

Willpower: Going the Distance

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're continuing our series called As a Man Thinketh. It's based on the Proverb that says as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Or as a woman thinketh in her heart, so is she. And we believe the word of God. We believe that what the scriptures say about thinking about the mind is true. Very simply you become your thought life. What you think about and what you dwell on always, always results in circumstance. You cannot have a private thought because every pattern of thinking crystallizes into habit, and those habits become circumstance. It's a law. That what we dwell on and what we think about will become our reality and our character.

Therefore, if you change your thoughts from base thoughts, from thoughts that tear others down, thoughts that see the worst in people, thoughts that see the worst in yourself, to thoughts that are aligned with the word of God that say you're loved by God, that you're called by God, thoughts that align with Jesus' teachings and morals and vision for a better life, your life will change. It doesn't happen overnight, but I promise you like changing the direction of a ship, you may not notice it in the moment, that slight shift will have you miles from where you would have been if you'd just changed one single thought.

And so fostering beautiful thoughts will foster a beautiful life. Fostering noble thoughts will create a noble life. Fostering wise thoughts will create a fruitful and successful life. So harbor wisdom and beauty, and these types of things, and cast out of your mind every thought that is not from heaven. Let go of everything that would drag you down into negativity or despair or seeing the worst in others, or seeing the worst in yourself, or seeing the worst in your future. Don't let them take root in your heart, in your mind, and instead foster the kind of thoughts that foster hope and joy and love and compassion and purpose and courage. Amen? And your life will be very different.

Your thoughts will become your future. Think about what you're thinking about and you can see where you will be five years from now. Your thoughts become your friends. What you think about and how you think about your life, you will attract people that think the way you do. You want to be around people that are positive and joyful and loving and kind and compassionate and gracious? Then you have to think those kinds of thoughts, too. It is law. It is how life is. So stop warring against your circumstance while harboring the thoughts that got you there and begin to change your thoughts and you will change your world, amen?

There's a great story, one of the best thoughts we can change is thinking not so much about right now and being always so worried about the short term, but fostering the kind of thoughts that have a mission for

our life, a vision for who we want to become, and even though we're not there yet, holding that vision before our mind.

I read a great story from a guy named Dr. Robert Pirsig and I know this sounds funny but the book was about repairing motorcycles; I don't even own a motorcycle. Don't ask, it's a long story, but in the story he talks about ascending a Himalayan mountain with a bunch of monks, and these guys are old, and at the time he's young, and he's so excited to get to the top of this mountain and they agree to go with him. He's become friends with these monks, so they start walking up the mountain and he's kind of at the front, he's like guys let's go, and these old monks are just kind of like, kind of hobbling along and they're making jokes about things, and they're stopping and they're getting water, and they're picking flowers and putting it in their satchels, and things like this. He's like guys, we got to get to the top! And there he is, full of energy, and there they are, sort of just slothy.

And he says after several hours, they're getting up the mountain and now he's exhausted and they are just like they were when they started. Still moving along, still smiling, still enjoying the walk. And the thing he said that I thought was so important was he learned in that time that the monks had reconciled the present and the future. That there was something that the future gave them a target, gave them a goal, it gave them a vision, but it wasn't all about that. In a weird way, having a goal but being at peace with the fact that they weren't there yet

liberated them. It gave them the freedom to put those flowers in their satchel, to take a sip of water, to tell jokes and to smile at one another knowing full well that they were making progress getting where they were called to go.

Today, I want to talk about this idea, this very scriptural idea that we ought to keep our sight as long term thoughts and long term vision; that we ought to think about our life in terms of legacy, and in terms of heaven. But we ought to not always be in a hurry to get to our destiny. And I think to strike the balance between the two, holding a mission for my life, a dream for my life, a destiny, but being at peace with the pace that God gets me there is the right way to think.

I think so many people today are on one or the other. Its only about the goal, its only about getting there, and they don't realize how they're hurting their kids, and they don't realize that they're burning themselves out, or hurting their body, or not taking care of themselves. And then you have other people who have no really big long vision for their life, its only like right now and very often they miss out on the long term. And you're probably one or two of those, the pendulum goes one way or the other, but the perfect way to think, I think, is to think long term so that it liberates you to be present right where you are. Think long term and allow the long term vision for your life to liberate you and give you freedom in what you're called to do.

