6 is not just about distributing food or restructuring the church’s org chart. The context is the story. The looming mission is the story. They were determined to fulfill the mission to which Jesus had called them and to live lives of holy passion, and they refused to allow anything to distract them.

And what’s true for the church is also true for the Christian and is true for you. Yes, Acts 6 gives us a model for church leadership. Yes, it gives us advice on how to develop strategy for a growing church. But it also gives you and me a model on how to maintain a holy passion for Jesus Christ. The principle of Acts 6 is to keep the main thing the main thing. The principle of Acts 6, beyond the details, is to ***never allow anything to distract you from living a life of holy passion for Jesus Christ***. So the question is, are you willing to restructure your life in order to preserve a holy passion for Jesus?

PRIORITY OF PRAYER & WORD

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food” (Acts 6:1, NAS).

The two main groups within the Jerusalem church were the Hellenists and Hebrews. The Hellenists were Jews who were Greek-raised, Greek-educated, and Greek-speaking. The Hebrews were Jews born and bred in Israel. Tension had always existed between the two groups and now “a complaint arose” because Greek widows were being neglected.

²So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good

reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2-4, NAS)

The apostles agreed that this oversight was unacceptable, but they refused to take on more responsibility. Instead, they delegated responsibility in order to maintain the priority of “prayer and the ministry of the word.” They said “no” to a necessity in order to say “yes” to a priority. But the problem in Acts 6 was not just about making sure everyone got fed. The context surrounding Acts 6 points to a much bigger issue, the issue of holy passion and staying focused on the mission.

The apostles knew that prayer was their power and preaching was their mission. ***In order to live a life of holy passion, the church must keep prayer and the Word a priority.*** The foundation of any church must be prayer and the Word of God. Prayer and the Word give direction to a church like the rudder of a ship. Prayer and the Word give life to a church like the roots of a tree. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They were hungry and thirsty for God. They were persistent in their pursuit of God. And they knew that prayer and the Word was their lifeline to the Father.

No church will be healthy or effective – especially in the midst of growth and adversity, chaos and complexity – without the priority of prayer and the Word. ***And what’s true for the church is also true for the Christian and is true for you. In order to live a life of holy passion, you must keep prayer and the Word a priority in your life.*** Prayer and the Word are your lifeline to the Father.

In the Bible we read story after story about what prayer accomplished.

- If Moses were here, he would tell us that prayer opened the Red Sea.
- If Joshua were here, he would tell us that prayer made the walls of Jericho collapse.
- If Elijah were here, he would tell us prayer brought fire down from the sky and consumed idols.
- If Daniel were here, he would tell us that prayer shut a lion’s mouth.
- If Lazarus were here, he would tell us that prayer raised him from the dead.

But are those just Bible stories? Can prayer do things like that for us? Can prayer do anything about broken marriages or prodigal children, about cancer or car crashes, about unemployment or finances? Can prayer do anything about those things? The Bible says it can. God promises it can.

- “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3, NAS)
- “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7, NAS).
- “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:14, NAS)
- “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16, NAS). “When a believing person prays, great things happen” (NCV).

Add up all the promises on prayer and there’s no better offer in the universe! And we can sum up God’s offer with two words: *relationship* and *request*. Prayer is the means through which we live in relationship with God. It is the means through which to enjoy God’s presence. Prayer is conversational, just as if we were sitting down and enjoying dinner conversation with God. And,

prayer is also the means through which we make our most urgent requests known to God. It's the means through which we ask of God and receive from God. We have been invited into relationship with God and we have been invited to make request from God. This makes prayer "irresistible."⁵

Also vital to spiritual passion is the Word of God.

Jeremiah said, "When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16, NLT). For Jeremiah, the Word of God was his spiritual food and the delight of his heart. Moses urged Joshua to devour God's word too. "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Joshua 1:8, NAS). David knew that spiritual vitality came from the Word of God. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psalm 1:2-3, NAS). David said God's word was like "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105, NAS).

