

Godly Passion, or Adrenaline Rush?

Dear Josh,

I'd been warned about cheap substitutes. An example is the temptation to use someone else's sermon in place of an original creation of my own. However, one cheap substitute that no one ever told me about is the substitute of adrenaline. It masquerades as godly passion, but it can imperil our lives and ministries.

I entered ministry full of zeal. My heart skipped a beat when I read about the Apostle Paul's ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. I could sense his passion and longed to replicate it in my life. Yes, I knew that Scripture banned selfish ambition, and I constantly monitored what *formed* my ambition—godly vision vs. selfish desire—but I failed to keep an eye on what *fueled* my ambition.

Now, there is nothing wrong with a little adrenaline. These God-given glands provide extraordinary energy when we face emergencies. But I developed an adrenaline addiction. I began to perceive every worship service, planning meeting, discipleship time as necessitating that adrenaline rush. Like many addicts, I was in denial about its impact on myself and those around me. I missed the warning signs.

Over the years I've created a list of questions to highlight the differences between adrenaline and godly passion. I review it every so often to keep my glands in check. Here's a sampling of the questions on my list:

Am I able to enter into and enjoy quiet times with God? Adrenaline stifles reflection. When living off adrenaline, the tachometer of the soul indicates my internal engine is revving. There is a fundamental incompatibility between a reflective soul and a revving internal engine. I can't *be still and know that He is God* because *doing* overwhelms *dwelling* in God's presence. I rush through my religious routine so I can check *spiritual disciplines* off my to-do list.

On the other hand, godly passion springs from reflection in God's presence. His gentle whisper helps me to understand who I am as His child and what He desires to accomplish through me that day. His leadings become clear, and I long to spend my time living them out.

Are my relationships becoming superficial? Adrenaline creates intensity—self-generated energy that either results in high productivity or, sometimes, just frantic activity. I begin to hydroplane through life and develop superficial relationships with God, family and friends. They get my emotional leftovers as I exhaust myself. In contrast, Spirit-generated passion makes room for intimacy with God and others. The Spirit, who gives me a power surge when needed, also slows me down to deeply interact with others.

How am I managing my time? Adrenaline subjects me to the *tyranny of the urgent*. There is a compulsive desire to make every minute matter. This urgency undermines any sense of priority and falsely signals that anything

waiting to be done must be done now. I begin to hurry everywhere and everything.

Godly passion, however, keeps me in-tune with the eternal rhythms of life. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes assures us that there is a time for everything. I can wait upon God for the seasons of opportunity that He will provide.

Am I burning out? Adrenaline is great for sprinters, but for marathoners it creates an overly aggressive early pace that leaves them with no reserve for the crucial stretch to the finish line. The stress that adrenaline generates prematurely ages me physically, emotionally and spiritually. God designed me to experience it in periodic spurts, but a constant flow wears me out. On the other hand, godly passion fosters perseverance that develops my character and deepens my ministry as the days go by.

Listen, Josh: for too many years I lived my life as an adrenaline addict—routine devotional times, superficial relationships, perpetually in a rush. I was vulnerable to burnout, family break-up, or doing something careless. By my mid-thirties, I was thinking more about retirement than a fruitful ministry for decades to come! Now in my mid-forties, I am learning how to enjoy the varied paces of life. I love those occasions when God says *full speed ahead*, but I also cherish those times of more quiet reflection.

Here's what I'm learning about godly passion:

- It blossoms when I remember the Sabbath, no-load principle. When I have one full day off each week as a release from the routine, I live more fully the other six days.

- As soon as I feel an adrenaline surge, I quiet my heart. I ask God to calm this area of personal weakness. While the external difference may be indiscernible, my soul is at peace rather than having to *power up*.
- I begin my day on my knees. This posture of submission before the day's activities begin reminds me He'll provide my daily energy needs.
- I take rest periods throughout the day. I stop to close my eyes for a moment of gratitude, listen to a song from a worship tape, or take a deep breath and review a memorized Scripture verse. These rest stops check my flow of adrenaline and open the channels for His passion to flow.
- I share with my accountability partner in our every-other-week meetings regarding the level of peacefulness in my private world.

So Josh, don't believe the lie that a continual adrenaline rush means you're on the cutting edge of ministry. In reality, it takes the edge off your ministry and off your life. Instead, live in the power of the passion that God gives—it is the fuel of eternally significant ambitions. You'll love it as I do.

In Christ,

Wayne Schmidt

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For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:6-7