Another way I put this is think like a farmer. It seems like Jesus loves the analogies of the farmer, the one who thinks in terms of cycles. The farmer has no crops in winter. Everything's barren but that's when he plants. And he's not worried about the fact that he doesn't have his crops yet, and he knows that there's nothing he can do to hurry those crops along, to make them grow faster. And even if he does, it might ruin his crops, or make them contaminated in some way, and so he follows the easy rhythms of farming. You plant in winter, you tend in spring and summer, and you harvest in fall. And because he knows that, he doesn't worry. But he also has his eye set on harvest, doesn't he. And that's why he gets up early in the morning, way before he's ever going to reach his goal, to plant that seed, anticipating victory in his farm.

In the same way, think like a farmer. Think ahead in your life and do the hard work now to be where you want to be when the harvest season comes. Amen? Become the kind of person that is willing to work hard now, even though there may not be any fruit in it.

They say that studies have shown that above every type of character trait, that success in every aspect of living, whether its success relationally, in your business, or any other aspect of life, the word that most links to it is this one word – willpower. Willpower. The ability to do what you really, really want to do. It's more important than education. It's more important than starting out with a good family. It's more important than any of these things that we know matter. The number

one thing that is going to dictate whether or not we get where we want to go is willpower: the ability to carry on even when it gets hard. To have the resilience that when we fall down, to get back up! So every time we face failure, instead of facing the shame by blaming other people, we blame ourselves or we don't blame anybody. We just decide I'm going to keep going. I'm going to get to my harvest season. I'm going to plant now. And if there's a fire, if there's a flood, I'm going to keep planting. I'm going to keep tending. I'm going to keep living in the rhythms of what I'm supposed to be. And so I believe a long term mission and vision for your life, thinking in the long term, allows you to have the willpower to endure the little things that can derail you, and the big things.

Look, I know a lot of you are going through a lot, but I want to convince you that God has called you to live for something much bigger than whatever tragedy you're going through. You will not be known for your tragedy. You will be known for your victory. And your victory will come because you foster the right kind of thinking. Because you foster a vision, a vision of who you want to be and where you want to get to, not blaming other people, not falling into self pity or despair, but choosing that just like those fat, happy monks, you're going to take one step at a time towards that mountain. You're going to ascend at whatever pace God wants you to go at. And you're going to be present now, and at peace with where you are, even though you haven't gotten there yet. You keep your eyes on the mountain, and you keep going. Amen? You're going to

cross that finish line, and you're going to do it with victory. I believe in you.

Second Timothy is such a great letter, and it's a letter from Paul to his protégé, Timothy, a young pastor. Paul's now an older man. Gosh, I love Paul, you know? So many modern theologians don't like Paul because he's so offensive, and he's so like rough around the edges, and he kind of says it like it is. If you studied old school Judaism, Paul was a Jewish rabbi, a Pharisee who was persecuting Christians and was almost faultless in his obedience of Torah, and brilliant, and a great teacher, intellectual. You get this sense that even as a young man, he had many people following him because of his genius.

And here he is an old man, and he looks back on his life at how wrong he was, and how he became this new person who even though he was still very Jewish, was now also very Christian, was following the rabbi Jesus, and was living for Him, and teaching new things like joy and love and victory, and of course here, right thinking.

And so Paul is writing to.. this is like at the end of his letter, he knows he's about to be executed and martyred, he's in a prison under one of the craziest emperors who's ever lived, Emperor Nero, and he knows he's probably going to die. And so this is his like sort of closing paragraphs in his last letter to Timothy knowing it's going to be over, and he's writing to Timothy and he's passing on his mantle to this young pastor. He's passing on his legacy.

And then he says “in the presence of God,” he’s talking to Timothy, “and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead and in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge – preach the word. Preach the word! Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction for the time will come when people will no longer put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

That is such human nature, isn’t it? Time will come. It’s always been that way. We as human beings naturally fall into bubbles. Right now, when you read that sentence, you were probably thinking of all the other people that hear the things their itching ears want to hear and don’t realize the political bubbles that we’re in, the religious bubbles that we’re in, the national bubbles that we’re in, the culture bubbles that we’re in, and the ways we only want to hear the things our itching ears want to hear. He who desires knowledge above comfort will become wise; those who have ears to hear let them hear. That the things you don’t want to hear are the best things you should hear. The things you don’t want to hear are the best things you can hear sometimes.

