

**Unique:  
Impassioned  
Philippians 3:7-14**

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I had a friend in high school named Steve. Steve was remarkably gifted with his hands. He could take anything apart and put it back together. Anyone who knew Steve would bring them their cars and Steve would fix them. I remember buying a car stereo and Steve literally begged me to allow him to install it, because he loved doing it. You could just tell that doing it made him happy. He loved tinkering, diagnosing problems, and fixing mechanical things.

Steve's father was a big deal in commercial Real Estate. The man lived and breathed wheeling and dealing, and he was really very good at it. Problem was, he insisted that his son be good at it, too. When Steve graduated from high school, his father insisted that he attend college and get a degree in business. Steve really wanted to be a mechanic, but he didn't want to disappoint his father, and so he studied business and upon graduation went into business. And he was miserable. Last I heard, his adult life was a disaster.

What if I told you that deep in your heart there is a kind of treasure map, something to guide you to the kind of aliveness for which we all long. And what if I told you that ignoring what's in your heart would keep your life smaller than it could be. I believe that God has placed into each of our hearts unique passions and desires that point us to our unique purpose in life. Tending to what's in your heart enlarges your life. Ignoring it diminishes your life.

My friend Steve knew what he was good at. He knew what brought him joy, what raised his pulse, what captured his imagination, what made him feel fully alive. But he didn't want to disappoint his father, so rather than doing what his heart told him he must do, he did what his father said he should do. And he paid the price.

Must and Should. That's what I want to talk to you about today. These are two paths in life, and we arrive at the intersection of Must and Should over and over

again. Every day we get to choose which path we will follow. Let me define what I mean when I talk about Must and Should.

Should is how other people want us to live our lives. It's all the expectations that are layered upon us. Sometimes those Shoulds are small, harmless and easily accommodated...like "You should listen to that song" or "You should try this new restaurant." And sometimes Shoulds are even helpful and important...I should love my neighbor even when I don't feel like it. But at other times Shoulds are highly influential systems of thought that pressure and, at their most destructive, coerce us to live our lives differently. When we choose Should, we're choosing to live life for someone or something other than ourselves...much like my friend Steve did. It inevitably makes our lives smaller.

Must is different. Must is our true self, what we believe to be true deep in our bones. Must isn't something to shame us as if someone outside us is telling us what we must do. Must is the deep calling in our hearts, a passion that will not let us go, the thing we dare to dream about. Must is when we stop conforming to other people's ideals and start connecting to what God has placed in our hearts, listening deeply and responding.

The Bible is filled with the stories of people who followed their Must, the calling that God placed in their heart. And one of my favorites is Paul. Our Scripture reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3. And as I read this passage, listen for Paul's Must. Listen for the unique calling and burning passion in Paul's life. St. Paul writes,

*<sup>7</sup> I once thought [all my past accomplishments] were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience*

*the resurrection from the dead.* <sup>12</sup> *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.* <sup>13</sup> *No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Did you catch it? Did you hear Paul's call, his Must, his burning passion? It was to know Christ in a very personal way, to grow in Christ and to make Christ known. Paul was willing to let everything else go, to let go of every Should in order to live into his unique Must, his unique calling. That's what brought Paul fully alive no matter how difficult his life became. And through Paul, God changed the world.

So, what's your Must? What is the dream, the passion that God has uniquely placed in your heart? It's possible you just don't know. For lots of different reasons you may never have taken the time to be still and listen to what's in your heart. Maybe you were told you "Shouldn't," that to do so would be selfish.

Or maybe you know what your Must is, you know that unique passion that God has planted within your heart. You can feel it pulsing and hear it calling deep within you. But you haven't done much about it. I think that's true for lots of people, and there are lots of reasons we choose not to live into our Must. Sometimes we're just too busy living day-to-day. Sometimes we fear that of what might change or what we might have let go of. Sometimes it's the fear of disappointing someone important in our life. Following our Must can feel like risky business. But I believe that our Must is God's calling, and when we dare to follow, I find inevitably God opens doors.

Following your heart's passion, your Must, doesn't necessarily mean radical change. Sometimes it means small changes. For instance, one of the Musts in my life is making music. I started playing instruments in first grade and discovered in me a passion I didn't know was there. I've played in everything from jazz bands to symphonic orchestras. I've even played Carnegie Hall... no joke! But there was a period of time when I stopped playing. I got busy with life. Every now and again I would feel a nudge, that internal calling to play again,

but I kept pushing it back down. But a few years ago, as a spiritual practice, I began to listen to my heart. And when I did I hear that call again to make music, I responded. I started playing again, just for myself. And it makes me feel alive in ways that few other things do. And that spills over into other areas of my life.

The poet, Rumi, said, "Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray." I've often wondered what would have happened to my friend Steve if he had followed his love, his Must, his inner calling, rather than living into the Should placed on him by his father.

The most recently example in my life of living at the intersection of Must and Should is my wife, Nancy. Nancy has been a CPA for 36 years. She's really good at what she does. She's good with numbers and she's good with people. But if you ask Nancy she'll tell you that she's never really enjoyed being an accountant. So, why is she an accountant? Mainly because of the Shoulds of her father. Nancy's dad wanted her to have a career so that she would never be dependent upon a guy, and for him that meant having a business career. And so, Nancy did just that for 36 years.

But about five years ago Nancy started listening to her heart, and that's when she heard her Must. She started a Masters degree in Business Education at Bethel College, and this last week she started her student teaching at Farmington High School with the goal of being a Business Ed teacher. There were lots of logical reasons why she "Shouldn't" make that change, but once she said "yes" to her Must, doors opened. And I've watched her come alive in new ways.

Friends, you are unique. No one else has your exact mix of gifts and passions. They are signposts from God, pointing you toward your purpose, leading you toward the fullness of life that Jesus promises. Rather than wondering what you might lose by following your Must, your passion, wonder what you might lose if you don't.

Oh, and before you think to yourself, "I'm too young" or "I'm too old to follow my passion, to follow my Must," think again.

Mozart wrote his first piece of music at the age 5.

Gymnast Nadia Comaneci scored the Olympics' first perfect 10 in gymnastics at the age of 14.

Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the *Little House on the Prairie* series, published her first book in that series at the age of 64.

John Glenn became the oldest person to go into space at the age of 77.

When she was 81, Ginette Bedard ran her 12th consecutive New York City Marathon. She started running at the bright age of 69.

I have no idea how old Paul was when he said “yes” to his Must. All I know is that because of him, the lives of billions of people, including my own life, have been changed forever.

The church has so often been a place that tells people all about what they Should. What if the church were the place where you could be encouraged to live into your Must, because you believe that God planted that passion in you for a reason.

So let me leave you with this:

If you believe that you have something special, something God planted inside of you, and I believe that to be true, and you feel it’s about time you gave it a shot, to honor your calling even in a small way – do it, today. If you feel a knot in your stomach because you can see the enormous distance between your dreams and your daily reality, do one thing to tighten your grip on what you want – today. If you’ve been peering down the road to Must but can’t quite make the choice, dig a little deeper and find out what’s stopping you – today. Because there is a recurring choice in life and it occurs at the intersection of two roads. We arrive at this place again and again. The intersection of Must and Should.

What one thing will you do today to live into your calling, into your Must, into what makes you truly unique? Let me pray for you as you begin that journey today.