

FOLLOWING YOUR HEART

Many years ago there was a boy named Antonio who loved music. He wanted to join a boy's choir but because his voice was high and squeaky, he did not make the tryouts. Then he took violin lessons but the neighbors had heard enough and persuaded his parents to make him stop. Still, Antonio wanted to make music. His friends gave him a hard time because his only talent was whittling. When Antonio was older he served as an apprentice to a violinmaker. His knack for whittling grew into the skill of carving and his hobby became his craft. He worked patiently and faithfully. By the time he died, he left over 1,000 violins, each one bearing a label that read, "Antonio Stradivarius." Only 650 are known to exist today. They are the most sought-after violins in the world and sell for millions each.

Antonio had a heart for music and even though he couldn't sing or play he found a way to use the talents he had. His violins are still making beautiful music today. We are continuing our series looking at how God has SHAPED us to serve Him. Understanding our SHAPE helps us do what God has planned for our lives. Today we're going to look at the H in SHAPE, which stands for HEART.

Prov 27:19 As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man

When we talk about heart, we're talking about your interests, passions and desires. What drives you, excites you, and interests you. Your heart affects everything you say and everything you do.

There are some things you're extremely interested in and other things you couldn't care less about. There are some things that are fascinating to you, and you could think about them and talk about them for a long time. Other things bore you to tears. We all like different things. That way everything in the world gets done. If we all liked to do the same thing and had the same interests we would fight to accomplish a few things and leave the rest undone. Where do you think our interests came from? It came from God. God hardwired it into your system. All your interests – the hobbies, the sports, the things you're interested in. God put that in you.

Phil 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

God not only commands us to act but also gives us the will or desire to do it. When I do what God shaped me to do, two things happen – I enjoy it, and I'm good at it. These are two things that help you determine your heart, what kind of heart God gave you.

So let me ask you, what is it that enjoy doing? What are you good at? The secret of an effective life is simply this: do what you love to do. People are rarely successful at things they hate doing because they don't have any passion for it.

That word "passion" is another word for heart. Passionate people get things done. Moses was passionate about setting his people free from Egyptian bondage. Paul was passionate about sharing the good news with everybody in the world. A Christian named William Wilburforce was passionate about abolishing slavery from the British Empire. Martin Luther was passionate about reforming the church in Europe. Martin Luther King had a passion for equality and for justice and influenced the world. Last week I said:

John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Having a fruitful life means that you are productive. When you do what God wired you to do you bring him glory. Most people don't follow their dreams. What keeps you from following your heart?

a. DISAPPOINTMENT

When you've been hurt you tend to pull back into a shell and say, "I'm never going to let anybody else hurt me." People give up on their dreams and ambitions and passions. You pull back into a protective mode. This is a bad idea because shells become self imposed prisons.

Prov 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

If at first you don't succeed... welcome to the human race. Almost nobody succeeds on the first try but many give up trying. Disappointment stops us and keeps us from moving forward.

b. FEAR

Fear is the second heart stopper. If disappointment keep us from finishing the race, fear keeps us from starting. It is another self-imposed prison. Jesus told a story of a wealthy man who gave three servants all his possessions: one servant gets five talents and one gets three and one gets one talent. Like this parable God says make the most of what you've been given. When the master returns the first and second servant had doubled their investment. The third simply buried his talent out of fear.

Prov 12:25 An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.

Fear often causes us to bury our talents. Fear keeps us from living our dreams. Fear gets in the way of our passion and limits our vision and shrinks our heart.

c. GUILT

Guilt stops us from going after our dreams because it takes enormous amounts of energy. It is like carrying a big sack of garbage around on your back all the time. You cannot be confident and guilty at the same time because guilt makes us hide from others. God never intended for you to walk around with a bunch of guilt and regrets. Jesus died for our sins so we can be completely forgiven. He's paid for them so you don't have to. We have been set free. You can get rid of the garbage. You can stop beating yourself up. Move forward and focus on your passion.

Psalm 40:12 For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

d. BITTERNESS

Bitterness will eat you alive. It's worse than cancer. It is the worst heart disease you can have. Bitterness is when pain and disappointment turns sour. You become resentful, and you're always thinking about how to get revenge, and you're always thinking about that person who hurt you in the past, it keeps you stuck in the past.

Psalm 73:21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, 22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

You can't get on with the present or the future because you're so hung up about that person who hurt you. Let it go. They don't deserve forgiveness, but you don't deserve it either. When you hold on to hurt from the past, it's like driving a car looking in the rear view mirror. You will crack up.

e. REJECTION

It may be the most painful one of all. Anyone who has ever experienced rejection from a friend or a parent or a former spouse or boyfriend or a girlfriend, you know how that hurts your heart.

