

# What are you passionate about?

by Paul E. Hamilton

*“It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. At the hour of serving wine I brought it in and gave it to the king. I had never been dejected in his presence before, so he asked me, ‘Why the long face? You’re not sick are you? Or are you depressed?’ That made me all the more agitated. I said ‘Long live the king! And why shouldn’t I be depressed when the city, the city where all my family is buried, is in ruins and the city gates have been reduced to cinders?’”*

*- Nehemiah 2:1-3*

Ask yourself this question: What are you passionate about? What is it that makes your heart pump a little faster and your mind spin into high gear? For some, it is sports. I know that some certain male individuals in my household get very passionate when the words “spring training” or “football season” are merely uttered. For some people, their passion is their work. People who become doctors have to be passionate about their career. The long, long hours of schooling, residency, and practice shows a high level of commitment and passion. As you can tell from reading the Scripture listed above, Nehemiah was very passionate about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, so much so that he risked everything to ask King Artaxerxes for help.

Nehemiah was one of the Israelites who was in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem had been leveled by the Babylonian armies and its walls were destroyed. Years later, the Persians defeated the Babylonians and King Artaxerxes took command. Nehemiah was his cup-bearer, which was a position of great prominence. You see, the cup-bearer made sure that no one poisoned the King’s drink. Only those who the king trusted could rise to such a position. But even though he was trusted, Nehemiah was still a slave. In order for Nehemiah to voice his concern for his homeland in front of the king, he had to possess immense courage and great passion. He could have been silent and kept his position of prominence and security, but he chose to risk everything to follow his passion.

Last week, I received an advertisement in the mail that just made my heart sink. It was from a real estate agent giving me a listing of churches for sale throughout the St. Louis area. There were 24 churches for sale which ranged in price from \$ 249,900 to \$ 3,900,000. What disturbed me was that 15 of the 24 churches were city located churches, and 7 of them are either in Gravois Park or on its borders. That means that seven churches are leaving the south city area. These churches are either moving their congregations out to

the county or they are just shutting their doors for good. This news just broke my heart and yet, it clarified for me the reason for the passion God has given us for the Gravois Park neighborhood. I'm sure that there are some people who are sick of me writing about the city and how the people that live there need the hope of Jesus Christ.

I'm sure that some would prefer that I go back to writing articles about prayer and how to live a good Christian life, but how can I talk about living a Christian life and not talk about those that do not have a shepherd anymore? Yesterday, while reading the Bible with my family, Jamie read Mark 6:34:

*“As Jesus landed, He saw a great crowd waiting, and He was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”*

Immediately, my mind went to the real estate advertisement. Seven churches gone. Seven congregations that might have touched the lives of the residents of the south city are gone. I do not know all the reasons that these churches have closed their doors and I do not stand in judgment of them. I do have some knowledge regarding one of the seven churches that is being sold. A friend of mine used to minister as pastor of this church. I know that the church ministered to the community via a food pantry. They also reached out in other ways to the neighborhood many years back, but for some reason, they have ceased to continue on.

God already knew that these churches were closing when He led us to settle Hole in the Roof in Gravois Park. He knew that these residents would not have a “shepherd” to help guide them or show them the love of Jesus. We are planning and preparing to launch out into these new waters, but we cannot do it alone. We have made a ministry proposal for our new outreaches, such as our Family Empowerment Program and our Neighborhood Tutoring Center. These programs are just a starting point as we have a heart to do so much more. We have counted the cost and put together these proposals to launch these beginning programs. Unfortunately, these programs take money, people, building space, and most importantly, prayer. Take the time to go to look over the enclosed proposal. Pray about how you can help and then follow what God puts in your heart.

It is not going to be easy and it is not going to happen overnight, but nothing that is worth being passionate about does.