

# Introduction

I AM AMAZED AT HOW MANY PEOPLE, particularly churched people, are looking for spiritual passion but overlook the Bible. It boggles my mind. We are a culture that looks so strongly to feelings and experiences that often those feelings and experiences become an end in themselves. We go to church and hang out around the Word of God, hoping that something “spiritual” will rub off on us.

It is closely akin to the person who thinks he can contract a blood-borne disease by sitting in the same room with contaminated blood. Nothing is going to happen unless there is contact. Sure, there are plenty of diseases out there to catch, so much so that over the years we have changed the way we do medicine.

Think about it. Back when I was in high school working as a dental assistant, we gave the dental tools a good scrubbing in hot water. Today, we are throwing the stuff away because of the danger of contamination. Medical and dental professionals wear gloves and goggles to keep from coming in contact with potential contaminants. We all know that the way one contracts a communicable disease is by coming in contact with it.

Oddly enough, spiritual passion is caught in much the same way. The primary means God uses for igniting spiritual passion in His people is contact with His Word. You can sit *by* your Bible, you can read *about* your Bible, you can read all the Christian self-help books on the shelves, you can listen to good sermons and rock to great Christian tunes, and you can hang out in Christendom for a lifetime without being genuinely infected. You want a serious “case” of Jesus? Open the Book.

## SPIRITUAL HOT ZONES

A few years back, I read a best-selling non-fiction book that scared me about as bad as any horror novel you could read. It was called *The Hot Zone*. Ever read it? It is a story about the Ebola virus. I’m sure you’re prob-

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ably familiar with that. It's a deadly virus that lives in Africa near Lake Victoria. It kills in a very ugly way and very, very quickly.

The book actually documents a strain of Ebola that ended up in Reston, Virginia, in lab chimpanzees. There was very real concern about it causing a medical mess the likes of which we could probably not even imagine. Obviously, the situation in Virginia was resolved, but the book marked me because of the picture it painted of hot zones.

The name of the book comes from science. When scientists and others deal with contagions that are this dangerous, they deal with them in hot zones. A hot zone is a place of intense concentration of a contagious agent. We're talking about suits with layers of gloving, bleach decontamination chambers on exit, special enclosed ventilation systems, the whole works because of the dangers involved.

So the deal is that in order to catch a contagious disease, you need to come in contact with it. Wear the gloves, wear the goggles, rinse in bleach, and you'll come away from the most highly contagious agent unaffected.

Friends, it is time for the church to take off the spiritual gloves and goggles and let the Word of God wash over us. It is time to "catch" some passion by being in the hot zone of the Word of God.

You know, though, passion for Christ and His Word is not an end in itself. Sometimes it seems that the selfishness we are taught in our culture pervades to the very depths of our souls. We want Jesus for ourselves, for the comfort He brings without the burden of bringing Him to others. We want Jesus as an end in Himself. Please read closely here and don't misunderstand. Jesus *is* the end in Himself. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is ultimately all we will ever want or need. *But*, and this is a big one, He did not leave us on earth just to enjoy Him and to keep Him to ourselves. When Jesus left, He sent us on a mission. We are to take His Word to the entire world and to make disciples.

BECOMING A SPIRITUAL HOT ZONE

So as we go forward on our journey together, we will look first at practical ways we can increase our contact with the Word of God so that we can become infected—set ablaze with holy passion. As we come into contact with the Word, we will see God transforming us into people of the Word, people of passion who love their God and love others and are on His mission to take His Word to the ends of the earth.

Now I know, what you're thinking. "Come on, Pam, people just can't get that set on fire by the Bible. Like, I'm going to read the Bible and become passionate and 'infectious' myself. I'm just not buying what you're selling."

I understand the objection because when you look around the church today people who are crazy about the Word of God are not exactly the overwhelming majority. And others who profess to love the Word are betrayed by their actions that show they only love the knowledge it brings. They have handled it up close, but they have handled it gloved, and it has never really infected the heart. If it is all about the head and not about the obedience of faith, knowledge of the Word can puff us up and fail to transform us. I hate to say that, but it is reality.

I understand the objection. I have an academic background in Bible study and have read liberal scholars who know all about the Bible, but who have never met Jesus.

The fact, though, that some handle the Word gloved and remain unchanged does not negate the inherent power in the Word of God. In fact, those who have been truly transformed, who are truly people of the Word, shine out and are very hard to miss on the landscape of life.

Maybe it is because of the darkness in the church and the world that those who are spiritually passionate shine like beacons. I will never forget the passion that many of my college professors had as they spoke of Jesus and all things theological. Although my head and heart were still pretty far apart back in those days, I saw something very real in those men...something that I wanted as reality in my life. They were carriers of

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something I desperately wanted. Maybe I'm just weird, but when I see a life coming more and more into conformity with the Word of God, my soul shouts out, "God, make me like that!"

I just can't help but think that His response to that request would be, "Child, draw near and read my words!"