
UNDERSTANDING THE PASSIONS



REMOVING THE VEIL

A Relational Framework for Youth and Young Adult Ministry



INTRODUCTION

The Church Fathers identified key passions: inner, distorted desires driven by whispers of half-truths to our souls. These passions don't present themselves as obvious lies; instead, they offer something that feels true, promising to meet our deepest needs. But they always lead us away from trusting God and toward trusting ourselves to secure what we need.

WHAT ARE PASSIONS?

The passions are not simply bad deeds or moral failures. They are habitual distorted drives within us that take holy desires – for love, worth, safety, comfort, justice – and convince us to seek these things in disordered ways, apart from God. Each passion whispers a particular half-truth that keeps us from seeing accurately and from trusting fully in God's provision.

As you read through these, pay attention to which ones resonate most strongly. You'll likely recognize multiple passions at work in your life, but 2-3 will probably feel especially familiar. Mark those and reflect more deeply on how they show up in your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

PRIDE

The Whisper

“You don't need anything from anyone. You can take care of yourself and others on your own.”

The Half Truth

You can be like God...

The Lie

...on your own... You don't need to depend on God or others; your strength and love are sufficient.

Misguided Attachment

The need to be needed.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to win affection.

How it Manifests

Pride elevates us to God's position, the only One who truly needs nothing. It's especially seductive for those of us with strong caregiving parts because it tells us to trust in our own ability to win affection and help others. Pride whispers that we're more loving, more capable, and that others owe us gratitude. We make ourselves indispensable all while not needing anything from anyone else, including God.

When it Fails to Deliver

When appreciation doesn't come, resentment builds: "A little appreciation would be nice," or "How could you do this to me after all I've done for you?" Behind this is often a wound that tells us no one really likes us anyway, so at least we can make them need us.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: How do you try to make yourself indispensable? When do you feel resentful when others don't recognize your efforts?



ENVY

The Whisper

“You’re not enough. If only you were like or better than others, then you’d be complete.”

The Half Truth

You are special...

The Lie

...if you stand out...
You’re fundamentally lacking compared to others; you need to be seen as special to matter.

Misguided Attachment

The need to be seen as special.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to express myself.

How it Manifests

This can look like wearing unusual clothing, cultivating melancholy, or embracing an identity of suffering. Envy is born from a sense of scarcity and drives us into constant comparison—who has more talent, better taste, better ideas. It tells us we aren’t good enough, that no one really sees us. We trust in our ability to express ourselves and draw attention to stand out as unique.

When it Fails to Deliver

When we don’t receive recognition for what makes us unique, we may slip into despair or self-pity, which is, ironically, another way to feel special: “No one understands because they haven’t suffered like I have.” Behind this is often a wound that tells us that no one actually delights in us for who we are – not even God. We believe we simply do not belong. As children, we likely needed someone who could see us for who we were, with all our complex emotions.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: Who do you most often compare yourself to? What are you trying to prove about your uniqueness?



GREED

The Whisper

“The world is scarce.
You need to hoard resources
to be secure.”

The Half Truth

You can be secure...

The Lie

...if you hoard resources...
There's not enough for
everyone; it's actually
wise to rely on yourself to
provide and protect
what's yours.

Misguided Attachment

The need to have enough.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to solve problems.

How it Manifests

We obtain as much information or as many resources as possible, keeping our knowledge and stuff to ourselves, seeing it as power while we become emotionally stingy. Greed makes us see the world through scarcity, driving us to hoard not just material resources but also intellectual and emotional ones. It's especially seductive for those with strong problem-solving parts because it encourages us to trust in our ability to assess and provide for ourselves rather than relying on God.

When it Fails to Deliver

When we don't feel like we have the answers or resources we think we need, we may withdraw from connection and retreat into our minds: another retirement plan, another podcast, another book, another seminar. We find ourselves gathering and conserving resources rather than investing in relationships. Behind this is often a wound of never feeling truly supported by anyone, so we must conserve our own energy and resources. As children, we likely needed someone who allowed us to express our need without being overwhelmed by us.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: What are you holding onto (information, money, time, emotions) out of fear there won't be enough? How does this affect your relationships?



FEAR & ANXIETY

The Whisper

“Danger is around every corner. You must prepare and control outcomes to stay safe.”

The Half Truth

You can be safe...

The Lie

...if you prepare for every outcome... Your worry can prevent bad things from happening; safety depends on your control.

Misguided Attachment

The need to control every outcome.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to prepare for the worst.

How it Manifests

The passion of fear | anxiety convinces us to trust in our ability to predict and manage outcomes. Those with parts that are highly attentive or skilled with administration are especially susceptible. The worry never stops, and it can evolve into paranoia or lack of trust in others.