Psalm 64:3 They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows.

You need to go back and erase that tape. You need to stop building your life on what critics said to you and start building your life on what God says about you. Studies show we need to hear 7 positive things about us for every negative one. Forget about what people are saying about you and start listening to what God says about you.

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,

Whatever you do! Anything you do in life you've got to do it with all your heart. With passion, interest, and vitality. How do I work at it with all my heart when my heart hurts? How do I move forward when my heart has been beat up, bruised, broken and battered around? You do five things.

1. OPEN YOUR HEART – receive Jesus

The first step is something hopefully you have all done – we open our heart to receive Jesus. Nobody can change your heart like Jesus Christ. I don't care what heartache you've been through or what habit you're dealing with or what hang-up you can't let go of. It all starts in a relationship with Jesus.

God gave you a heart, and He has placed in you some passions, desires and dreams. These things have been hardwired into you. However, unless they are under His control, they will be misused, abused, misapplied, and misdirected. So many people have taken the dream that God gave them and have misdirected it into other things. The result is that, despite their talent and success, they are unhappy.

Bruce Wilkinson wrote a book a few years ago called the Dreamgiver. In it he talks about the fact that God has placed a dream in each one of us. Even if we grow beyond surviving to success we will never be happy until we find significance and that means we are in the center of God's will.

Maybe you are thinking, "I am really not passionate about anything right now." You know what that means? It might mean you are disconnected from God at this moment. You cannot be connected to God and be dispassionate. When you are plugged into God, it's like sticking your finger into an electrical socket - you get passionate real fast! In fact, the closer you get to God, the more passionate you become. The further away from God you get, the more dispassionate you become.

God is passionate and we were created in His image. When you spend time with God on a daily basis you begin to understand his heart for other people and the world. You start to feel the things that God feels and feel the way He does. This is not only true for God but also other people. Who you spend time with influences your heart and makes a difference. Find people that are passionate about the things you are passionate about! E.g. going to a missions conference – Urbana!

I can prove that with any teenager. Give me a teenage kid, and I take him and put him with a group of dispassionate kids who care about nothing, who are apathetic about everything, what happens within a matter of weeks? That kid becomes apathetic. Who you hang out with makes a difference. Take that same kid and put them in a passionate group and the difference is amazing.

Do you want more passion, more enthusiasm? The word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek words EN THEOS – EN means IN and THEOS means GOD. When you get EN THEOS, when you get IN GOD, you’re going to be enthusiastic. The closer you get to God, the more energy, the more vitality, the more passion you have in life. The further away you get, the more bored and apathetic you become with life. You have to open your heart to Jesus first.

2. HEAL YOUR HEART – let God mend you

Everybody here has had their heart broken at some point in some way. Because God cares about you He cares about that as well. When you weep God weeps with you.

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

The word restore here is the Greek word KATARTIZO (KATA - according to and ARTIOS - complete or perfect) It means to mend or make perfect. The meaning of the word is clear, especially for Peter. Peter spent a lot of time as a fisherman mending his nets. In fact this is what he was doing when Jesus first called him.

Matt 4:21 - Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing (mending) their nets

Like a net there are times in our lives when we be torn. When the weight of the world and our sins will tear us in places. Jesus came to Peter and helped to mend his life back together making him strong and useful again for service. Jesus wants to do the same to us.

In the early days of the automobile a man's Model-T Ford stalled in the middle of the road. He couldn't get it started no matter how hard he cranked nor how much he tried to advance the spark or adjust things under the hood. Just then a chauffeured limousine pulled up behind him, and a wiry, energetic man stepped out from the back seat and offered his assistance. After tinkering for a few moments the stranger said, "Now try it!" Immediately the engine leaped to life. The well-dressed individual then identified himself as Henry Ford. "I designed and built these cars," he said, "so I know what to do when something goes wrong." God, as our creator knows how to "fix" us when our lives are broken by sin.

If you're going to follow your heart, which God wants you to do because He put it in you, first you open it to Him, second you let Him heal it, and third...

3. LISTEN TO YOUR HEART – understand what is in you

You need to listen to your heart. The problem is that most of the time we are moving so quickly that we can't even hear our heart any more. We need to slow down. Most people are speeding through life with no direction.

Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Do you know your heart? Ask yourself these questions: "What do I love to do? What do I dream of doing? Where have I been most effective in my life?" These are the questions you want to ask yourself in listening to your heart. Slow down and take the time to listen.

