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Developing Spiritual Passion

Every year the United States Armed Forces enlists about 180,000 new recruits (military.com). They enlist realizing they could be called on to lay down their life for their country. Since 2007, an average of 1.5 million people are turning away from Christianity every year in America with no realization that they are losing their life (Decline). If the Armed Forces can recruit new members, expecting them to lay down their life for their country, we can do the same in the church. We can develop spiritual passion, passion that is willing to suffer for Christ, if we give young people a cause worth dying for, train them for spiritual warfare, and heroize Christ above all else.

Young people are leaving the church today because they are not passionate about serving the Lord. It is not that they are not passionate. They are passionate about sports, they are passionate about hunting, they are passionate about saving the planet. This passion is not wrong, but it is often disproportionate to their passion for Christ, making it an idol. Suppose we lack passion for sports or politics: we stop following it. In the same way, if we lack passion for Christ, we stop following him. Jesus wants to redeem people but without followers there is no light to pierce the darkness. We need recruiters, willing to spread the cause of the Kingdom of God. Few adults seem to expect young people to be passionate about spiritual things. We have created a culture in which we expect young people to be “teenagers,” not very mature and a bit rebellious.

Parents hope that someday they will grow out of it but accept it as inevitable. Because of this, young people have few peers that exemplify spiritual passion.

If we would make discipleship costly, expecting every member to give up all of himself for the cause of Christ, young people would join. No one wants to join a team that doesn't care whether or not they win. Multiple times I have seen a young person step up to the plate as a spiritual leader, passionate about the cause of Christ, and have watched as his peers join him, ready to fight spiritually. Deep in every person is a warrior wanting to fight for something they believe in even to the point of putting their life on the line. Eighteen year old men stormed the beaches of Normandy knowing they would likely die within a few minutes of leaving the ship. Why? What drives this kind of commitment? Augustine once said that individuals become a people by loving the same thing together (qtd. in Kimbriel 14). Those soldiers loved their country enough to lay down their lives. They believed in the cause. We can become a spiritual army by loving Jesus together and calling young people into active duty. They will storm the gates of hell and they will prevail.

To enter the battlefield takes preparation, a building of knowledge and experience. We need systematic structures to train spiritual warriors. Instruction class should be just the beginning of teaching for young people. It is a wonderful way to lay a foundation of the faith, but we need more hands-on teaching. We need adults who are willing to mentor young people, showing them what true passion and service looks like in every day life. The Moravians are an excellent example of developing a culture of passion. They created a prayer chain, kept alive for a century by taking turns praying for an allotted amount of time, making sure someone was praying 24/7. Imagine the power of this continual prayer. They were passionate about

evangelizing, sending people out in pairs for two years at a time after having received extensive training. If they made it through two years without being killed for their faith, they would come back and settle down, start a family, and financially support the next generation of evangelists. We can learn from the Moravians that giving young people the proper training will help them be prepared to share their faith passionately. Establishing a culture of sharing the faith gives them the push they need to passionately share the Gospel.

Another step in developing passion is giving young people a hero worth honoring. Ask someone who their hero is and it will tell you a lot about him. We should heroize faithful Christians like the United States heroizes the Armed Forces. Parents and teachers need to read stories about martyrs for Christ, setting them up as examples to young people. The early apostles wanted to suffer for Christ, an idea that is foreign to most American Christians. If we would honor those that have fallen for following Jesus as much as the military honors their fallen, we would create a culture where being passionate about Jesus is held in high esteem. Although we need stories of faithful Christian heroes, our greatest hero should be Jesus Christ. Jesus was not some weak, passive person who got into the wrong situation and ended up being killed for it. Jesus had so much power he could have smashed his enemies with a single word, but he chose to direct that power not at his enemies, but toward the needy. He healed the sick, he forgave sins, he raised the dead, he freed the captives. His power was under his control, but he laid it down, taking our sin upon himself, dying for our freedom, the sacrifice of the ultimate soldier. Instead of making remarks about how brave our military is, what if we as freely referenced how honorable Jesus was? What if we got as fired up about Sunday morning worship as we did at the

softball game on Saturday? When Jesus becomes our greatest hero, we will lay down our lives freely in service to him.

Young people are passionate and they want someone to call out their full potential and give them something to fight for. They do not want to fight unprepared but we can create a culture that not only provides training but motivates them to be passionate about their belief. We do this by coming to Jesus and because he first loved and died for us, we fall in love with him and when we do, we form an army, loving the same thing together.

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