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KAZOOS JUST WON'T DO
2 Samuel 24:15-25

When our kids were little they each had their own white teddy bear. Carissa called hers Cuddle Bear and Toby called his Cozy Bear. These might have been the cutest teddy bears ever. Both kids slept with their bear every night. One time disaster struck. Somehow Cozy bear got left behind at a hotel. We called the hotel to report the tragedy and appeal for assistance. I feared for the worst, for my experience with leaving things in hotels left me with little hope. But this was a Disney hotel. Somebody actually cared about doing a good job and about serving their guests. A few days later the world was saved when Cozy Bear arrived in the mail, none the worse for the wear. I believe Toby still has that bear, though he no longer sleeps with it.

It reminded me of a story management guru and motivational speaker Ken Blanchard tells. He knew of a hotel that wanted to make customer service a priority. So they gave key employees \$2000 each to use to solve problems for hotel guests. One woman was contacted by a guest who had stayed at the hotel but had inadvertently left his computer behind at the hotel. He had flown to Hawaii where he was to make an important sales presentation, but the presentation was on his computer. Could the hotel employee send the computer to him by overnight express? She told him she would take care of it, but then found out it was too late to get it to him overnight. She went down to the airport and with her \$2000 fund bought an airline ticket to Hawaii. She flew there, delivered the computer, then turned around and flew home.

That is someone with a passion for doing the job. Wouldn't you much rather deal with that person than with the manager at the local store that gave us incredibly bad service, and when I talked to him about it he acknowledged it was terrible and apologized. When I asked what he would do about it, he told me he would do nothing. He just said, "There's nothing I can do." What irked me was he didn't seem bothered by that in the least. And as I was leaving he told me if I was ever in the store again and needed help to ask for him. Right, because he had been so helpful when I needed help.

All of us would like to deal with people who actually have passion for what they are doing. Even more we'd like to be people like that. I want you to think about that with me today as we look at 2 Samuel 24:15-25.

DAVID SOUGHT TO SACRIFICE TO THE LORD

David had committed the sin of unbelief, which is the root of all sin. He decided his security and his strength was found in having a big army rather than in the Lord. We saw previously that this was the same sin that Israel committed when they refused to enter Canaan. It is a failure to trust God. Fortunately when David realized what he had done he admitted his sin. God told him there would be consequences for his disobedience and offered him his choice of punishments. It was sort of like a TV game show with 3 really bad options. He could choose between door number 1: 3 years of famine in his kingdom, door number 2: having an enemy army gain the upper hand against him for 3 months or door number 3: having a deadly epidemic break out for 3 days.

Had I been in his sandals I'm pretty sure I would have chosen door number 4: none of the above. Maybe I would have suggested 3 hours of traffic school for me. That is an excruciating experience, but it would have been slightly less lethal than those other options. However, God wasn't negotiating. David just had to make a choice. He chose the one most of us would have chosen. It was the one that put him and his people not in the hands of cruel and merciless people, but in the hands of God, whom he knew is good. The other advantage of door number 3 was it had the shortest duration. It was 3 days, as opposed to 3 years or 3 months.

So David opted for the epidemic lasting 3 days. It was a terrible epidemic, taking the lives of 70,000 people. Someone might object that this is outrageously unfair. David makes a bad choice and 70,000 people die? That's just so wrong. Those people were punished for something they didn't do. If anyone was going to be punished it should have been David, not people who had nothing to do with his faithless action.

This chapter began in verse 1 telling us that God was angry with Israel. The writer told us that so that we would understand that this terrible epidemic was not merely a punishment for David's action, but also God's justice being poured out on Israel for something they had done, though we are not told just what that was. But he wanted us to know that Israel deserved what they got.

David was deeply grieved by the epidemic and asked God to punish him and leave his people alone. God sent a prophet named Gad to David to tell him what he wanted him to do. He was to buy some land from a local named Araunah and build an altar on that land. Araunah was not Hebrew, he was a Jebusite, a member of the Canaanite tribe that lived in Jerusalem before David conquered it. When David

showed up and explained what he wanted to do, Araunah offered him the land and the animals to offer as sacrifices at no charge.