“They will turn their ears away from the truth, and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations.” There it is. The thinking, right? Guard your thoughts. Think the right kinds of thoughts. “Endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist. Discharge all the duties

of your ministry.” And then here comes this sort of beautiful famous part that Paul says. You can almost hear the sadness in his voice, can’t you? He says, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering,” already being poured out. What does that mean? He’s probably been tortured. “And the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight.”

Do you want to be like Paul, by the way? Do you want to be able to say these words when you cross the finish line? “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing,” He’s going to give that crown to you, too.

See Paul always had his eyes set on the prize, and the prize for him was a life that honored God; that in everything he did, he preached the word, he kept faith alive and he never gave up, and he crossed that finish line. And here he is, probably bleeding, broken, in prison, about to die under a crazy person, and he simply says to Timothy, don’t give up, my son. Don’t give up, my son. You finish well. Don’t be like everyone else. You cross that finish line. You cross that finish line. God has given you a vision for your life. Keep your eyes on that vision and on that mission.

You want to be that way? I know you do. I know you do. You want to live a life that honors the Lord, and live a life that makes a difference in the lives of others. And I’m so proud of you. So Paul kept his eyes on

heaven and on the throne of God, and it reminds me of the quote from Jim Elliot of Modern Martyr, who before he died says, “He is no fool that gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.” Amen. I want to be that kind of person.

So what do you live for? What are truly your values? What really do you care about? You may find that you think that your values are not really what you think. I think it was Stephen Covey who said that we should always begin with the end in mind. Forgive me for getting dark here, but doing funerals as a pastor has made me want to live for more. I’ve done lots and lots of funerals, and all of them are important, and all of them matter, they’re just as important as a birth; probably the two most important stages in a person’s life – birth and death. In every funeral everybody says something good, but you can tell when people really think it’s good and when other people are just sort of there. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want the preacher to lie at my funeral. How about you? I don’t want the preacher to get up there – he was so great, people loved him, he was the best. Don’t make preachers lie.

I remember my first funeral. I was just a kid. I was like 22/23, something like that. I’d just started seminary and there was a funeral for this woman and it was crazy because when I get there, the parents said to me.. I actually got.. I accidentally fell in this funeral. They asked me to do an opening prayer. They didn’t tell me to do the funeral and then when I got there, she was like, hey what are the plans for the funeral?

I'm like I don't know. I've never done a funeral before. So I'm like I need 15 minutes to put something together, so I went back to my office, and I was like googling how to do a funeral, like I literally did that.

So I get there and there's not very many people there, which was a surprise because the woman who died was a young woman, maybe in her early 40's, and she seemed pretty. I was doing the funeral and her parents before they said we want you to just say that no matter what, her parents loved her. And I thought well that's an odd thing to say. Of course her parents loved her, right? And I got there and there weren't many people there, 15/20 or so, and I preached a sermon and shared a few things, and then read the Psalms and then at one point I said, as you do sometimes in funerals, is there anybody here who wants to say something about the deceased, something kind or share a memory. About a minute went by and nobody stood or did anything. And the mother stood and she looked back at everybody and she said, I don't care what she did, I don't care. We still love her. We love her. She sat down with tears in her eyes. And I still have no idea what that was about. In a way, I feel like it's none of my business, but I felt awful for those parents. And I felt really bad for the people who were there. And I thought wow, like so many of the decisions that we make in life, we don't think about how we're going to finish.

And I don't say that to make fun of, but I remember if Covey is right and we ought to begin with the end in mind, no matter how old you

are or how young you are, you ought to imagine what people want to say at your funeral. You imagine, in a perfect world, what do I want them to say? What do I want them to say? Do I want them to snicker when the pastor says he was such a nice guy? Do I want the pastor to snicker when he says she was so compassionate and generous and gracious? You imagine your funeral, you imagine what people are going to say about you there, and those are your values. You may think you have other values, but what you want people to say when you pass, those are your values, and those are what you ought to live for. And I believe that you'd get there and you'd want.. I know what I'd want people to say. I'd want my kids to say he was the best dad ever. I want my grandkids to say he was the best grandpa ever, and my wife to say he was the greatest husband ever. We loved each other so much. And my friends to say he was a truer friend than any I ever knew. That's what matters! And if I build a thousand churches on a thousand hills with tens of thousands of people, but my children don't love me, what have I done?

