

## ROMANS 12:11-13 OFFERING OUR PASSION

Every so often, you hear a story like this.

A dozen years ago, a fishing boat in western Australia slipped loose from where it was tied up, and it began to drift west, carried by the currents of the Indian Ocean. It drifted for almost eight months, about 20 miles a day, until it drifted ashore in Mozambique, which is near the east coast of Africa. The fishing boat had drifted over 4-thousand miles.

It is true with fishing boats in the ocean, and it is true with all sorts of objects, in any body of water. If you just let something drift, it will travel far, sometimes very far, from where it started.

In Romans 12, Paul is answering the question, "If the gospel is true, how do we live?" We have learned that because the gospel is true, we should be offering ourselves to the Savior who offered himself for us.

We offer our gifts. We offer our love. We offer our honor.

We also offer our passion, before our Lord, and in this community. In the verses I just read, Paul ponders the passion of the Roman Christians.

In verse 11 we read, "Never be lacking in zeal." When you have zeal, you are earnest and diligent. You never want to lag behind. You never want to be slowed in your passion for the Lord and his people.

Also in verse 11 we read, "Keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." The word translated "fervor" means to "boil." You want to stay "hot" in your relationship with the Lord and his people. You don't want to cool down.

If we slow down and cool down, we start to drift, and we may end up far from where we started.

Are you drifting? Am I drifting? Are we slowing down, cooling down, and drifting?

I am concerned about this in the churches in our culture, but I am also concerned about this, in the church in this place. Are we drifting toward a passion for the passions of this world, and away from a passion for the Lord? Do we have zeal, fervor and passion for the Lord, or are we too content, too comfortable, and even too complacent?

I wonder. I cannot prove this. We cannot easily measure passion. But is this what I sense, as we live among each other in this community?

In verses 12 and 13, after Paul urges the Romans against the drift of slowing down and cooling down, he paints them a picture of a life of passion.

These habits both show our zeal, fervor and passion, and grow our zeal, fervor and passion. They describe what we must be in our hearts, and what we must do with our hands, lest we slow down, cool down, and drift far from where we started.

So even at the beginning, I must ask: do you want this zeal, this fervor, this passion? Or are you content, comfortable, and complacent, right where you are in your life before God and his people?

Paul has told us that God's mercies must move us to cry, "Use me! Change me!" Will you be used? Will you be changed? Or will you, and we, just drift?

Paul writes of the passion of our hearts, and the passion of our hands.

**THE PASSION OF OUR HEARTS:** "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer."

**Be JOYFUL IN HOPE.**

What is hope? It is when you know something good is coming. We know something is coming, and we know that something is good.

For the Christian, our hope is rooted in the good news of Jesus Christ. Through faith in him, we have died with him: our sins are forgiven. Through faith in him, we have been raised with him: we have the hope of eternal life. We know that God is for us, so we know that sin and suffering will not defeat us, for we are "more than conquerors" through him who loved us.

This gives us joy. Jesus is ours, now and forever. Other joys are flimsy and fleeting, compared to the joy of knowing the hope of Jesus.

In a book called "The Great Divorce," Christian author C.S. Lewis imagines a group of English tourists, taking a bus ride for a visit to heaven. When they get out of the bus, they become transparent. Everything and everyone around them in heaven is solid and real, but they are not. These visitors cannot even walk on the grass, because it is solid and strong, while their feet are not even solid and strong enough to bear the weight of their transparent bodies.

Every hope apart from Jesus Christ is like those people. Every such hope is transparent and weak. I know it doesn't seem that way, because we cannot take bus rides to heaven to see what it is like for those who have now realized this hope. These hopes of today seem so real and so solid and so strong.

But only in Jesus Christ, do we have real, solid, strong hope - a hope that begins today, lasts forever, and leads to real, solid, strong, lasting joy.

Is this true, for you? Do you have the joyful hope of Jesus Christ? If not, I urge you to turn in faith to him for such joyful hope.

But if you say you do have this joyful hope, as most of you do, what does this mean to you? Is this the joy of your life? Is this the hope that remains on your heart? Or have less solid, less real hopes and joys stolen your passion for the Lord?

Where does your mind drift? What makes your heart race and boil? Is it the hope of the Lord, or is it something or someone else?

Maybe it is a person, whose love is too important to you. Your hope is in him, or in her. But should your greatest hope, be in people?

Maybe it is a pleasure, that you must have. Your hope is in getting it, or in getting what you want from it. But where is your hope, when that pleasure is gone?

Maybe it is a possession, that possesses you. Your hope is that it will be yours. But when you have that, where will your hope turn?

Be joyful, writes Paul, not in any hope, but in the hope of Jesus Christ, that you may offer your passion to the Lord and to others.

Be joyful in hope. Be PATIENT IN AFFLICTION.

What is affliction? One Bible student captures the idea this way. He writes that our greatest problem is that we are homesick. We yearn for a right relationship with God, and a good relationship with others, in a place of life without death.