Araunah was probably a bit unnerved when David showed up. David had conquered his people and had been ruling for some time. David was not a guy he wanted to get sideways with. He took the “whatever you want, O King,” approach because he wanted no trouble with David. But David insisted on paying for everything. He makes a crucial statement in verse 24. “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

Baseball has a play officially known as a sacrifice. A player comes to bat with a runner on first base and no one out. Let’s imagine that it is late in a tie game, so the team needs a run to potentially win the game. Getting the runner from first to second, which is scoring position, is a high priority. The manager orders the batter to bunt. When the pitch comes he squares around and bunts the ball so it rolls about 30 feet up the first base line. This enables the runner from first to easily advance to second base while the batter is thrown out at first base. That batter has sacrificed his opportunity to get a hit in order to get the runner to second because from there that runner can score on a base hit. He gave up his chance to be the hero and drive in the winning run with a big blast. You will never bunt your way to the major leagues. Because he sacrificed himself for the good of the team the out that he made does not count against his batting average. Now imagine the exact same situation, only the batter does not bunt. In an effort to get a hit he takes a mighty swing at a pitch hoping to drive the ball over the fence. He tries to go yard, dial 9, hit a big fly, in other words hit a home run. Only his results are disappointing. He barely tops the ball so it dribbles 30 feet up the first base line, just like the bunt in the previous example. The runner moves to second and the batter is thrown out at first. So the result is exactly the same as in the sacrifice bunt. However, that is not considered a sacrifice. Even though the result was the same, he did not intend to give up his chance to hit. He gave up nothing, he sacrificed nothing. Therefore it counts as an out against his batting average.

David understood if he used land he had not purchased and offered up animals to God that he had not bought, then he had given up nothing of his own. He wasn’t sacrificing anything. There was no cost involved. The core concept of a sacrifice is that it is costly to the one sacrificing. No cost, no sacrifice. David wanted to offer a sacrifice to God.

In Malachi 1:8 God reprimanded the ancient Hebrews of that day because they were offering blind and lame animals as “sacrifices.” In other words, they were

“giving up” animals they didn’t want to keep as part of their flocks and herds anyway. God said, “try offering those animals to your governor. How do you think that will go?” I’ve seen this attitude a lot. Oh, here’s a thing I don’t want anymore or have no use for. I’ll give it to the church. Let’s be clear, that could be a good, echo-friendly approach that is better than just throwing something away, but it is not a sacrifice that comes out of a desire to express love for God. When Laurie and I got married we received a number of wedding presents that we knew were re-gifted. They were things friends had been given as wedding presents, things they didn’t want so they just sent them on to us. That was okay, but we also knew it said, “here’s how much we love you” and it wasn’t all that much. David wanted no part of that. He wanted to give to God something that said, “You are worth the best that I have.”

What does this have to do with us? We are not asked by God to sacrifice animals as part of our worship. I’m really glad about that. I fear I would have had a hard time killing animals as a way of worshiping God. I also think we’d have gotten into all kinds of trouble with PETA. They would have been all over our case. We aren’t commanded by God to sacrifice in order to get him to accept us. In fact, it is God who made the sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed himself so that we could be accepted by God and loved by him. But did you know that now that we are God’s beloved children he does ask us to make sacrifices? We don’t make them to get God to accept us, for that has already happened. We are to do it as a way of expressing our gratitude and our thanks to God. Our sacrifices are to be thank offerings, given out of gratitude for what God has already done for us.

Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.” So one way we can sacrifice to God is by praising him. How is that a sacrifice? The thing we most like to talk about is ourselves. The writer of Hebrews instructs us to use our words for an entirely different purpose. Use them to bring honor to God. It is a sacrifice to gather with believers to praise God. You could do a lot of other things beside coming to a worship service to praise God. And even in your coming to offer the sacrifice of praise you must sacrifice in another way. These days it is not uncommon to hear someone say of a worship service at a church, “I didn’t enjoy the worship there” (by which they mean the music) or “I didn’t get anything out of the sermon.” That person is revealing a serious flaw in their thinking. Who cares if you didn’t enjoy the music or appreciate the sermon? You weren’t supposed to be there to enjoy it or even get anything out of it. It was supposed to be a sacrifice of praise to God. It wasn’t for you, it was for him!

