

Building a Passionate Church

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by
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IDENTIFYING THE PASSIONATE CHURCH

Passion—a desire that overcomes obstacles—is a critical element of any healthy church.

We are made in the image of God. As such, we share our Father’s capacity to care deeply and act energetically. Outcomes require effort, sometimes strenuous effort. Often our goals require extreme acts of sacrifice. Passion pushes through that pain.

We face impossible challenges, but we keep trying. We’re tired, but we keep working. We’re confused, but we keep thinking. We don’t have enough, but we make due with what we have. All strength is gone but we keep going.

Passion fuels the “must” in every story of success and provides both individuals and churches with the will to overcome.

Churches must

- harness the passion that God has placed in people, giving them outlets to use their energies for the Kingdom;
- generate passion by rallying people around a common vision;
- celebrate success in a way that honors God while encouraging people.

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How could your church better harness the passions of its members?

THE “LAW OF THE LID”

When it comes to passion, churches follow the “**law of the lid.**” Across the whole church and in individual departments, the general level of interest will never exceed the excitement of the leadership. If the people running this place don’t care, why should I care?

To have a passionate church, you need passionate leaders. And these leaders need to express their passion in tangible ways.

So how do we do that? Let’s take our lead from other things you and/or other members of your team feel “passionate” about.

Name 3 things you feel passionate about. Things you care about enough to invest time, money, or effort in them, even though you may gain nothing but satisfaction. Even though doing so may actually hurt in the short term, or the long term.

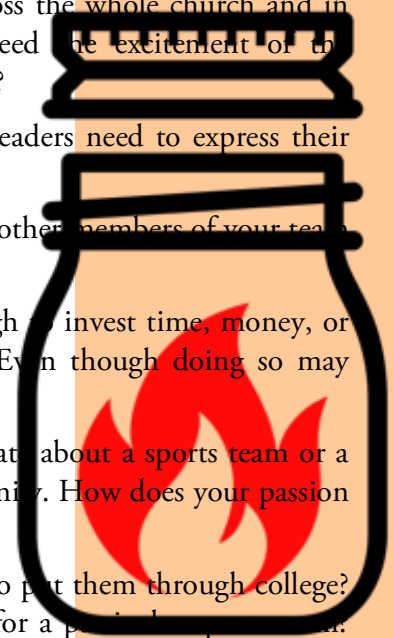
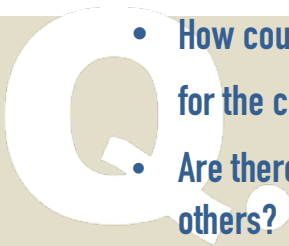
Not all your answers need to be super serious. Many of us feel passionate about a sports team or a movie franchise, along with more serious causes like our company or family. How does your passion for those 3 things/people/causes express itself?

Do you work overtime to pay for Christmas presents for your kids, or to put them through college? That’s passion. Do you pay hard-earned money for tickets and shirts for a professional sports team? That’s passion. Do you get up early to hit the gym, or the lake, or to get the best deals online? Passion. Do you make special meals or gifts for people even though it takes a lot of time and makes a mess you have to clean up? Pure passion. Have you ever done things at work that you might not be paid for? Passion does that.

We all know what passion looks and feels like. What does it look like in your life as a church leader?

As you reflect on how to model passion for your church, ask yourself these questions:

- **What is my own passion level for church right now? Am I energetic or burnt out?**
- **How could I, and other members of our leadership team, show our passion for the church without seeming arrogant about it?**
- **Are there passionate people in our church we could point to as examples for others?**



Passion gives the energy to get off the couch.

THE DANGER OF THE EASY

One of the biggest threats to passion is the easy. Easy and comfortable require no passion. It's easier to do what's easy than to get passionate about what's not.

As biological creatures, human beings naturally seek to conserve energy. We move only when motivated by some outside stimulus.

We need money, so we work. We need food, so we go shopping. We don't like how we feel, so we exercise. We're content with how the house looks, but not content for our in-laws to know that it looks that way, so we clean. We'd rather watch TV, but we know Christ calls us, so we serve. We'll generally take the path of least resistance.