But we do not have that yet. We long for all to be right, but so much is wrong. In our afflictions, we are homesick for a better place.

Paul's readers knew this. They had suffered for their faith. They also faced all the afflictions that are common to all of us.

So Paul calls them to patience in this affliction. The word here describes a "remaining" or "abiding" under. In other words, we stay where we are, with Jesus, despite the affliction.

The "homesickness" of this life might drain our passion and set us adrift from the Lord and his people. But with patience in affliction, we are steady and do not drift, even through the affliction.

What makes you homesick today?

Maybe you are hurting physically. You hurt and you hurt and you hurt, and you just want to give up.

Maybe you are struggling financially. You worry and worry and worry, and you are so weary of it.

Maybe you are tired of being the only one in your home or school or job who cares about the Lord and his ways. You believe you are alone.

How are you responding to it? Do you know that the joyful hope of Jesus Christ is still yours, and that God's grace is present and strong to help you to remain with him, and abide with him, even through the affliction?

Or are you slowing down? Are you cooling down? Are you responding to affliction, by drifting away from a passion for the Lord, and his people?

I believe affliction both reveals and seals our character. It reveals who we really are, and it seals us into becoming the people we will be. As we are able to endure through affliction, God will reveal our passion for him, and will seal our passion for him.

Be joyful in hope. Be patient in affliction. Then, as Paul writes of the passion of our hearts, he calls us to be FAITHFUL IN PRAYER.

How are we faithful in prayer? The image here is of "strong constancy." You are strong to do it. You are constant in it.

It's not a matter of how much you pray, but of how prayer fills and feeds your heart and your life. You know you need the grace of God in every season and situation of life. You know you do not take a breath, say a word, make a decision, or do anything except in Jesus, and for Jesus. You want to offer all of yourself for him, but you know that apart from the filling and feeding of his Holy Spirit, you will fail.

So you pray. You pray faithfully. You pray always. You may be like the pastor who said that he never prayed for more than five minutes at a time - but he never went more than five minutes without praying.

But what does this have to do with the passion of our hearts? With a heart habit of prayer, you will discover that you do nothing apart from the grace of God. He is the giver of all good gifts, including the ones that flow from you. As you are faithful in prayer, you will love him more, for you will see how he hears and responds and provides in everything.

You pray, and you sense his peace, as you deal with that cruel person. You love your Lord, for loving you through that.

You pray, and you receive his wisdom, as you make that difficult decision. You thank your Lord, for guiding you through that.

You pray, and you experience his physical and spiritual strength, as you walk through that family crisis. You worship your Lord, for his help through that.

So what about these heart habits, in your life?

What gives you joyful hope? Are you patiently enduring affliction? How does faithful prayer characterize your walk with the Lord?

Are these habits speeding and heating your passion, so that you may not drift through life before the Lord and his people? Or are you slowing, cooling, and drifting?

Then after Paul writes of the passion of our hearts, he mentions THE PASSION OF OUR HANDS.

The offering of our passion is not just a matter of what we are in our hearts. It is a matter of what we do with our hands. We grow and show passion not just with the spiritual disciplines of the heart, but with how we offer our hands to others.

Paul writes here of sharing with the needy, and practicing hospitality.

The passion of our hands: SHARING WITH THE NEEDY.

Verse 13: "Share with God's people who are in need."

What is this all about? When you share, you give something to someone. You contribute something to them. You distribute what you have to them.

But it's even more than that. Literally, the word here refers to "having a part" in the situation of the other person. Someone is in need, and you are entering into that situation. Their struggle is your struggle. You are not just "apart" from it. You have a part in it.

But what kind of need is this? As Paul wrote, he was probably thinking of material need. In the New Testament, we often read of Christians suffering for their faith, and losing even what they need to survive. So Paul urges his readers to show and grow their passion, by sharing with the needy.

What about us? How do we share with "God's people who are in need"?

It starts with helping each other in this body. We are incredibly more prosperous than Paul's readers. We don't have as many material needs.

But sometimes we do. And we should be willing to share with those in need. Let me say it strongly: in this body, no one should EVER lack for a basic material need. It should NEVER happen.

Yet while this passion starts with helping each other, it can and should extend to helping others. Needy are all around us, and many of them are counted as God's people.

What is your passion for this? I can only speak now, of what happens in my heart, as I try to do this. As you know, on the fourth Tuesday of each month at Rock Solid Ministries, our church serves the meal. As you may not know, different pastors are asked to give a devotional at Circle U's Saturday noon meal, and Dale and I take occasional turns at that.

Two Saturdays ago, it was my turn at Circle U, and since Taylor and I were in no hurry to go, we put on the gloves and started helping serve food. In my heart, I sensed this: it is time for you to stop fearing these people, and it is time for you to stop despising these people. Look them in the eye. Smile at them. Treat them with dignity. Love them, if even for a moment.

It is the same at Rock Solid. Issues of poverty are very difficult in this culture and this town, and I do not have all the answers. But this I know: if we are to show and grow our passion for the Lord, we must be willing to share with people in need. We must serve them, pray with them, even touch them - with the love of Jesus Christ.