Hebrews 13:16 speaks of another sacrifice. “Do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” When we use our time, energy and money to help others we are making a sacrifice. We could use those resources for our own comfort, advancement or enjoyment. When we use them to benefit others it is a sacrifice, and God is pleased with it. Romans 12:1 really summarizes this sacrifice thing. That verse tells us “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Give everything you are to God every moment of everyday.

It is absolutely crucial for us to remember these sacrifices are “thank offerings.” That means they are offered after the problem of sin has been taken care of through sacrifice. The sacrifice of the cross of Christ has dealt with our guilt. Now we offer sacrifices purely out of gratitude, not as a way of obtaining favor from God.

Sacrifice is important because the point now is to love God, and sacrifice is really the measure of love. In our Anchorman study we recently considered the events of John 12. In that chapter Mary, the sister of Lazarus, desperately wanted to express gratitude to Jesus because he had brought her brother back from death. At a banquet in Jesus’ honor she brought out a jar of expensive perfume and poured the whole thing on Jesus’ feet, then she dried his feet with her hair. She made a huge sacrifice. The perfume was worth in today’s terms perhaps in the range of \$30,000 to \$40,000! Her action of letting her hair down and using her hair to dry his feet was shocking and considered totally scandalous in that day. It earned her horrified condemnation. She did not do that to fulfill some law, to keep some rule or to get Jesus to accept her. She did it because only something that sacrificial and outrageous would express the tidal wave of gratitude in her soul.

This past Christmas I really wanted to do something for Laurie that would tell her I loved her. I had gotten her a sweater that I knew she wanted. Then I saw a dress on line I knew she would really like. Even though it blew up what I had budgeted for a present for her I bought it. Then just a couple of days before Christmas I was completing some shopping for some other people when I saw a jacket that was on sale for a good price. For a couple of years Laurie had been mentioning that she wished she had a particular kind of jacket, but they were too expensive. This was exactly what she wanted and at an amazingly good price. But I had already bought two presents for Laurie and obliterated my budget in the process. I deliberated. I couldn’t help myself. I bought for her because I want to blow her away with how much I love her.

That’s a bit like David’s insistence that he would never offer as a sacrifice to God something that didn’t cost him anything. In his book, *Loving Christ*, Joe Stowell

asked, “When was the last time you were willing to do something radical and dramatic to express your love for Christ?”

DAVID’S DESIRE WAS CHARACTERISTIC OF HIM

Where did this desire to give something costly to the Lord come from? In this case it came from his desire to see the epidemic stop. He wanted to show God that he was sincere in his regret and was committed to do whatever God asked, and to do it with all of his heart. David would never just do his duty. He would never do the minimum required. When God asked him to do something he went all out in doing it. If he was to make a sacrifice then he wanted to do something that was a costly sacrifice.

We have seen this from the very start with David. He had a heart that blazed with passion for his God. When all Israel was cowering in terror before Goliath, the intimidating Philistine, do you remember what David’s response was? Verse 36 tells us he was upset because Goliath had “defied the armies of the living God.” Verse 47 tells us that he told Goliath God would see to it that David defeated him so that “the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.” What bothered David was the disgrace to God’s name caused by all Israel running in fear of him.

Listen to some of the things David wrote. Psalm 63:1 says, “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.” In verse 3 David wrote, “Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.” David’s whole being longed for God and he thought that God’s love was better than life itself. That is not a description of someone merely doing his religious duty.

In Psalm 27:4 David wrote, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” If you only had one thing you could ask of God, what would it be? In the legendary story of Aladdin and the lamp, the genie grants Aladdin 3 wishes. What if a genie suddenly showed up in your life, only he says you can have one wish, what would you ask for? If that happened to David he would ask to live in the presence of God all the days of his life. That is the one thing he wanted above all else. He wanted it so much more than anything else that he could write, “This only do I seek.” In other words, this is all that matters to me. Everything else is unimportant, so if I have this and nothing else, I will be happy.