Passion gives the energy to get off the couch. The heat of conviction drives us off the easy path, as our vision for what could be and must be overcomes the attraction of the comfortable.

Like the biblical prophet Jeremiah, churches and leaders with passion can't rest and can't be silent. We know the work will be hard, but ignoring God's call is harder. This passion becomes an obsession or, in Jeremiah's words, a "fire in our bones" that we cannot hold in (Jeremiah 20:9).

The Church's mission is to change the world. By definition, that won't be easy. Passion makes us care enough to do what's hard.



What are some ways you could motivate people in your church to take risks?



THE THREAT OF CHANGE

Many churches say they are passionate but don't welcome passionate people. Passionate people stick around these churches for a while but eventually leave to seek new horizons. There are at least two reasons for this, and both arise from the nature of the church as a corporate entity.

Specifically, like other organizations, churches 1) don't like change, and, 2) don't like passionate individuals who act as change agents.

First, churches resist passion because passion drives change and all organizations resist change. What we're doing today has worked in the past, is time-tested, and is familiar. Even if it doesn't work so well, at least it works at all. Or we know why it doesn't work and we're comfortable with that. And since we don't know the future we can't know that something different won't lead to total disaster.

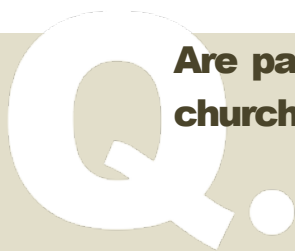
Even large profit-driven companies with significant intellectual and financial resources find it difficult to motivate change throughout their ranks. How much more difficult for churches, where the very large majority of people don't get a paycheck?

Second, because change is threatening, passionate people are often viewed with suspicion. Their unusual commitment to the cause can make others feel bad about themselves. Or worse, their passion may infect others and disrupt the status quo. Far easier to marginalize passionate people than to consider their radical ideas. Far easier to explain to them why they should be content than to empower them to run to new horizons.

All the rest of the world is changing all the time. Shouldn't we at least be able to trust that the church will always be there for us? Can't the church be the one place in life where we know that things will stay the same? Can't church be the one place where results don't depend on our own effort and ingenuity?

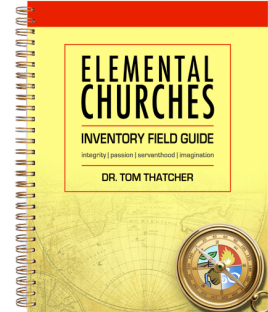
Passion says "No."

**Churches
resist passion
because
passion drives
change and all
organizations
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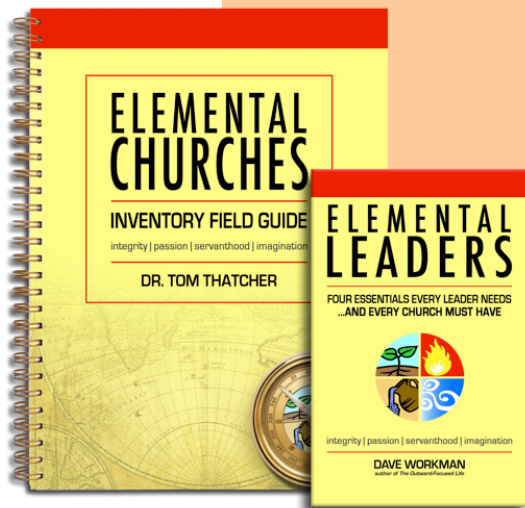
Are passionate people happy in your church, or do they feel stifled?

*Excerpted from the **Elemental Churches Field Guide** by Tom Thatcher. Tom is Co-Founder and Chief Analyst at Elemental Churches, a consulting group devoted to developing tools to help churches become healthier and more effective. The **Field Guide** is part of an inventory to measure church health and effectiveness through a comprehensive team-based audit. For a free 12-page summary of the **Elemental Leaders** book the **Field Guide** is based on, visit www.elementalchurches.com*



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