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. . . . If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:5, 7, NAS). Prayer and the Word are a lifeline to our Father.

CALL TO SERVE

The apostles solved the problem and maintained the spiritual priority of prayer and the Word and fulfilled the practical necessity of feeding the body.

³Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. . . . ⁵The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:3, 5-6, NAS).

In order to live a life of holy passion, the church must empower and release people to serve. Notice these are all Greek names. The apostles were wise in choosing leaders from among the Greeks to minister to the Greeks. They were men of "good reputation"; they were trusted. They were "full of the Spirit"; spiritually mature and pastorally sensitive. They were "full . . . of wisdom"; smart, fair, and had common sense.

Acts 6 is the model for the later development of leadership within the church. The original apostles' role was later fulfilled by elder-pastor, those responsible for spiritual oversight, governance, doctrine, direction, and discipline.⁶ The role of the seven was later fulfilled by the office of deacon, those responsible for specific ministry tasks. The qualifications for both elder-pastor and deacon are found in 1 Timothy 3.

And the action the apostles took, by selecting and developing other leaders, is now a model for all churches. The Bible says that God gave leadership gifts to the church – apostles, prophets,

evangelists, pastors and teachers – “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12, ESV). The purpose of church leadership is “equip the saints,” to empower and release others to serve.

And what’s true for the church is also true for the Christian and is true for you. In order to live a life of holy passion, you must find out how God wants you to serve. You must find out how God wants to use your life.

Laying hands on the seven was very significant. When the apostles laid their hands on the seven and prayed over them, it represented God laying His hands on them, empowering them, releasing them, and commissioning them for ministry. Verse 6 is relevant because every Christian has a ministry, a calling, a purpose. God has laid His hands on you and you have a responsibility to find out what God wants you to do with your life.

Peter wrote, “Each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Whoever speaks, let it be with God’s words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:10-11, NET).

Fulfilling your kingdom assignment means understanding that you are a steward.^{7,8} A steward is someone who has been entrusted with something valuable, something precious. Steward is a sacred role and a sacred trust. When a parent places their baby into the hands of a babysitter, they’re handing over the most precious thing in their lives. When you think of the word steward, realize that God has placed something precious into your hands. God has poured something sacred into your life and entrusted you to use it wisely. Stewardship is a whole life concept and includes finding out how God wants to use your life.⁹

Executive coach Arthur Miller makes this profound statement about you.

“Perhaps you are unaware of the fact that *you are the customized expression of a loving God*. He has wired you through some genetic mechanism we do not as yet understand. You have been endowed with a unique mix of competencies and the desire and drive to use them in pursuit of an outcome of unrivaled personal importance. Your life has meaning built into it. Effectively, you have an exciting, challenging, and achievable destiny if you will but discover and embrace who you are designed to be.... *You are God’s idea.*”¹⁰

Therefore, as Paul urged Timothy, “Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you ... Take pains (with it) ... be absorbed (with it)” (1 Timothy 4:14-15). To “take pains” means to pay careful attention to your gift, to be diligent in exercising your gift, to work hard at improving your gift.¹¹ Most people spend too much time trying to improve their weaknesses and too little time improving their strengths. God wants us to play to our strengths and to leverage the gifts He has given us. He wants us to do most what we do best.

I love Max Lucado’s book *The Cure for the Common Life*, in which weaves wisdom and Scripture together to make his point.