And so we as people ought to live our life, not only for that funeral, but for the resurrection. When we're raised from the dead, and we look at the throne of God, and we look into the eyes of Jesus, are you going to be filled with joy? Is He going to just say well done, good and faithful servant? And that's what we ought to live for! You live for that kind of life you're going to have the most joy-filled, godly, awesome life you could ever have today! You live for today I just believe it. Well you know that.

And that's why you live for what really matters. Look, I want you to succeed in business, and I want to do well in ministry. If you're in ministry, go for it in ministry, but never forget that your true values, your true values are what you want the Lord to say about you, and what you want your friends and family to say about you; that they were life giving, friendly, Christ-like person in my life.

This is D.L. Moody, who said this: our greatest fear should not be failure, but succeeding at something that doesn't matter. That's the biggest danger in America, isn't it? Most of us are driven, most of us have goals, but we forget that sometimes those goals that we have, they're not really our values. And when we actually achieve those goals, we achieved something that really wasn't that valuable to us in the first place. Wow.

Remember, you have a legacy. Everyone has a legacy and long after you're gone, your life is going to make ripples in this world in ways you could never imagine for generations. One thing that I realized when I became a parent was that people who really love you take on your character flaws. They do! People who love you think your character flaws aren't so bad because they love you. I'll never forget when my son, Cohen, he loved to get into the fridge and raid the cheese. He's like a little guy; he's like three at the time. So he'd open the fridge and go for the cheese, and one day I got so sick of telling him not to do it, I'm on the couch and I turn back and I go, "Cohen, no!" Like this. And he goes and

then like you see his hand start to reach for the cheese very slowly and I go “no” and then he goes.. closes the fridge.. and walks away very slowly.

And then it was like two days later, and he asks Hannah, he says “I want some potato chips, please?” And Hannah goes, “no potato chips right now,” and he goes “NO! NO!” And then Hannah, of course, she looks at me.

That’s the thing we don’t realize is that our legacy isn’t just our memory, our legacy is our character. That we pass on not only the good things about ourselves, but the bad things, as well. And that’s why it’s not important to be perfect, but it’s important to be honest about your imperfections, and honest that you’re a work in progress.

I can tell you doing what is right is always better in the long run. It’s especially true with our speech. How many times have you regretted saying something in anger or when you were just not feeling good, you wish you just wouldn’t have said something. Or lying. Never lie. It will always come around, and by the way, it’s too much to remember.

When you keep your eyes on the mountain, you’re able to be at peace with the fact that you’re not at your destiny yet, even though it seems like everybody else is doing it. I promise you. So don’t hurry. You don’t need to hurry. You’re not the one getting you there, anywhere. The Lord’s doing it. So trust in Him and He’ll get you there.

I always think, whenever I read the temptation of Jesus, I always think the temptation is one to hurry. Here Jesus is hungry and He

knows He's going to eat soon, maybe in the next few days, but the devil is like turn those stones into bread, just do it now. And He knows that someday people are going to know He's the Son of God, but He says, hey, jump from this steeple and the angels will catch you. They'll know now. You know, you'll get it right now. And He knows someday that the Father's going to put Him on the throne of the earth, but the devil, who currently sits on that throne says to Him, hey, just bow down and kneel to me and I'll give you everything. I'll give it all back to you today. You don't have to do anything. In all these cases, the enemy is in a hurry. The enemy is in a hurry, by the way, because he knows his future isn't very bright.

But you don't have to be in a hurry because time is on your side. Heaven is your home, and you're going to go nowhere but up as long as you go in the easy rhythms of grace.

So, whether we're at a church, or as individuals, we ought to have a mission for the kind of life that we want to lead. No matter how young you are, think about your legacy. If you're 16 and you're a teenager and you're watching today, or you're here in the church, think about what kind of legacy you want to have, even as an old man, and from the very beginning, you'll start planting the right kinds of seeds that'll make a big difference in your life.

And that's why I love this, and I'll close with this quote from the Greek proverb, it says "a society grows great when old men plant trees

whose shade they know they will never sit in.” Right? How many of us are sitting in the shade of trees and we look and we say thanks mom, thanks dad, thanks grandma, thanks grandpa, thanks mentor, thanks teacher. I want to be a person like that, how about you? Those are your true values. So don’t hurry, don’t bend the rules, and in your thinking, always think about that – your legacy, your vision for your life, and your mission for your life, and you will stay on the straight and narrow path that leads to life. Amen.