

What's Your Passion?

Dan Nelson

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I have learned that rarely do good things come without effort. I know it seems that some people have always had everything, but it's not true. The infamous "silver spoon" can be deceiving. Growing up I enjoyed playing sports; football, baseball, wrestling, and the like. When playing sports, practice is an essential part of the deal. If you didn't attend practice, you didn't play. This is because of the bigger principle that coaches were trying to plant in our minds, that practice develops skill and teamwork. Without regular and focused practice it is unreasonable to expect good performance at the game. None of us are born with refined skills at anything. While it seems that some may have more natural talents than others, these things must be learned and developed. We were a musical family and my sister and I were required to practice our instruments everyday. We grew to hate practice. I enjoyed the music, especially when we sounded good, but loathed the disciplines of regular practice. The ticking kitchen timer that kept us from playing with our friends outside had become our prison guard. The day the timer finally broke we celebrated. When my sister and I were finally allowed to make our own decisions, we gave up practicing because we despised it so. I regret that decision now because I would be a much better musician today if I had not neglected those disciplines. I now understand better that saying "anything worth having is worth working for".

With all of the discussion, praise, criticism and controversy over Mel Gibson's new movie *The Passion of the Christ*, there remains one facet that is rarely discussed; what is the passion of Christ? The movie does show clearly the tremendous and nearly overwhelming painful effort Jesus endured to get to the cross. The film reminds in the most revealing way that it was Jesus' choice and that no one was taking His life but He was giving it of His free will. That He had power to stop the crucifixion but didn't. But what is leaving most people speechless walking out of the theater is not the gore for we have seen many graphic films. No, what seems to be capturing the hearts of the people is the unanswered question "why?". I know a lot of people have a pat answer they have thrown out many times before in dialogue or even preaching, but then being confronted with a realistic portrayal of the crucifixion, pithy quotations and witty clichés seem to soak in triviality. We walk out speechless. I think the movie is powerful. Ironically, however, the name of the movie still leaves the biggest unanswered question, "What is the passion of the Christ?". We saw what His passion caused Him to endure, but what was His passion? The Bible says "for the joy that was set before Him he endured the cross"

(Hebrews 12:2) and that "He was delivered up for us all"(Romans 8:32). The scriptures describe His great love for people and His insistence that this was the only way to save us from our fate, that we are His reward, His prize. I believe that those who walk out of the movie aghast are those bewildered by this notion, not that Jesus died, or even that His death was gruesome for most of us expected that, but that His death was somehow motivated by His love for me. This truly is still a mystery. I don't understand it. I am in awe.

It has been said that what we occupy our time with reveals our priorities. If you want to know what people are passionate about, watch how they spend their free time. If I say family is important but never spend time with them, my true heart has been exposed. If I consider myself spiritual but never worship, I am revealed by my actions. So what is your passion? We have been talking a lot about the passion of the Christ but I want to close with this thought; your actions define your character. (Matthew 15) What disciplines are you cultivating? What skills are you developing? What is your life practice? What is your passion?

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