

PEACE LIKE A SPIDER

and Other Devotions for Teens



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PASSION

What's Your Passion?

Passion. What comes to your mind when you hear the word? Steamy perfume commercials? Calvin Klein billboards? A speech by environmental activist Greta Thunberg? Olympic athlete Simone Biles flipping for gold? Poet Amanda Gorman reciting “The Hill We Climb”? What is your picture of passion?

Everyone has a passion. For some, it's animal rights. For others, it's money. For many, it's nothing more than Netflix. Or romance novels. Or playing Call of Duty.

For Hideaki Tomoyori of Yokohama, Japan, it was *pi*—which he recited from memory to forty thousand places in seventeen hours, twenty-one minutes.¹

For Reg Mellor, passion means “ferret legging.” At seventy-two, he was the reigning world champion of ferret legging—a contest in which competitors tie their trousers at the ankles and subsequently insert into those trousers a couple of particularly vicious, fur-coated, foot-long carnivores called ferrets. The brave contestants' belts are then pulled tight, and they proceed to stand in front of the judges as long as they can while these animals, with claws like hypodermic needles and teeth like number sixteen carpet tacks, try to get out. Reg Mellor holds the world record at five hours and twenty-six minutes.²

Henrietta Howland Green equated passion with money. Although she kept a balance of more than \$31 million in one bank alone, she was so stingy that her son had to have his leg amputated—possibly because she insisted on finding a *free* medical clinic. Her estate totaled more than \$100 million.³ It was rumored that she ate cold oatmeal because she was too thrifty to heat it.

Everyone has a passion for something. So what is your passion? What is so important that you will invest your life

in pursuit of it? What keeps you awake at night? What do you cry about? What consumes your time and energy?

Hans Küng, the Roman Catholic theologian, writes about this passion: “We all have a personal God—a supreme value by which we regulate everything, to which we orientate ourselves, for which if need be we will sacrifice everything. And if this is not the true God, then it is some kind of an idol, an old or a new one. Money, career, sex, pleasure—none of them evil things in themselves but enslaving for those for whom they become god.”⁴

Choose your passion carefully. For passion is the spark plug that ignites action. And action exposes your god.

“O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water”
(Psalm 63:1, NASB).

1. Bob Greene, “A Guy Who Opted for Pi in the Sky,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1988, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1988-07-20-8801160316-story.html>.

2. Ty Karnitz, “It’s Time to Bring Back Ferret-Legging,” *The Art of Manliness*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.artofmanliness.com/skills/manly-know-how/its-time-to-bring-back-ferret-legging/>.

3. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Hetty Green,” November 17, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hetty-Green>.

4. Hans Küng, *Why I Am Still a Christian* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 26.

INTEGRITY

\$50,000 Worth of Integrity

The headline could have proclaimed, “Ted Lasso Elected as President,” and I would have been less shocked. I stared at

the front page of the Seattle *Times* in disbelief:

Snohomish, Washington—Lisa Thorpe of Lynnwood passed the good Samaritan test Sunday when she found \$50,000 cash in a roadside ditch—and gave it to police.

According to Snohomish County sheriff's spokesman Elliot Woodal, a Snohomish man, 65, withdrew the cash Saturday, planning to deposit it in another bank. But first the man, who recently had a death in his family, drove home and became distracted, leaving the money bag on the running board of his pickup truck. Later he drove the truck on an errand and didn't realize until early Sunday that the money was missing.

Thorpe was on a Sunday drive with her family when she noticed a money clip and money on the road in the 200 block of Dubuque Road north of Snohomish. When she stopped to investigate, she found the bag of cash in the ditch. Deputies traced the money through papers in the bag.

The story hit me like an avalanche of rocks. Coincidentally, I had driven the 200 block of Dubuque road that Sunday and had whizzed by \$50,000! The question still taunts me: What would I have done with the money?

Captivated by the story, I set out to contact Lisa Thorpe. Fifteen phone calls and an hour of frustration later, I had Lisa on the line. "Hi, um, Lisa?" I stammered. "You, ah, don't know me, but I read about what you did last week, um, with the fifty thousand dollars and all, and I wanted you to know I find your story very inspiring. That was a noble thing you did."

"Thank you," she replied modestly. "I appreciate the call."

"Um, one question," I blurted out before she could hang up. I had to ask the burning question. "Were you tempted to keep the money?"

"No, not really."

“Why not?”

“Well,” she said, “you may not understand, but have you ever heard of the Ten Commandments?”

What Seventh-day Adventist minister hasn’t heard of the Ten Commandments? A fourth-generation Adventist. I could recite the Ten Commandments before I could say my full name.

“Yes,” I assured her, “I’ve heard of the Ten Commandments.”

“Then you know about the one that says not to steal?”

“Yep.”

“Then you know why I . . .”

“Yes, I know.”

Her final words before our goodbyes cut like a surgeon’s scalpel: “My integrity is worth far more than fifty thousand dollars.”

What about you? What is your integrity worth?

Integrity is the primary ingredient of a successful life. It is the cornerstone in the foundation of success—living honestly when no one’s watching.

You can drive a Tesla, get a degree from Harvard, vacation in Australia, golf with an even handicap, and sing like Taylor Swift, but you’ll never be truly successful unless everything you do is undergirded with integrity. Only when truthfulness is deeply embedded in your character will you taste the heady potion of success.

So, what is your integrity worth?¹

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

1. Adapted from Karl Haffner, “Fresh Start: \$50,000 Worth of Integrity,” *Gleaner*, October 2004, https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/Gleaner_Online/2004/2004_10.pdf.