“Each person is given something to do that shows who God is” (1 Corinthians 12:7, MSG)... Look back on your life. What have you consistently done well? What have you loved to do? Stand at the intersection

of your affections and successes and find your uniqueness. You have one. A divine spark. An uncommon call to an uncommon life. “The Spirit has given each of us a *special way* of serving Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:7, CEV).¹²

God endows us with gifts so we can make him known...Exhibit God with your uniqueness. When you magnify your Maker with your strengths, when your contribution enriches God’s reputation, your days grow suddenly sweet.... Use your uniqueness to make a big deal about God.¹³

When you do the most what you do the best, you put a smile on God’s face.¹⁴

Living a life of holy passion is about finding out what God has called you to do, discerning how God has wired you, unleashing the passions and talents and abilities that God has poured in you. Living a life of holy passion is “doing most what you do best.” It’s being able to say, “I was born for this!”¹⁵

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

To me, verse 7 is the most important verse in this passage. ***In order to live a life of holy passion, the church must have a clear and focused definition of success.*** The church must stay focused on what God has called us to do. The apostles refused to allow anything to distract them from their mission.

This section of Scripture begins and ends with same point. In verse one, “the disciples were increasing in number” and in verse seven, “the word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). People were coming to Christ and lives were being changed. That’s the definition of success.

After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20, NAS). He said, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15, NLT). When they heard that commission, it was not just an inspiring speech or strategic plan. When they heard Jesus’ commission, faces came to mind, names came to mind, friends came to mind, relatives came to mind. People who desperately needed salvation came to mind.

And with a holy passion, the church was “having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). More and more people were attracted to Jesus and more and more lives were being changed.¹⁶

In order to live a life of holy passion, the church must have a clear and focused definition of success. ***And what’s true for the church is also true for the Christian and is true for you. In order to live a life of holy passion, you must have a clear and focused definition of success and stay focused on what God has called you to do.***

It’s been said that “everyone dies, but not everyone lives.”

Life is short, and it moves faster the older we get. Job knew that feeling. “Our days on earth are as a shadow” (Job 8:9, NIV). James referred to life as “a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). David knew that feeling too. “Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life” (Psalm 39:4-5, NIV).¹⁷ David wanted his life to count, don’t you?

Erwin McManus is so right when he says “the great tragedy is not the sins that we commit, but the life that we fail to live.”¹⁸ Too many Christians think that successfully living the Christian life means that they don’t sin too much. But that’s not enough. Sinning less is a good thing. But being a pious spectator is a bad thing. “God counts it a tragedy when we choose to simply watch life rather than live it.”¹⁹ McManus cries out, “Wake up! Get out of bed. God wants to change the world through your life if you’ll just do something.”²⁰

As always, Jesus is our example. Just before He was arrested, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. In that prayer He affirmed His willingness to obey His Father and placed His life in His Father’s hands. And knowing what was about to happen on the cross, Jesus prayed, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).²¹ Another example is David, of whom it was said, he “served the purpose of God in his own generation” (Acts 13:36). And Paul is yet another example. He resolved in his heart, “My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24, NLT). “The most important thing is that I complete my mission . . . that the Lord Jesus gave me” (Acts 20:24, NCV).²²

If you want your life to look like that of Jesus or David or Paul, if you want your life to count, if you want to make an impact for eternity, if you want to experience true success, if you don’t want to waste your life, then you must stay focused on what God has called you to do and live out of a holy passion for Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

What is your one holy passion?

There has to be more to life than minimizing suffering and maximizing comfort. There has to be more to life than accumulating wealth and possessions, more than promotions and positions. There has to be more than 60 hour weeks and endless loads of laundry. There has to be more than watching television and even more than raising our children. And there is. For those who love Jesus Christ, nothing comes close to that one holy passion, that one magnificent obsession, that one glorious ambition of serving Jesus.

If you have yet to make a commitment to Jesus Christ, do you hear God speaking to you this morning? Does the thought of living with holy passion resonate with you? Is there a desire burning in your heart to find purpose, and are you starting to realize that that purpose can only be found in God?

