

PASSION FOR GOD?

by Andrew Gabriel



Passion. What does it look like? It's green. At least it is in Saskatchewan. I recently moved here and quickly realized that people in Saskatchewan are passionate—to say the least—about the Saskatchewan Rough Riders (that is the best football team on earth, by the way . . . or so they tell me). On Canada Day, I think I saw more green Saskatchewan Rough Riders shirts than I did red and white maple leaf shirts. Passion is something you can see.

I have heard numerous discussions, among both pastors and lay people, where people have pondered the idea that Pentecostals are becoming less “Pentecostal.” It seems we don't look the same way we used to. The idea is that many people, churches and pastors are “Pentecostal” in name (because they belong to the PAOC), but that, at the heart of it, they are not really Pentecostal in practice. In these conversations it is often hard for people to define what they mean by “Pentecostal.” What are the characteristics of being a Pentecostal? Often times the discussion will centre on missions, or sometimes holiness; inevitably, speaking in tongues also comes up. It is probably fair to say that these are indeed characteristics of Pentecostals. But another thing that I think is—or at least should be—an important marker of Pentecostals is their passion for God. (It should, of course, probably be a characteristic of all Christians.) So when I ponder how “Pentecostals” are perhaps not as Pentecostal as they used to be, I wonder if we (myself included) are not as passionate as we should be.

Now, I can just guess what some of you are thinking when I mention the word “passion.” You are thinking about eyes squinting, hands raised, loud singing, and perhaps even tears being shed, all in the context of a worship service. But that is not quite what I have in mind. Passion might look like that, but it might not. People show passion in different ways, but it can be seen.

The early Pentecostals were passionate about God. They were passionate enough to stay at prayer meetings late into the night. They were passionate enough to linger at the altar seeking God for hours on end. They were passionate enough to leave their extended families behind and head overseas to share the gospel (without the Internet for communication!). And, yes, they were even passionate enough to raise their hands, sing loudly, and perhaps even shed a tear or two.

To be passionate for God means that we follow the Lord “wholeheartedly” (Numbers 32:12). It means that we fulfil the greatest commandment: to love God with all that we are—heart, mind, soul, and strength—in whatever situation we find ourselves (Matthew 22:37). But my fear is that too often we do not put all that we are into our relationship with God. When a person prays, they should not just “talk to God;” they should also “shout to God with cries of joy” (Psalm 47:1). When worship leaders sing, they shouldn't just sing nice songs; they should give it their all as they “make his praise glorious” (Psalm 66:2). When pastors preach, they shouldn't just deliver a sound biblical message; they should preach “as one who speaks the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

I know that passion looks different for each individual. It can also look different in each generation. For this reason I used to convince myself that I didn't have to look a certain way to be passionate. But then I had to ask myself, *When was I most passionate about God? What did that look like? How do I look now? Am I still passionate?* Whatever having passion for God looks like for you, regain that passion. And whatever it takes, “keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). If we all do this—not just pastors—perhaps then our churches will seem a little more Pentecostal.



ANDREW GABRIEL IS ORDAINED WITH THE PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF CANADA AND IS A PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT HORIZON COLLEGE AND SEMINARY, SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN
