

ZONDERVAN

*Lose Your Cool: Discovering a Passion that Changes You and the World*  
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# PASSION vs. INTEREST

## HYPER-HYPERBOLE

If you spend any time at my school, you'll see that my generation says a lot of things we don't mean—or maybe it's just that we say things without considering the real meaning. We exaggerate a lot—not on purpose, but I think the way we communicate lends itself to exaggeration. We call something "awesome" when it's just "aw-right."

Because of the massive social networking sites, many of us now have a lot of "friends" whom we've never even met. There are people at school whom we might never talk with face-to-face, and might not even like, yet we call them "friends" too. Through Facebook and MySpace, the status of "friend" or even "top friend" is just a click away, instead of reserving that word for people who have shared our ups and downs and proved their loyalty over time.

Or look at tired texting terms like "LOL." I seriously doubt that most normal people laugh out loud as often as I've been led to believe. I have a friend who, in a series of just six text messages, gave me five "LOLs" and two "hahas." I'm pretty sure that if she were laughing out loud as much as she said, her parents would have sent her to therapy.

Do you get what I'm saying?

This might all seem innocent, but I think language shapes our

thinking in subtle yet important ways. Words matter. When we casually and carelessly use words that were once powerful, how does this impact their meaning? More importantly, how does it impact us?

The word *love* is a great example. What does it really mean to love something or someone? In one day someone could say all these things: "I LOVE *American Idol*," "I LOVE coffee," and "I LOVE Jesus." Do those really belong in the same category? Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't love the simple things in life, and it's probably clear you don't LOVE your grandma the same way you LOVE popcorn. But I think you get my point. Our words no longer carry as much depth and meaning as they once did.

You may have heard that the ancient Greeks had five different words for love. There was a friendship love, an I-would-die-for-you-love, a romantic love, a sibling love, and a love called *agapao* that was an act of the will that put deep emotion into action. Of course I'm no expert on ancient Greek, and these are just my quick interpretations of the definitions of the five words. But I think the fact that all five of these ideas get translated as "love" really shows how diluted our language has become. It's no wonder, then, that the Internet and texting have continued to deteriorate our language, even changing the way we communicate with one another.

## **PLUGGED IN BUT NOT CONNECTED**

Go hang out with kids, and you'll see that most of us are constantly checking the displays on our phones, logging in to our laptops, and sending texts to one person while talking with someone else. We communicate, and we're super-plugged-in, yet we're never fully connected to others or really connected to what's going on around us.

Tech devices have given us amazing access to one another. You can reach people around the world with a few keystrokes. You can

track someone on a GPS and have alerts sent to your cell phone. Yet I think many teens resist having genuine, deep, and personal conversations—even with their “top friends.” We text people who are across the room, and “LOL” while chatting about Algebra homework (which, if you’re like me, is no laughing matter). We go to parties to get together, but many students have their ear buds in and are incessantly checking their iPhones to see if a new message has come in. With all these distractions I wonder if we may be missing God’s whispers to us about our priorities and the desire he has to help us unlock some amazing ideas he wants to pursue through us.

Online, we fill out profiles that talk about the things we say are our “interests”—the things that consume our time like “playing Wii, playing baseball, my girlfriend, watching *Lost*, playing Wii, listening to music, reading my Bible, playing Wii.” And chances are, if you’re in some sort of dating relationship (whatever *that* means), playing Wii (or Xbox 360 or PS3) three times a day, watching TV, playing sports, and eating, you might not find the time to read your Bible—so that might need to be taken off the list of real “interests” if you’re totally honest.

Maybe a level above our interests are the things we say we’re “*really* passionate about.” These things might include some of our interests, but they’re often more specific. We may say we’re really passionate about football or the Beatles. Some people say they’re passionate about coffee or chocolate or their favorite TV show. I know people who will argue for hours about who should have won a reality TV show (something they feel passionate about), but won’t speak up to challenge a racist comment because they don’t want to offend anyone. If this sounds like you, then maybe something isn’t quite right.

So what do you see when you look at the things you say you’re interested in, the things you “love,” and the things you’re really

passionate about? I think most of us would have to admit there are quite a few petty things on our personal lists. Yet these are the things that consume our time, the things we spend time thinking about and doing, the things we make a priority.

## IS THIS PASSION?

Let me tell you a story about a guy named Mark Malkoff. Mark decided to try to visit all 171 Starbucks stores in Manhattan in a single 24-hour day. And he didn't just wake up one morning and decide to try this—he spent two whole months planning the effort. In those two months he bought a cheap bike from K-Mart (because, of course, he couldn't reach all 171 on foot), and he went to many of the stores to research opening and closing times and to see which ones had the longest lines at different times of day.

On the big day, he woke up at about 4:30 a.m. and started biking. He had figured out that he had to arrive at a different Starbucks every seven minutes for over 20 hours, and he wanted to order something and consume at least part of what he'd ordered in every store. At one point he had to have a friend drive him around because his body was shutting down from the overexertion and the caffeine. He even showed up at one store four minutes after closing time and had to bribe a worker \$80 to let him in so he could get a piece of pound cake. He didn't arrive home until about 4 a.m. the next day.