God created the world and He created you, and without God in your life, life doesn’t make sense. Without God, life is empty. Without God in your life, you are on your own. And there’s no way life without God, without the help of the God of the universe, can be better. Jesus is giving you

the opportunity to know Him. He is offering you an invitation. An invitation to be forgiven. An invitation erase your past, to recreate your life, and to start all over. Jesus is offering you peace within and peace with God. He is offering you a place in heaven, He is offering you eternity. And that's what you'll miss if you ignore His offer. Jesus loves you, that's why He died for your sins on the cross. And He wants to forgive you and save you. He wants to restore you and reconcile you to God. He wants to give you the promise of eternal life and the reality of a passionate life today. I urge you to consider to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord today.

Again, quoting John Piper, "The wasted life is the life without passion."²³ Oh, don't waste your life. Every day as the sun rises, we wake up to a new day filled with great opportunity. And we should wake up, kneel before our God, and raise our hands in praise, saying, "Today is Yours Lord. Everything I have and everything I am, I give to you today. Today, Lord, I live for You." God is inviting you to join Him and to participate in what He is doing in the world. So don't waste your life. ***Never allow anything to distract you from living a life of holy passion for Jesus Christ.***

CLOSING PRAYER

Oh Father, help us see the reality that we have only one life. Help us dread the thought of wasting that one and only life. Help us see the adventure to which You are inviting us. Help us make up minds, "Today, I live for You."

Give us one pure and holy passion. Give us one magnificent obsession. Give us one glorious ambition for our lives. So that we might know and follow hard after You.

In the name of one who had passion for us, Amen.²⁴

NOTES

1. John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), page 13.
2. *Ibid.*, page 46.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), page 17.
5. E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), page 16.
6. The following passages list the responsibilities of an elder:
 - Hebrews 13:17 – “for they keep watch over your souls”
 - 1 Peter 5:2 – “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God ...”
 - 1 Peter 5:3 – “proving to be examples to the flock”
 - 1 Timothy 5:17 – “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”
 - Titus 1:9 – “Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”
 - James 5:14-15 – “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”
7. Paul added, “It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
8. The Greek word is οἰκονόμος; which means one who manages a house.
 - A steward is like the caretaker or manager of a wealthy estate.
 - A steward is like a babysitter or nanny who cares for a child.
 - A steward is like a gardener who tends a flower bed.
 - A steward is like a project manager or foreman at a construction site.
 - A steward is like a financial adviser who manages a client’s portfolio, or like a treasurer of an organization.
 - A steward is like a waiter who drapes a towel over his arm to serve others.
9. Peter went on to explain that every blessing we receive and every spiritual gift we possess comes to us “by the manifold grace of God.” With a surprising grace, God has favored us by inviting us to participate in His kingdom work.
10. Arthur F. Miller, Jr., with William Hendricks, *Why You Can't Be Anything You Want to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), page 11 and 111.
11. The Greek word is μελέταο; which means to pay careful attention to.
12. Max Lucado, *The Cure for the Common Life* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2005), page 3.
13. *Ibid.*, page 5.
14. *Ibid.*, page 20.
15. This is the point Paul made in Ephesians 2:10. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV).
16. At Pentecost, “Those who had believed were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (2:42). Days later, many more heard the message and believed “and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (4:4). “Multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number” (5:14). “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). The church expanded dramatically, and lives were changed. But don’t get the impression that it was just about numbers. Every “number” was a person with a face and with a name. Every “number” was a friend or a relative or someone who desperately needed Jesus.
17. “Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should” (Psalm 90:12, TLB).
18. Erwin Raphael McManus, *Seizing Your Divine Moment* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), page 34.
19. *Ibid.*, page 44.
20. John Piper warns us that “life is wasted when we do not live for the glory of God” (page 32). So, don’t waste your life. “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ESV). “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).
21. Jesus prayed, “I glorified you on earth by completing down to the last detail what you assigned me to do” (John 17:4, MSG).
22. Because of this resolve, Paul was able to say near the end of his life, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).
23. Piper, page 31.
24. “One Pure and Holy Passion,” from the *One Day Live* recording, Passion Worship Band.