When it Fails to Deliver

When our best laid plans fail or we encounter unexpected outcomes, Fear leads us to replay situations and conversations, to obsess over “what ifs,” and to fearfully replay every detail over what we think went wrong. The inner voice suggests: “If I had been more concerned or prepared, I could have prevented that.” Behind this is often a wound that came from an environment that felt unpredictable or had an untrustworthy authority figure. As children, we likely needed someone to help us feel safe.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: What are you trying to control or prevent? What would happen if you loosened your grip?



GLUTTONY

The Whisper

“You should always feel good. Seek pleasure and avoid pain at all costs.”

The Half Truth

You can be satisfied...

The Lie

...if you never stop seeking satisfaction... Happiness means never experiencing discomfort; you deserve constant pleasure.

Misguided Attachment

The need to feel good.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to find pleasure.

How it Manifests

Gluttony can make us hyperactive, scattered, and unable to be present. We may show discomfort when others discuss painful things. We want 'Good vibes only.' Gluttony whispers that we should always feel good, sending us pleasureseeking. When pleasure fades and uncomfortable feelings resurface, we ravenously seek the next experience, whether it's through food, adrenaline, entertainment.

When it Fails to Deliver

When the inescapable reality of uncomfortable or painful feelings shows up, Gluttony can lead us to toxic optimism or addictions to escape our pain. Ironically, Gluttony can lead us to despair because we've never learned to handle pain – only how to avoid it. Behind this is often a wound that tells us our pain is too much to handle and we'll just be left alone with it. As children, we likely needed someone who could be with us in our pain.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: What uncomfortable feelings are you avoiding? What do you turn to for quick pleasure or escape?



LUST

The Whisper

“Get what you want, and don't show weakness.”

The Half Truth

You can find connection...

The Lie

...without vulnerability...
You can use others to meet your needs without being vulnerable; power protects you from pain.

Misguided Attachment

The need to not be vulnerable.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to be strong & powerful.

How it Manifests

Lust leads us to manipulate or use others as we shield ourselves from vulnerability. Those with strong leadership or courageous parts may be especially tempted. Lust is a relational distortion that looks at others as objects for consumption, asking, “What can I get here? How can I use this person to make myself feel better?” While primarily discussed in terms of sexuality, it also includes the lust for power and control.

When it Fails to Deliver

When it cannot deliver true connection or lasting pleasure, Lust keeps us in a frenzy and distorts our view of others as we keep looking for the next object. Lust hardens our hearts, creating a shell that prevents real connection. As it deepens, we become insensitive or even aggressive toward others. Behind this is often a wound caused by a sense of betrayal or that they were dominated early on. As children, we likely needed to experience someone who used their power to protect us, rather than to control us.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: How do you use power or control to avoid vulnerability? How do you objectify or use others?



SLOTH

The Whisper

“Nothing is really worth the effort. Better not to try.”

The Half Truth

You can have peace...

The Lie

...if you avoid conflict and stress... Avoiding difficulty will bring you peace; hard things aren't worth engaging.

Misguided Attachment

The need to be comfortable.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to maintain peace.

How it Manifests

We trust in our ability to pacify ourselves and others, keeping the waters calm. Those with naturally calm or diplomatic parts often heed sloth's voice. The indecisiveness can frustrate those who count on us. Sloth isn't just laziness; it's an overarching drive to avoid anything difficult, whether a work task or a conflict with a loved one. It makes it hard to begin tasks, make decisions, take initiative, or form clear perspectives. It draws us toward listlessness, making it hard to show up for our own lives.

When it Fails to Deliver

When it cannot deliver true connection or When it cannot bring us the peace we desire, Sloth deepens, bringing with it a residual anger, depression, despondency, and the belief that nothing we do matters. We become shadow-people, simply going along to get along. Behind this is often a wound that tells us asserting ourselves leads to disconnection or conflict. As children, we likely needed to experience a sense of our own feelings, needs, and wants being welcomed.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: What difficult things are you avoiding? How does your passivity affect your relationships?



ANGER

The Whisper

“Things should be fair and right according to your standards. You must make them so.”

The Half Truth

You can find justice...

The Lie

...if you make things right...
You are the judge; you must make things right according to your perception, *right now*.

Misguided Attachment

The need to make things right, right now.

Misplaced Trust

My ability to make things right.

How it Manifests

If we live with the passion of anger, we may slip into a critical spirit, leaving others feeling judged or inadequate. In ourselves, it can look like perfectionism or a harsh inner critic. The passion of anger is activated when things don't go according to an internal sense of how we believe things ought to be. Those with parts convicted about what's right or that care about fairness are especially susceptible.

When it Fails to Deliver

As it takes deeper root and doesn't deliver, it leads to rage, lashing out at those who fail to live according to our standards. We need things to be right and often shield ourselves from acknowledging our own wrongdoings. Behind this is often a wound that tells us we're only acceptable if we're good and self-controlled. As children, we likely needed someone to stay connected to us, even when we made mistakes.

Discussion Questions

Does this resonate? If so, consider: What situations or people activate your anger most? How does your inner critic speak to you?





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