What about safety? What about status? What about comfort? What about pleasure? What about power? What about fame? What about approval and acceptance from

people? David would have said that all of those are nice, but he could live without any of them as long as he lived in the presence of God. That was the kind of passion he had for the Lord.

In his book, *The Color of Water*, James McBride tells the story of his mother, Ruth McBride Jordan. She was the daughter of a Polish immigrant who was an orthodox Jewish rabbi, but not a good man. He physically abused his wife and sexually abused Ruth. Ruth, looking for love became pregnant by a neighbor boy. Her parents sent her away to get an abortion. Later, when she had left her toxic family she thought she fell in love with a man in New York, only to find he wanted her to become a prostitute working for him along with his other women. This is a tragic story, a recipe for disaster, but it does not end tragically. Ruth married an African American man named Dennis McBride who truly loved her. Dennis was a genuine follower of Jesus and he brought Ruth to faith in his Lord. And that changed everything. Ruth said had it not been for Christ she would have ended up either a prostitute or dead. Instead even though Dennis died fairly early on, she raised their children, all of whom grew up to get college or graduate degrees and succeed in their professions, as a single mom. Ruth herself graduated from college at the age of 76. James says at the worst of times his mother might be confused about all but one thing, and that one thing was Jesus. He gave her hope. He says he recalls that often in church during the music he would see her bow her head and weep. It was the only time he would see her cry. He asked her once why she cried in church. She said, "Because God makes me happy. I'm crying because I'm happy." That is the sort of passion for the Lord that David had.

IMPLICATIONS

This story challenges me, and I hope you, at two points: First, it asks me if I am sacrificing for the Lord as a thank offering. I do not have to sacrifice for him to appease him or gain his favor. Those issues are settled and done through the work of Jesus Christ. No, this is about responding to God's kindness in gratitude. However, the question is the one that Joe Stowell asked. "When was the last time you did something radical to express your love to Jesus?" Are you merely meeting religious obligations or are you lavishly pouring out your love to him? This passage challenges me to never give to the Lord only that which costs me little or nothing. It calls on me to offer the sacrifices of praise and good works, to live my whole life as a living sacrifice to the God who loves me.

Second, though, it asks me about my passion for the Lord. At Christmas I didn't have to force myself to try to extravagantly express love to Laurie. I couldn't stop myself. Lavish expressions of love will naturally occur when we lavishly love the

Lord the way David did, the way Ruth McBride does. So the real question this passage poses to me is, “how is your passion for the Lord?” Does your whole being long for him like David’s did? Most of us would likely say our passion isn’t where we wish it were, and it isn’t where it ought to be.

I was on the staff of a high energy campus ministry for 4 years before I went to seminary. When I first started grad school I was looking for a church to be involved in and I was able to connect with a young couple that had been involved in that campus ministry a couple of years previous. They invited me to try their church with them. They had graduated from college, gotten married and launched their life together. After we went to church, which ended up being the church I stuck with because it was really good, we visited for a bit. In the course of the conversation at one point they told me that though they loved their church they experienced a bit of sadness. They missed something from the years of their involvement in that campus ministry. As we talked I realized what they were missing was passion. Life and its many demands had cut into, eroded some of the passion they had for the Lord. It wasn’t something they intended. It somehow had just kind of happened to them.

Life has a tendency to rob us of passion. At Dylan and Amy’s wedding I saw an abundance of joy and passion. Most couples start out like that. Way more than end up with joy and passion. Disappointment, insane busy schedules, loss of hope erode passion so frequently. Poet William Wordsworth wrote, “There was a time when meadow, grove and stream, the earth and every common sight, to me did seem appareled in celestial light. The glory and the freshness of a dream. Heaven lies about us in our infancy. Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy. But he beholds the light and whence it flows. He sees it in his joy. At length the man perceives it die away, and fade into the light of common day.”