Visiting 171 Starbucks stores in a single day is pretty crazy, no matter how much a person might LOVE coffee. But when Mark was interviewed by CNN, he confessed, "I actually don't drink coffee, which makes this thing completely insane."

When I first read Mark's story, I laughed out loud (for real—not an "LOL"). But I was really struck by the reaction of Dan Lewis, the Starbucks spokesperson of that region. When asked about Mark's stunt

by the *New York Daily News*, Lewis said, "We appreciate Mr. Malkoff's passion, and we applaud his creativity and commitment."

So Mark Malkoff is now famous for being passionate, right? But what is he passionate about? Coffee? He said he doesn't even drink coffee. This is what I would call a misguided passion—or maybe it's just a desire to get his day in the spotlight. You may laugh, but what about the things we argue about all the time, the things we seem to be so passionate about: The mispronunciation of a word, whether or not a movie is good, and which band is the best, or worst. What does all that impassioned arguing get us?

I must admit, Mark Malkoff's story is amusing. But what did he really accomplish? Wouldn't it have been better if he'd gone to 171 of Manhattan's biggest charities and raised money to do some good? What if he'd taken that drive to do something his friends said is impossible—something that might even appear foolish—and decided to tackle something that would really make a difference for others? Like Malkoff, who was simply trying to make the news by doing something quirky or different, I wonder if we choose some of the things we embrace as passions just because they are odd, or because they'll get us attention, or just because.

## FLAMMABLE

Now before I say any more about passion, let me clear one thing up: A lot of people hear the word *passion*, and the first thing they think of is romantic love or sexual desire. But that's not what I'm talking about here. When I refer to passion, I'm not just talking about that guy and girl at your high school who are *always* together. *Passion* can refer to anything you feel powerful emotion about.

Let's go back to the difference between an interest and a passion—because I think there *is* a big difference. An interest is often

an "I want to know more" kind of thing. Many people—maybe even *most* people—claim to be interested in God or interested in helping people. This isn't a bad thing necessarily, but it is not necessarily good either. If you are one of those people, ask yourself this: "Would I give away money and time and blood to this thing I'm interested in? If I had to, would I die for this interest?" I think the answer is no. "I'm really interested in biking," you might say, but would you die to bike just one more trail?

So what is passion, really? And how is it different from interest? I'm sure others may define passion differently, but for the purpose of this book, let's be clear that passion is a good bit deeper than interest. Let's even say that, for the follower of Jesus, passion is a stirring in us that connects us more closely to the things that matter to God. That stirring moves us to a willingness to make sacrifices to accomplish something to further that passion. You can't just dig down deep inside and try to somehow draw out passion from the well of your soul. You can't go to bed tonight hoping that if you try hard enough you will be more passionate tomorrow, because passion is so much more than a simple, human feeling.

Passion often starts with an interest. Perhaps you notice some issue in your community or some problem that's facing our world, and you realize that it's wrong. Usually this awareness sparks some emotion in you, like anger or sadness—and then a realization that feeling bad simply isn't enough. You decide you want to do something about it. And that's when an interest becomes a passion. When you take the feelings inside you, or that intellectual interest you have, and put it into action, passion is ignited.

When you're passionate about something, a "whatever" attitude just won't do. You don't just sit back and stay detached. You do something. You get involved.

Sometimes passion requires going against the grain. If we're passionate about something, sometimes we'll have to give up our desire to be looked at as cool. Passion might mean sticking up for something or someone no matter what the cost. Passion, unlike interest, doesn't come from merely liking something or having fun while doing it. Passion is being willing to give up something of ourselves—our time, our resources, our comfort, our interests—for something or someone.

Some of the most passionate people since the beginning of time have been willing to give their all—even their very lives—for the causes they were passionate about. Of course not every passionate person is forced to become a martyr because of his or her passion, but every passionate person has to make sacrifices.

If you know me, you know I love a good story and that I believe we can discover things about ourselves through the stories of others. This book is filled with the stories of passionate people. Every single one of them has been willing to make sacrifices to pursue his or her particular passion. While most chapters will focus on people whose passions lead to a better world, we'll also look at the stories of a few whose passions are less admirable—or even terribly destructive. We will look at people whose passions flow directly out of their Christian faith, but we'll also seek to learn from people who aren't committed to Jesus, yet still have something to teach us. We'll unpack some pretty interesting characters on the pages that follow, and we'll ask, "What can we learn from them about passion and about ourselves?"

We'll also talk about priorities. It sometimes seems that the things we students are most passionate about are things that should be mere interests, and the things we express interest in are often things we should be truly passionate about. Sometimes we need to turn it upside down. Our generation has such amazing potential for passion, but we need to be passionate about things that matter. We'll explore that more a little later.

Do you want to be passionate? Do you want to find a reason to get out of bed in the morning? Do you wish you were so excited about a project or a purpose that you had a hard time getting to sleep at night? Do you want to "lose your cool" in a good way and discover a passion that can change you—and maybe even change the world? I know my answer to each of these questions is "yes"—and I hope yours is, too. If you'll stick with me through this book, I think you'll find these stories will ignite a flame within you.