Recently a man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that 1,100 people walked past him, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by, and a middle aged man noticed there was musician playing. He slowed his pace, and stopped for a few seconds, and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the till and without stopping, and continued to walk. A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work. The one who paid the most attention was a 3 year old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally, the mother pushed hard, and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on. In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. A few gave him money, but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the most talented musicians in the world. He was playing a Stradivarius violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$100. This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste, and priorities of people. How many people missed the opportunity that day because they were simply too busy to listen.

4. DIRECT YOUR HEART – look at your options

Find out all you can about what might interest you. Try different things before you jump in with both feet. Don't be reckless with your future. Just because you love something does not mean you are necessarily gifted to do it.

Prov 19:2 It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.

It's like the person who says "I love Mexican food, so I'm going to go start a Mexican restaurant." It's very tough work. Ninety-five percent of all business start-ups fail within five years. The reason is because they had zeal without knowledge. A little prudence, a little good sense, a little forethought saves a lot of pain down the road.

How do you start going after your heart? Talk to people who are already successful in what you'd like to do. Just go find somebody who's already successful in this and say, "I've got a heart for this" and talk to them. By the way, have you noticed that when you meet people who have the same heart as you, you like them instantly? There's this heart-to-heart connection.

The Bible says we need the wisdom of other people. That is one of the reasons we have small groups. Ask your group "I'm thinking about *this*. I've always wanted to do it. What do you think about it? Do you have any advice? Would you pray for me?" Then experiment. Get involved in something.

5. RELEASE YOUR HEART - launch out in faith.

God will bless you if you're doing what He created you to do. If He put it in your heart to do it, and you go do it, He is going to bless it. However, there is going to be a fear factor if you start following your heart. There will be people who will not want you to follow your heart. It's like on a trapeze. You swing out on one bar, and before you can grab the other. From the time you let go of the first bar and grab the second, there's a split second where you're hanging in the air three hundred feet up in total faith. There's nothing holding you up except God.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

When you start living your heart you are going to stop worrying about status, and you're going to start enjoying significance. You are going to stop obsessing over money, which really isn't that important and you're going to start obtaining meaning. Meaning trumps money every day of the week.

A gifted young man with a bright future went to the mission field. His salary was very little. A large company wanted him to go to work with them and offered him 5 times the salary he was making as a missionary. He refused. They then offered him 10 times the salary but again he refused. They said they would offer even more money but the man replied, "Oh, the salary is big enough - it is the job that is not".

God did not put you on earth just to acquire a bunch of things. Purpose trumps prosperity every day of the week.

Psalm 4:7 You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

Charles Thomas Studd was born to a wealthy family in England in 1860. He grew up surrounded by everything that money could buy. He went to the best schools. At age 16 he started playing cricket and by 19 was captain of the best team in England. He had it all, fame and fortune. One day DL Moody was touring England and visited his home. He led Charles and his two brothers to Christ. After graduating from school CT Studd left everything he had to go to the mission field. First he went to China and latter India and then Africa. Countless lives were changed. He once wrote: 'Some people love to dwell near church with choir and steeple bell. But I want to run a rescue station a yard from the gates of hell.'

Most people don't like the way they are. They are always saying "I wish I were taller, I wish I were smaller, I wish I were thinner. I wish I had red hair, brown hair, black hair. I don't like my nose. I don't like my teeth. I wish I had more talent. Why couldn't I be like him or her? When you do that it causes all kinds of problems in your life. As a result of that they live frustrated lives.

The problem starts when we try to compare ourselves to others. We start looking at everybody else. And we tend to overvalue their ability and we tend to undervalue our abilities. We say, "If I could just... decorate my home like she does. ... If I could just sell stuff like he does.... If I could just..." We are always comparing. The grass always seems greener for others. If you want to have satisfaction and success in life I would suggest you stop saying, "What's wrong with me?" and start asking "What do I do right? What do I do well?" Figure out what you're good at and focus on that and don't worry about what you're not good at. E.g. the car salesman.

Every high achiever in life gets there by specializing. Every Olympic athlete – the guy who swims the 200-meter doesn't go around saying, "I wish I could pole vault!" No, they specialize. They find out what are they really good at and they focus on that. If you are constantly saying, "I don't like the way God made me," you're in essence rejecting God and that means you're listening to the devil. When you say, "I don't have enough talent... I don't have enough this or that..." you're basically saying, "God, you blew it. You didn't do it right with me."

Have you ever met someone who was trying to be somebody or something that they're not. Tall people who want to be shorter. Short people who want to be taller. People with no hair who want a lot of hair - or curly hair or straight. Dark skinned people who wished they had lighter skin. Light skinned people who wish their skin was darker and tan all the time. Women who are trying to be men and men who are trying to be women. Everybody is depressed because in their confused identify they say "God, You blew it! I don't like being me!" You miss out on the satisfaction of being what God called you to be.