TRUST

Whom Do You Trust?

The title gives you the whole article: “New Study Finds Fake News Spreads Faster and Deeper Than Verified Stories on Twitter.”¹ Gallup reports, “Americans remain largely mistrustful of the mass media.” Yeah, no kidding! The article states that only 41 percent of Americans “have ‘a great deal’ or ‘fair amount’ of trust in newspapers, television and radio to report the news ‘fully, accurately and fairly.’ ”² “Fake news is perfect for spreadability: It’s going to be shocking, it’s going to be surprising, and it’s going to be playing on people’s emotions, and that’s a recipe for how to spread misinformation.”³

Trust me

All the chatter about “fake news” raises the question, whom can you trust in the media?

And does it really matter if the info we’re fed is trustworthy?

Yes! A thousand times, *yes!*

Every day is based on trust. We expect the newscaster to report honest news. We assume the bus driver will drive safely. We have faith the teacher will provide accurate information. We trust drivers to abide by the traffic laws as we stroll down the sidewalk. We have confidence that our parents will give good advice. The choices we make are based on trust.

Good decisions rest on good information. And good information comes from those we trust to give it to us.

So, whom do you trust?

MTV? TikTok? YouTube?

Your friends?

The Kardashians?

Your teachers?

God?

Who influences you most when you make decisions?

Do you trust God?

The Bible is full of stories of men and women whose lives changed when they chose to trust God. Peter switched professions. Nicodemus shifted priorities. Mary Magdalene transformed her lifestyle.

The cripple at the pool of Bethesda acquired a new mode of transportation when Jesus said to stand up and walk. Because the man trusted Jesus, he stood. And for the first time in thirty-eight years, he walked!

Wouldn't you find it exhilarating to do the same? to stand when Jesus says, "Stand"? to trust Him completely?

When Jesus says you're forgiven, to unload the guilt?

When Jesus says He'll take care of you, to stop worrying?

When Jesus says you are saved, to bury your fears?

When Jesus says you are a child of the King, to act like it?

So when Jesus says to stand, why not stand?

I recall hearing a story told of a private who captured Napoleon's runaway horse. When he returned the animal, Napoleon said, "Thank you, Captain."

With one word, the private became a captain. And he believed it. He wore a new uniform, ate his next meal at the officers' table, and moved out of his barracks into the officers' quarters. Because Napoleon said it, he believed it.

Why not live the same way?

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight"
(Proverbs 3:5, 6).

1. Jason Daley, "New Study Finds Fake News Spreads Faster and Deeper Than Verified Stories on Twitter," *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/fake-news-spreads-faster>

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-and-deeper-verified-stories-180968443/.

2. Megan Brenan, "Americans' Trust in Mass Media Edges Down to 41%," Gallup, September 26, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/267047/americans-trust-mass-media-edges-down.aspx>.

3. Daley, "New Study Finds Fake News."

VISION

A Big (Mac) Vision

Few people have described the power of pursuing a compelling vision better than the late Ray Kroc. His vision was ignited at a drive-in restaurant owned by the McDonald brothers in southern California. Intrigued by their mechanized approach to delivering a limited selection of foods quickly, Kroc studied the business and discussed expansion possibilities with the McDonald family. After some planning, he entered a partnership with the McDonalds in 1954.

Kroc recalled the excitement of changing his career in pursuit of a new vision: "When I flew back to Chicago that fateful day in 1954, I had a freshly signed contract with the McDonald brothers in my briefcase. I was a battle-scarred veteran of the business wars, but I was still eager to go into action. I was 52 years old. I had diabetes and incipient arthritis. I had lost my gall bladder and most of my thyroid gland in earlier campaigns. But I was convinced that the best was ahead of me. I was still green and growing, and I was flying along at an altitude slightly higher than the plane."¹ From the outset, the vision felt right to Kroc.

The story, however, was not all milkshakes and hot-fudge sundaes. If you've seen the 2016 movie *The Founder*, starring Michael Keaton, then you know about the bitter fights Kroc had with the McDonalds and the lawsuits that scarred Kroc's

road to fortune with bumps and potholes. Yet Kroc maintained that he was able to persevere because his vision for the fast-food business fueled him past the obstacles. He pressed through periods in which he doubted his employees, suppliers, lawyers, and even his family, but Kroc remained convinced that if he tenaciously pursued his vision, he could create a better future. From a corporate perspective, he did just that.

And from a biblical perspective, God has always used visionaries to alter the world. The apostle Paul found himself driven to fulfill a vision for ministry that God had entrusted to him. In the book of Acts, we see the apostle preaching, teaching, and planting churches with a fervor missing from anyone who's working only for a paycheck. Rather, he worked tirelessly through beatings, shipwrecks, and prison sentences because he clearly saw God's vision for a better world.

Nehemiah accepted responsibility for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Scripture tells us that, for several days, he couldn't sleep or eat or function because of the burning vision that consumed his life. His gutsy confrontations with opponents testified to the vision God had given him. Rather than collapsing under the pressure, Nehemiah stood firm based on that vision—the very work that “my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:12).

Moses received a clear vision from God to make a difference. Pursuing that vision meant forty years of camping in the hot desert, leading an unruly band of whiners through times of sacrifice and pain. But driven by God's vision, Moses stuck with it.

God still calls people to pursue His vision for a better world. What vision has God given you?

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”
(Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

1. Ray Kroc, *Grinding It Out* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1977), 13.