That's me. What about you? We live in a community with many material needs. I sometimes despair of how to help. But am I finding a way to share with people in need, knowing that some of these people are God's own children, purchased for him by the blood of his Son?

The passion of our hands: sharing with the needy. The passion of our hands: PRACTICING HOSPITALITY.

What is hospitality? Literally, it is the love of strangers. Once again, there is a bit of a cultural gap for us, because Paul wrote to Christians who often needed to open their homes to travelers.

There were no cars. There were no hotels. When you went from here to there, you went on your feet or on an animal, and you slept wherever someone would open their doors to you.

So how does this translate to our day? We have cars. We have hotels.

I offer you this word: welcome.

"Welcome" refers to a heart and a hand that is willing to invite people in, and to allow them to enter your life and your community. It is when I deeply desire to see you living and walking in the grace of Jesus Christ, so I welcome you with real love and real deeds. I do not hold you off at a distance, but I embrace you as God gives me opportunity.

And I not only respond to those opportunities, I seek those opportunities. This word translated "practice" describes the pursuit of something. You are not content to wait for people to come to you. As you walk along your roads, you seek to welcome people into the grace of Jesus Christ.

It's simple kindness. It's the hand of help to the person in the grocery store. It's seeking out that person at church, that person you know will be encouraged by your care, and honoring them with service, listening, and love. It's the invitation to sit down at a meal, inside or outside the home. It's a willingness to take time to call or email and say, "How are you?"

It's a story I have told before, of a day in college when our college speech team, all three or four of us, was riding in a car in West Virginia. Somehow we got one too many sandwiches at Arby's, and we drove up by a gentleman whose possessions were all in the shopping cart he was pushing.

I went to roll up my window, but my friend put down his window, called to the man, gave him the sandwich, and spoke a kind word to him.

Are you rolling down your window, or rolling up your window? The practice of hospitality takes countless forms, but it is a way of declaring, "I welcome you into the grace of God in Jesus Christ, as I have experienced it, and as I now offer it to you."

What will happen when you do this? What happens when we roll down our windows, practice hospitality, and share with those in need? We are showing our passion for God, and we are growing our passion for God.

Do you believe that? Do you believe Jesus when he said, "It is more blessed to give, than to receive?" Do you believe that the greatest of all blessings is the blessing of knowing and loving and serving God, and that this blessing is ours as we offer our hands in sharing and practicing hospitality?

We have it so backwards in our culture, and we have so inhaled this way of thinking in our church culture. We are consumers. We really believe the way to happiness is the way of getting what we can.

But the Bible says the precise opposite. We find life, when we die to our own lives. We find joy, when we give joy to others. We find who we are, as we honor the God who made us who we are.

Sometimes we don't see it that way. We slow down. We cool down. We drift. We crawl inside ourselves, and we hunker down and think of ourselves, when the clear call of the Bible is to get outside ourselves, and to roll up our sleeves, and to offer our hands to others. I say it again: as we do this, we show our passion for the Lord, and we grow our passion for the Lord.

The story is told of a monk. He lived in a cold and bare place, and he spent his days praying.

One day a bright glow appeared in his room, and the monk saw a vision that could only be Jesus Christ. He rejoiced.

But even as he rejoiced, he heard the sound of the chapel bell, calling him to leave his room and do his daily work. He was assigned to feed the needy of the town, who would gather outside the gates of the monastery.

As the bell rang, the monk wondered what to do. Should he stay with this magnificent vision? He believed it was Jesus himself! Would it not be an insult for him to leave?

So he remained. But his thoughts would not go away. When he could stand it no longer, he ran out to feed the poor.

It was hard that day, but he finished the work. Then he raced back to his room, in the hope that he would see the vision again.

As the story goes, he did see the vision again. It was Jesus, and he said to the monk, "If you had stayed, I would have left."

It's not a real story, but it provides us with a real truth.

We should be feeding the passion of our hearts, with joyful hope, patience in affliction, and faithful prayer.

But the passion of the heart must lead to the passion of the hands. The monk was wise, for when he went to share with the needy and practice his own form of hospitality, Jesus was indeed with him. Jesus also blessed him with a new vision of himself, because he had offered himself for Jesus.

What about you? What about me? "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

In what direction are you going? Like a boat on the water, you are headed somewhere in your heart, and somewhere with your hands.

Are you serving the Lord, with zeal, fervor and passion, in your heart and with your hands? Are you showing your passion and growing in your passion?

Or are you slowing down, cooling down, and drifting? Are you offering God the empty motions of someone who is content, comfortable, and complacent?

I ask myself. I ask you. I ask us, as a body. I cannot prove the answer. I cannot measure the answer.

But I can ask the questions, and I can ask you to ask the Lord to search your heart, and search your hands, and to search our hearts, and our hands.

May he search us, and may he spur us, to a passion for himself, for the community that he has given to us, and for all who live before us.