

"THOSE WHO BRING JOY AND NOT"

(Acts 13:1-12)

(Gordon MacDonald)

In his excellent book *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* Gordon MacDonald addresses how others affect our spiritual passion. What he says is not easy to hear and even more difficult to apply. He makes the observation that some people give you energy and others sap your energy. While we're called to love all people, we need to be wise in how we spend our time with people.

First, he lists three types of people who bring us joy and help boost our spiritual passion.

The Very Resourceful People – They ignite our passion. (VRP)

These are the mentors—the shapers of our lives. For many of you your parents were your first VRP's. In the position of a mentor now, you may be playing this role in the life of someone else to some degree. We all need VRP's in our life to help us grow and to ignite our passion. We take from VRP's and are refueled for the challenges ahead. These can be people we know personally or even people we learn from at a distance.

The Very Important People – They share our passion. (VIP)

These are our peers, teammates, fellow workers and colleagues who share our passion and contribute to our lives just by the very nature of their camaraderie and friendship. It is the power of equals who share their love for the Lord. The goal of married couples is to be VIP's for one another. To share a passion for a healthy marriage that honors God is a high calling. Passion can be shared by our co-workers in the church as well. We work side-by-side in ministry and inspire one another.

The Very Trainable People – They catch our passion. (VTP)

These people catch our passion and we are encouraged by that. They are the VTP's of the VRPs (mentors). The VTP's mainly take from the VRP's but they still encourage us as they take what we've passed on to them and use it to build God's kingdom.

Paul brings these together when he writes to a young Timothy, "What you have heard from me—VRP—before many witnesses entrust to faithful men—VTP—who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

In recent years, as the study of leadership has grown, it has become clear that Paul was right on target with his strategy. Once you've become older and grown wiser in the Lord (over age 35-40 probably) it is time to begin investing that much more in the younger very trainable people. For these are the people who will make a difference in the future.

The Very Resourceful People, The Very Important People and the Very Trainable People bring joy to our lives and help us in the area of spiritual passion. This is one reason why when mentor relationships are going well, people are feeling energized and full of spiritual passion. It is a great investment to make for the kingdom of God to spend time with these people.



Not all the people you know fit into one of these three categories! What are we to do with the other people in our lives?

Here is what MacDonald came up with:

The Very Nice People – They enjoy our passion. (VNP)

These are the good people who like to be around us, who enjoy us, who clap for us and build our ego, but they contribute nothing to our passion. Jesus had a lot of very nice people following him around in the crowds. But when times got tough, they disappeared. These people, as nice as they are, absorb a lot of our energy if we let them. And this energy tends to bear little fruit. Frankly, this is the largest population in most churches. They may be necessary but they are not contributing to the advancement of the mission of God's people.

The Very Draining People – They sap our passion. (VDP)

God calls us to love all people, but there are some people who will demand a lot more energy in order to care for them. This doesn't mean that we don't reach out to them and give to them, but we need to be aware of just how much of our passion is being sapped. If we are not careful, these people will dominate our time when, in reality, they should get the least amount of it. This does not mean we only invest in people who are easy but it does mean we should be careful to make sure we are not wasting our time.

For some reason, Paul thought that John Mark would be too draining of a person to take on his next missionary journey and so he left with Silas while Barnabas, the encouraging one, took on the very draining John Mark (Acts 15:36-41). Later, rather than being a drain on Paul, John Mark would be someone who shared his passion (2 Tim. 4:11). The lesson here is that some people just seem to understand VDPs and can turn them around. We should also note that we should never give up on anyone.

How did MacDonald apply this to restoring his spiritual passion? He realized after a few years in ministry that the VNP's and the VDP's were taking up the majority of his time. This is in contrast to Jesus who spent the majority of his time with the Very Trainable People (his disciples) and less time with those who only took from his passion. MacDonald writes "In giving my time to the VNP's and the VDP's, I was inadvertently teaching them an unhealthy dependence upon me as a leader, but even more significantly, by spending my prime time with these two groups, I was expending my own energy in non-restorable ways.

So consider who you are in this paradigm. Are you a VRP for anyone? Do you appreciate the VIPs in your life and prioritize them? Have you found a VTP whom you are training for the future to make an impact? Are you a VNP who has not found your SHAPE at Fellowship? Are you a VDP, sapping the energy from those around you—perhaps even your family? What can you do to be someone who brings joy and energizes others rather than sapping their energy?