

# Psychotherapy Newsletter

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## In Pursuit of Passion

I had someone ask me recently if her husband's "sexual addiction" was a rare disorder. I responded that I'm not sure about the title "sexual addiction," but that I think turning to sexual gratification to attempt to fill a void or to provide immediate satisfaction is really quite common, something we have all done to some degree, in some shape or form, and for some season in our life, some more chronically and destructively than others. The other ways we attempt to fill an emptiness or to "mimic" a passionate life, are substance abuse, extreme busyness, shopping, eating, controlling, and so on.

There is a clear distinction between the life of a person who is on a productive, passionate road, who is building, inventing, pioneering, studying, serving, utilizing their gifts, contributing to society – and someone who is not functioning within their passion.

Some people find their passion early on and from a relatively young age seem to be driven and "on it." For others it is a slower process – our childhoods may have left us with internal struggles and preoccupations that don't leave enough free energy to think outside of ourselves and be able to stay focused and become excited about a particular direction. As a therapist, I have worked with people who could never quite get their life on a productive path without a season of therapy. I've worked with other people who had clear passions and were really quite successful and energized and then got derailed, disillusioned and found themselves acting out in ways that were indicators that they had somehow lost their way. I think it is during these seasons in

life, when we have lost our way, that the instant gratification of a sexual encounter, or the immediate effects of taking a substance, become the cheap imitations of what can or at one time had been a deeply satisfying life. I think it is probably safe to say that most things that really matter and have meaning in life are not instantly gratifying, but rather have been worked at, slowly plodded toward, and have had a long incubation period. Sometimes people are tucked away in school for many years before the fruit of that labor, attending all those classes, writing all those papers, taking all those tests, comes to light. Sometimes starting a business can require years of investment and hard work before the fruits of a thriving company or practice emerge. Raising children can have that feel to it – a very long process, sometimes with years at a time of very little gratification (I'm thinking of the adolescent years where you can become the least interesting of all human beings to your child). Finally, hopefully, when your child becomes an adult you see the results of all those minutes, hours, days, months, and years of investment you made.

Sometimes I hear from women that I work with that their main passion in life is to be a wife and a mother. For some, that is indeed a satisfying and worthwhile investment of their time and they come up with outside-of-the-family interests as their children get older that feel satisfying and creative. For others, being a wife and a mother is not really their passion, but rather an escape or a "legitimate cover" for not really knowing themselves very well. Often these women

aren't really very successful wives or mothers over the years, as they are not very fulfilled or contented people to begin with.

One belief I hold is that each of us has a purpose, a passion, maybe several passions, that will come to the surface, if invited, and that it is worth the effort to do what it takes to get into a position where the passion can come forth and show it's face.

I think it is safe to say that truly contented people are those that devote their energy to their personal relationships and have their own interests that excite them. Both are important. Passions without meaningful personal relationships fall short or become obsessions or defenses against what isn't going well internally. The opposite is true as well, that people who are devoted to their families, but don't have a personal interest or calling, also tend to find dysfunction in their lives. The healthiest recipe, I suppose we could say, for any family, is to create an atmosphere where each family member is encouraged and facilitated in their quest for what feels important and meaningful to them. When this is the case, then co-dependency and enmeshment are replaced with brainstorming, support, and encouragement. Boundaries tend to come more easily when the focus of the interpersonal interaction is about hearing the other's ideas rather than imposing our ideas – or expecting that what we are passionate about is what they should be passionate about.

We are fortunate that life is long. We have many, many years of opportunity to learn what we need to, to invest the time and energy, to accumulate the wisdom we need...to eventually find that we wake up one day with the realization that we have a deeply satisfying life. God promises that He will "restore what the locust has eaten." What that means

to me is that everything we experience, everything we learn, everything we suffer, everything we survive, all becomes the raw material of our passion, of our ability to be of service to others.

Sometimes we have to quietly stand by as we watch those we know and love experience seasons of derailment, of disillusionment, of acting out to manage their pain. Maybe we need to extend each other large doses of grace and patience as we learn, sometimes the hard way, what we need to, all the while hoping we will once again find our way.

Perhaps true "peace on earth" cannot occur because it is dependent upon each individual person, world wide, to have discovered their own personal worth and passion that contributes to the good of mankind. The fact is, in our human struggle, we all pass through seasons of disillusionment and derailment. Here's wishing that each of us pursue our passions, not only for the sake of our own personal satisfaction and the health of our families, but also for the larger good of those with whom we share this earth.

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