In his book, *Journey of Desire*, John Eldridge said if you look around you will see that most people “have lost heart. They are camped in places of resignation or indulgence, or trapped in prisons of despair.” Romans 12:11 says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Don’t ever lose your passion. Wordsworth said life has a way of taking things from us, especially wonder, joy and passion. But it also erodes our abilities, friends, loved ones, health. My focus today though is that it has a tendency to rob us of our passions. What can help us keep our zeal for the Lord, which is what life is really all about? How can we maintain our spiritual fervor? What can help us have the passion for God that David had?

MISSION

Years ago I read a thriller novel titled *The Fourth War*. It was written by best selling author Chris Stewart. It was not great literature, in fact I can remember little about it. But I remember one passage. A central character is an American special forces operator fighting in Afghanistan. He lives in brutal conditions under constant threat. It is a miserably unpleasant life accompanied by continual grave peril. On one freezing cold rainy day he reflects on why he would choose to persist in the stressful, uncomfortable, dangerous and difficult life he is living. He says, "It was the joy of a mission, something one man in a million would ever understand in this life. Other men endured their jobs, and to what purpose? Money? Power? Everything they worked for amounted to diddly squat; more money, bigger houses, more and more empty air. None of them would ever know the feeling of having a purpose in life. And he couldn't stand the thought of living without the overwhelming satisfaction of doing something that is right."

In his book, *The Rhythm of Life*, Matthew Kelly wrote, "without a clear sense of the purpose and meaning of our lives the emptiness is overwhelming. We try to fill the void with pleasure and possessions, but the emptiness is unaffected by such trivialities." Without that mission in life we end up, he says, "Depressed, disillusioned and miserably unhappy."

Laurie's parents moved into a retirement community last June, 6 months before her mom rather unexpectedly passed away. Following the memorial service for her mom in January they had a reception in the social hall at that community. During the reception at one point we were treated to a performance by the community's kazoo band. Yes, kazoo band. And yes, it was as bad as that sounds like it would be. It was just atrocious. I sat through that wondering what in the world those people were thinking. Why would you inflict this on other people? It was like something you would see on a TV sitcom. Why have those people formed a kazoo band, have rehearsals and seek to actually perform for others? It is because life has taken much away from them. And they need some sort of mission. They need reasons to be alive! Just playing the kazoo together isn't enough. They need to do it to have an effect on other people. They want to make some kind of impact on people. I'm not a big fan of their method of carrying out a mission, but I applaud their understanding that they need one to be really alive. Without a mission we are just existing, waiting around to check out.

If we are to live with passion, and particularly passion for our God, it begins with a mission. But it is going to have to be a far bigger and more important mission than having a kazoo band. It begins with grasping the eternal enormity of living for God's glory. It means seeing this as the greatest of all goods and embarking on a

fierce campaign to show his glory for all the world for the rest of our lives. This is something, and ultimately the only thing, worth utterly expending life for.

Inside all of us there is a need to give ourselves to a cause. You can see it in the passion people display for some political agenda. We want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, something that is powerful and meaningful. But there is only one cause that serves true good, only one cause that is the best, that has impact that will last for eternity. There is only one cause that we were created for, that is the reason for our existence. That cause is living to serve God and make his glory known. Like David said before fighting Goliath, it is living so that all the world will know there is a good, holy and merciful God ruling over all.

A GREAT JOY

Would you be surprised if I told you I am passionate about my wife? I didn't think so. In fact I know you might get tired of hearing about that at times. Do you know why I am passionate about her? It is because she brings me boundless joy. I enjoy her so much that the word enjoy doesn't really come close to expressing it. I revel in her.

I enjoy her because she is beautiful inside and out. She is wise, kind, incredibly affirming and patient with me, and full of life and love. Not long ago she made an embarrassing mistake that was hilarious. She delights in telling the story about herself, because she laughs so easily at herself. She is endlessly fun to live with. She is a kick to be around because she provides sound effects for things she does and has a sound track for her life. I know every day I will find myself laughing because she is so funny. She is incredibly affirming, joyful, kind, giving and always seeking to serve. Do you think I would be passionate about Laurie if she were unkind, proud, combative, so insecure she could never admit a mistake, and was just hard to be around? Never. We are passionate about that which we enjoy.

