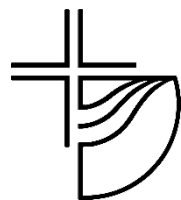


Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 4
Ilxene & Kayla Alphonse



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Focus Question

What does it mean to be spiritually passionate?

Scripture Texts

Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Focus Statement

Being spiritually passionate means having a palpable enthusiasm informed by God's Word and evidenced by obedience to Jesus Christ. The purpose behind this spiritual passion is not self-glorification or selfish satisfaction. This spiritual passion, or zeal, exists to bring glory to God and bless others by supplying their needs. Being spiritually passionate draws others to see God's goodness through Jesus Christ.

Supplies

- Internet-connected device
- Paper, pens, or pencils

Media Suggestions

- **Books:** *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of Jericho* by Timothy Keller; *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* by Timothy Keller
- **Songs:** "Heart with Loving Heart United" by Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf; "[This Little Light of Mine](#)" by Mutual Kumquat; "[Establish the Work of Our Hands](#)" by Porter's Gate Worship Project (YouTube)
- **Videos:** "[READ, THINK, PRAY, REST: A Simple Approach to Lectio Divina](#)" by Tricia Rhodes; "[Lectio Divina](#)" by Unhurried Living; "[Know Your Why](#)" by Michael Jr. Comedy

Reflecting on the Texts

"...they put [the light] on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:15-16

In a dark room, the smallest light draws attention. A pinch of salt can enhance the flavor of food.

Using these two common concepts, Jesus gives us an idea of what it means to be spiritually passionate. Being spiritually passionate means having an observable zeal, or an enthusiasm, directed by the Holy Spirit for the same things that God is passionate about (Matthew 22:37-39). This kind of zeal is informed by God's Word (Jesus) and radiates from within. It manifests itself in how we live, and it affects our surroundings. Like salt with food, this spiritual passion preserves and enriches its environment. Much like a lit candle in a dark room, this spiritual passion is ignited by Christ to provide illumination and warmth for those who are in the dark and cold.

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." 2 Corinthians 9:12

Spiritual passion, or zeal, that honors God does not exist for itself, but is to be shared. Salt is still salt even if it loses its flavor and is no longer useful. Light that is too intense can cause irreparable damage (think cancer) or blind those around it rather than help them see. A person with spiritual passion guided by the Holy Spirit considers context and others' needs to be effective in bringing glory to God.

It is important to remember that salt and light have distinct characteristics that set them apart from each other. Salt is a mineral. Visible light is electromagnetic radiation. They are not the same, yet the nature of both profoundly impacts our lives on earth. Each of us is unique and wonderfully made by God, the Creator (Psalm 139:14). Because Christ's nature is at work within us, we can live out that nature in an expression that is authentic to how God has fashioned us.

"...others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ. . . ." 2 Corinthians 9:13

Spiritual passion is observed through obedient action to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Period.

"And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8

Spiritual passion is often dampened by the idea of being consumed with nothing left to offer. Burnout is a real thing felt by many. Spiritual passion is also dampened by the idea of scarcity—not having enough (fill in the blank). Amid the reality of burnout and scarcity, one must look to God. Zeal for the things of God should consume us, but we must turn to God often for replenishment. God's replenishment can come in the form of material goods, extra hands to help, and rest. We do well accept these blessings so that we can continue every good work God has for us to do.

Gathering

Choose one of these options to introduce the theme of today's session.

- *Option 1*—What is your passion in life? How does your life give evidence of this passion? In the eyes of your family, what is your passion? If your answer and your family's answer are not the same, explain the difference. Consider the statement: "Following your passion is a very me-centered view of the world." How can this statement be false? How can this statement be true?
- *Option 2*—Before the session, gather a lighter and candles of various sizes and colors—enough for each person to light a candle. Arrange the candles in a designated space that all can see. Before the session, light one candle. Open the session by singing along with the music "This Little Light of Mine" by Mutual Kumquat (see Media Suggestions). While singing, invite participants to take turns lighting a candle. At the end of the song, say a prayer thanking God for Jesus, the source of our light.

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Engage the scripture through contemplative reading. Lectio Divina is a form of contemplative reading that incorporates prayer, meditation, and contemplation between multiple readings of the scripture. Refer to videos in Media Suggestions on the steps of Lectio Divina, if needed. Lead your group through the following steps, reading the passages aloud, asking the questions, and allowing time for participants to reflect in between.

Step 1: Read Matthew 5:14-16 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 aloud slowly and deliberately. What word or phrase stands out to you? Hold that word or phrase in your heart and mind.

Step 2: Reflect. Read the passages aloud again. Why do you think this particular word or phrase stood out to you? What does it bring to mind? How does it connect to what is going on in your life right now?

Step 3: Respond. Read the passages aloud again. Ask what God is calling you to do through this word or phrase. Pray for God's wisdom to guide you.

Step 4: Rest. Let yourself rest in God's presence. Listen for what God is saying to you through this time of reading and reflection.

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into the texts using these questions.

- In reflecting on Matthew 5:13-16, what reason does Jesus give us for why we should be salt and light?
- What qualities of salt and light help us understand how Jesus wants us to make a difference in the world around us?
- In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, what phrases does Paul use to stir passion in the hearts of the Corinthians for the work Christ is calling them to?
- According to Paul, why should we be passionate about serving?
- When have you experienced burnout or fear related to a sense of scarcity? How do these, or other passages, help us maintain our passion (retain our flavor, keep our light burning bright)?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

Watch the video "Know Your Why" by Michael Jr. Comedy (see link in Media Suggestions). Divide your group into pairs or triads to reflect on the video and share their thoughts.

Then, invite participants to consider these statements:

"The first time I asked him to sing, he knew what he was doing. The second time, he knew why he was doing it. When you know your "why", your "what" becomes more impactful because you're walking in or towards your purpose."—Michael Jr.

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."—Matthew 5:16

Is your "why" the same as Jesus' "why"? Is your "what" the same as Jesus' "what"? What about the "why" and "what" of your congregation?

In prayer, ask God to align your "why" and "what" to Jesus' standards, personally and as a congregation. Ask for clarity and guidance from the Holy Spirit for a renewed sense of purpose and spiritual fervor.

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of these activities.

- *Option 1*—Consider the statement: "When you go through life, what you'll find is what you take out of the world over time—be it money, cars, stuff, accolades—is much less important than what you've put into the world. So my recommendation would be to follow your contribution. Find the thing that you're great at, put that into the world, contribute to others, help the world be better and that is the thing to follow."—Ben Horowitz, Commencement Address at Columbia University (2015)

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and discuss the following. What has God equipped you to be great at? Reflect on your life experiences, skills, education, and background to formulate your answer. *Remember that what you were well-equipped to do in your 20s may not be the same as what you're well equipped to do in your 40s, 60s, or 80s. How will you use it to honor God and bless your community?

- *Option 2*—Write or sketch how you plan to live out what you have heard and discerned from the session. Allow sufficient time for reflecting, writing, and drawing. Write down one thing you can do within three days to ignite or renew your spiritual passion or that of your congregation.

Sending

Pray for everyone gathered and the communities they represent. End the session with the song "Heart with Loving Heart United," in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, #420.