

Passionate Following  
Sermon 1-24-21  
Andrew Hartzler

**Good morning Waterford.**

**My name is Andrew - I currently function as the Treasurer at Waterford**

**Today I am tasked with bringing you the sermon for the third Sunday in our "HOPE" series.**

**When Pastor Neil asked me to participate in this way, I was excited to be invited to preach on the "P" in HOPE which stands for Passionate Following.**

**To me, this life we are given is richest when we develop an awareness of our passions and pursue them relentlessly, albeit in a healthy way.**

**As a Professor at Goshen College, I am passionate about teaching and love being in a room with students, encouraging them to learn something new, to get excited about learning.**

**Since there is some overlap between preaching and teaching, I will be speaking to you as a teacher, excited to learn alongside you, internalizing the concepts that God has placed on my heart.**

**I may occasionally check if you're still with me through the screen as I do in person with my students in class. :)**

**The verse I've chosen to focus on today is Psalm 34:8, one of my favorite passages in the Bible.**

**It reads:**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**

**Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!**

**Taste and see..... Taste and see.....**

**My goal for our time together is for you to capture an image in your heart and mind of what it means to Taste and see the goodness of God, and to encourage you toward a passionate pursuit of that goodness.**

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**First I think it is important for us to define what we mean by "Passion".**

**If you Google definitions of the word Passion you find many definitions...**

**The most relevant one that is applicable to what we are talking about today are the following:**

**Passion - An intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction, or a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept.**

**In our context, I would like for us to focus on developing a vision of passion for communing with and seeking after the presence of God in our lives.**

**Depending on your background, giving in to "passion" may feel a little dangerous or risky, but I want you to remember what and who we are talking about today.**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.....**

**At this point it is critical that you develop a mental picture of what I am talking about by digging deep into your mind and finding other memories that you associate with passion.**

**This will require the use of all your senses.**

**To get you started I will give you examples of some of my passions:**

**I like food, although perhaps not nearly as much as some people. However I decided to think of a food that when I bite into it takes a significant amount of willpower to stop eating it. In other words, the taste is so amazing to my senses, it generates an intense, driving conviction to continue tasting this incredible explosion of flavor in my mouth.**

**Hunger warning, if you have not eaten before watching this service the next thing I do may make you hungry....**

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**A food that I am passionate about is no-bake cookies...A combination of oats, butter, milk, cocoa, peanut butter, salt, and lots of sugar combines for a mind-blowing taste explosion.... Did I mention they have lots of sugar???**

**You know what, I'm actually going to take a bite of one right now since I just happen to have one here in front of me.... Mmmmm,....wow, now that's passion.....It will be tough not to finish that during the sermon....**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good..**

**Another passion of mine is hiking in the mountains.**

**If you've ever been to the mountains, I invite you to join me now, close your eyes and breathe in deeply the scent of pine, or perhaps of eucalyptus if you're in Ecuador.**

**Open your eyes and survey the almost unfathomable grandeur before you, drink it in, the lines, the colors, the scope....feel your smallness amidst the awesome creation of an almighty God....**

**Listen to the wind whistling through the trees, sweeping down the mountains to the valley below. Behold the immensity of the landscape laid out before you.**

**At this point I want you to visualize a passion of yours in the same way.**

**Perhaps it is the incredible beauty of a particular melody that stirs something inside you,**

**perhaps it is the rush of straining with all your physical body to defeat someone in an athletic contest,**

**or perhaps it is the rich and deep warmth of laughter and conversation around a meal shared with family or friends.**

**So do you have your passion in mind?**

**Can you taste it, hear it, feel it, visualize it?? I encourage you to close your eyes for a moment and think of it. I will do the same.**

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**Ok, now I want you to take that visualization along with all its tastes, sounds, sights, and feelings and think about how we translate that kind of passion into our pursuit of a relationship with God.**

**How DO WE associate those intense feelings, convictions, and emotions with our drive to discover and commune with the Holy Spirit of God?**

**You may be saying to yourself, associating that kind of passion with God sounds nice Andrew, but God doesn't feel as real to me as chocolate, music, and mountains.**

**As we try to make the shift into thinking about passionately pursuing a relationship with God, I think this definition of passionate love is helpful:**

**Passionate love is defined as "a state of intense longing for union with another." So let's think about that together, a state of intense longing for union with God.**

**I will admit at this point that even after a lifetime of pursuing a relationship with God, something that I am very passionate about, there are moments in time or even stretches of time that the presence of God is elusive for me.**

**However, when I become aware of God's comforting, loving, powerful presence, it is impossible not to develop a strong desire to repeat those moments of awareness.**

**For me this has happened in a variety of places, in the presence of others, and when I'm alone.**

**What I've found in my life is that there exists a direct correlation between when I'm seeking God's presence and when I find it.**

**Sometimes it comes upon me and catches me by surprise, like when I heard a Ukranian ballad played by the Goshen College orchestra this fall. In that moment I experienced sounds of unspeakable beauty, woven together in a song that only God could have designed.....I saw the rays of the sun on the horizon, felt a warm breeze on my face, and I leaned into the embrace of the Holy Spirit in that moment.**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.....**

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**Or sometimes I find it when I am deep in conversation with a good friend and through our gathering of two or more, God unlocks a new awareness and understanding.**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.....**

**Or when I am trapped in my anxious thoughts and all good things seem dark and distant, shrouded in a fog of uncertainty, God's light pierces through my darkness and I run towards it in my mind crying "Come Lord Jesus!!!!".**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.....**

**God's presence jumps off the page in many Biblical texts, as I become acutely aware of who God is and how the Holy Spirit intersects with my life. Like in this one:**

**Psalm 143:6-8**

**6 I lift my hands to you in prayer.  
I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain.  
7 Come quickly, Lord, and answer me,  
for my depression deepens. Don't turn away from me, or I will die.  
8 Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning,  
for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk,  
for I give myself to you.**

**As I read that I feel God's presence surround me and wash away my darkness and replace it with warm enveloping light.....**

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.....**

**So Waterford, are you ready to join me in this passionate pursuit?? I know it's hard. It seems intangible, untouchable, just out of reach.....but man o man is it worth pursuing.**

**In the fleeting moments when I catch a glimpse of the true nature of God, a passion wells up in me that is overpowering..... an intense, overmastering, deep longing for union with my Creator God.**

**So Taste and see with me that the Lord our God is good, and oh the joys we will experience as we take refuge in God's presence together.**