I want to contrast two hotels Laurie and I have stayed at in the past. One was a little ways up the coast from San Luis Obispo. When Toby graduated from Cal Poly he wasn't sure he would graduate until late in his last year. When we found out we tried to book a hotel room so we could be there for graduation, but there was no room at the inn. Every hotel for miles around was booked solid. I kept looking and was surprised to find one place a few miles north that still had a vacancy. We jumped on it. A month later when we got there we found out why it was available. The place was painted in garish colors. The room actually had a kitchenette. But the floor was sloped, so that the refrigerator door would just swing open. There wasn't a door separating the bedroom from the "living" area, there

was a bead curtain. I think of the bed as the valley of death. It was a lumpy, sagging thing that was backache central. I think of the place as the Bedbug Inn. It was truly awful, one of the two worst places we have ever stayed

Compare that with a hotel we stayed at on the island of Kauai. We were able to stay there because of a huge discount a friend got for us. This place is spectacular. The entrance is a wide, rectangular opening to an open air lobby. You look straight through and see the ocean on the other side of the hotel. It was designed to look like a framed picture of the ocean, and it is beautiful. The entire hotel is built with gorgeous wood, lovely moldings, just terrific design touches everywhere. Our room was spacious with a bathroom bigger than our master bath at home. The bed was wonderful. The grounds of the hotel are magnificent and the pool is like a water park. The employees are amazingly friendly and provide impeccable service. I love that place. Do you think there's any difference in the level of passion I have for those two places? The first would I would ardently suggest you never visit. But that second one I love and am quick to sing its praises, and I would love to go there again.

If we are to be passionate about God, we are going to have to enjoy him...a lot. You will be passionate about God to the degree that you enjoy him. In Psalm 16:11 David wrote, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." That's why David was passionate about the Lord. God gave him life and joy.

Through many years of ministry I have run into a lot of Christians that try to make God the source of lots of duties. He has a big To Do list for them. And he demands that they behave really well. Do you get a lot of joy from those who major in duties, to do lists and a demanding behavior code? Mary didn't dump thousands of dollars of perfume on Jesus because he gave her a whole new set of rules to live by. She did it because he brought life to her family.

Jesus said those who trust in him will find rest for their weary souls. They will find acceptance, love, joy and encouragement. That is what the Gospel of Jesus brings us. That's why the New Testament makes such a huge point of telling us that God pours out his love on us. As we experience his love and his grace as the rule of our lives, as the air we breathe, more and more we will enjoy our Father in heaven. As we enjoy him we will become more and more passionate about him.

Here's one suggestion that will help you enjoy him. Do whatever you can to be around people who enjoy him. Enjoying something or someone is contagious, and

the more time you spend with people who are passionate about God because they enjoy him so much, the more you will enjoy him and be passionate about him.

A FORWARD FOCUS

Paul was another person who lived with great passion. In Philippians 3:13-14 he wrote, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” The word translated “press on” meant “to run after” or to “sprint after.”

How often do you sprint? As part of my exercise regime I used to run sprints in the street in front of our house. More than once I noticed a neighbor observing me in some puzzlement and shaking their head. Why is that old guy dashing up and down the street, going nowhere? After I repeatedly sidelined myself by pulling muscles I kind of gave up on that. But I realized that I never sprint anymore. Sprinting is going all out, 100%.. Here is a simple truth: you cannot sprint 100% while looking backward. Forgetting what lies behind means leaving behind past hurts, past disappointments, past failures, past successes, past glories. It means looking forward, recognizing that living in the past will, in the end, only sap the passion and energy out of living today. I will either be weighed down by the guilt of the past, be depressed because of the lost glories or successes of the past, or have my energy destroyed by resentment over hurts of the past.

A couple of years ago someone said to me, “You used to lead and preach to a church of many hundreds of people. Now you have this small group of people. Does that ever bother you?” I could honestly tell them that it did not even in the least. Two things really help me with that. First, I love the people and the church I am with today. The size only matters if you use that as a measure of how valuable you are, if you care about how it might look to other people. Second, and maybe more important, I know this is where God has me today. If this is where God has me today, what does it matter where he had me 15 years ago? This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. As we look forward not back, our souls can be fresh and new every morning. We can be alive with passion for this day.