

2 Key Steps to Becoming Soul-Passionate

In 1904, Britain's King Edward VII invited William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, to Buckingham Palace to honor him for his contributions to society. When the king asked Booth to sign his autograph album, he wrote these timeless words: "Some men's ambition is art. Some men's ambition is fame. Some men's ambition is gold. My ambition is the souls of men!"

The Apostle Paul was apprehended by this same passion for souls, stating in Rom. 9:2-3: *"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race."* Paul's desire to see the Jewish people saved was so intense that he was even willing to go to hell if it meant they could be saved.

The men and women who have made the greatest impact throughout church history—such as John Wesley, George Whitefield, Hudson Taylor and D.L. Moody—had this same zeal to see people far from God get saved. Franklin Graham recently shared how his father, the great Billy Graham, still prays for the lost every day even though his health has deteriorated at the age of 95. Like many of the heroes of faith before him, Billy's life and ministry have been shaped and driven by his passion for souls.

How can we develop this same kind of burden for unbelievers? I believe there are two primary keys to developing a passion for souls—prayer and proximity.

1. PRAYER—Get close to God

The first key ingredient to developing a passion for souls is prayer. Evangelism—the process of helping people far from God get close to God—should always begin with prayer. Talk to

Jesus about your friends before you talk to your friends about Jesus. When you spend quality time with Jesus, His burdens will become your burdens and His values will become your values. Jesus declared His life's mission in Luke 19:10: *"Indeed, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save people who are lost."* Jesus was all about people, and the closer you get to Him, the more His passion for souls will consume you and become the driving force in your life.

Acts 4:13 reveals that Peter and John's boldness in sharing their faith came from spending time with Jesus: *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."* Intimacy with Jesus develops within us a passion for souls and the courage to share our faith with them.

John Hyde, a well-known missionary to India, experienced this firsthand. When he arrived on the mission field in 1892, he discovered there were only one other missionary and three Christian women in the state of Punjab, which had a population of about 1 million people at the time. Winning India for Christ seemed like a daunting task.

In 1908, after 16 years of missionary work with very little fruit to show for his labors, Hyde drastically changed his strategy. He felt challenged by the Holy Spirit to pray for a whole year for one soul to be saved every day in India. Many of his fellow missionaries thought that was utterly absurd. It seemed impossible, but over 365 people got saved over the course of the next 12 months. The following year, the Holy Spirit challenged Hyde to stretch his faith and pray for two souls every day. He would often pray all night until he felt confident that two people had surrendered their lives to Christ that day.

John shocked his fellow missionaries when he announced in 1910 that he was going to double his goal yet again and pray four

souls into the Kingdom every day. He doubled his prayer target once more the following year—*eight souls a day!* Hyde's faith and prayers sparked a revival in the state of Punjab that spread to the rest of India. What was the secret to his power in prayer? People who knew John personally witnessed him pray passionately for the salvation of the lost. He would repeat this simple and yet powerful phrase over and over again with tears streaming down his face: "Give me souls, oh God, or I die!" I pray that this prayer will become the deepest cry of your heart.

2. PROXIMITY—Get close to people

The second key ingredient to developing a passion for souls is proximity. Your proximity to unbelievers, how close you are to them relationally, often determines how much impact you will have on them. You will have more influence with friends than with strangers. In order to develop a meaningful relationship that serves as the springboard for sharing your faith with people, you have to get close to them and earn their trust. C.T. Studd said it best, "Some wish to live within the sound of a chapel bell; I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell."

Matt. 14:14 reveals that Jesus had a deep compassion for lost people because of His proximity to them—He got close enough to see their needs, hurts and afflictions: "*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*" Closeness with people releases compassion for people. Jesus had such a great impact on unbelievers because He was a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34).

Maewyn Succat was captured in Great Britain and taken to Ireland as a slave when he was 16 years old. He escaped after six years of slavery and returned home to his family. Sensing a call from God to return to Ireland as a missionary, he became a priest and took the name Patrick. Over the course of his ministry, he founded over 300 churches and baptized more

than 120,000 people. It was said of Patrick that he “found Ireland all heathen and left it all Christian.”

Saint Patrick, as we know him today, had a passion for souls that drove him to dedicate his life to help the Irish accept Christ as their Savior. He couldn't have made that kind of impact on them had he stayed in England. In the same way, if you want to lead people to Christ, you have get up close and personal enough to witness their struggles, hear their stories, and feel their pain. As Rick Warren explains, “You build a bridge of love between your heart and theirs, then you let Jesus walk across. You cannot bring enemies to Jesus. They must become your friends first. Before people trust Jesus they want to know if YOU can be trusted.”

If you want a greater passion for souls, focus on getting closer to God (prayer) and closer to people (proximity). The closer you get to Jesus, the more you will love people; and the closer you get to people, the greater your impact on them will be. Take a few minutes today to pray and ask God to give you a greater burden and passion to reach the people in your circle of influence who are far from God. The most important thing you can do with your life is to lead people to Jesus. As John Wesley said, “You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend, and be spent in this work.”

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