

Grit and Growth

By Bobby Schuller

Once there was a man walking down the road came to a construction site. And the first worker he saw laying bricks, he went up to him and said what are you building? And the bricklayer said to him, I'm building a wall. The man kept walking, saw another man, looked a little happier doing what he was doing, also laying bricks, and said what are you building? And he said me? Well we're building a church. Wow, that's nice. Kept walking a little further, saw a man who seemed to enjoy his work so much, serene, joyful, and he said what are you building? And the man looked up at him with joy in his eyes and said I'm building a house of God.

All three men are doing the same thing: laying bricks, but Angela Duckworth, when she talks about this ancient parable, she said the first man is a man who has a job, the second man is a man who has a vocation, and the third man is a man who has a calling. Now all three men are laying bricks. When you hear that story, you imagine that the fulfillment of that third person, that's what we want, isn't it. Whether we're laying bricks or doing accounting work or doing ministry or caring for our children or shop keeping or whatever it is we're doing, we want to have that deeper sense of passion and purpose and joy in the work that we're doing.

And I want to talk about that today – the idea that you can have meaningful work, that your work, whatever it is you do, can bring you joy and it can be a calling and you can be passionate about it. But I want to argue against the idea of the world that you should follow your passion.

Now that may come as a surprise to you. It's become almost the American cliché: follow your passion. Do what you love to do. Pursue your passions. This is something that goes back to the '70's, actually. There was a book written by an Episcopalian priest on this. And the idea was if you follow your passion, you'll eventually get good at what you do.

And I want to argue against that today. I think that good work, fulfilling work and passionate work comes from being good at something; being really good at something. Being a master, being a craftsman. And I just believe that the evidence shows now, and in my life experience, that usually passion isn't enough. That passion will get you to a plateau, but at some point you need to have grit, you need to have faithfulness, you need to buckle down and continue to practice and work hard, and then the real passion that comes, comes from becoming a craftsman, from being a master. You want to enjoy your life, enjoy your work, enjoy what you're doing? Today I'm going to talk about the power not of passion, but the power of faithfulness. The power of enduring. That's the thing that nobody talks about. Getting through the hard days so that you can have the really great days, and let me tell you being amazing at something makes it easy to be passionate about that thing.

The Jews have a word for this. When your work becomes so fulfilling that it's like you're worshipping God with everything you do, the Hebrew word is Avodah. Everybody say Avodah. Avodah. Avodah means work and Avodah means worship. Wouldn't it be great if the work we did was worship? Martin Luther is attributed to saying this quote, he probably didn't actually say it but it's still true. Martin Luther said "the maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays. Not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps, but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty, not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

If you want to be a craftsman, if you want to be really good at something, if you want to be passionate about what you're doing, be faithful. Do it for a long time. Invite mentors. Invite criticism, get better and refuse to be like everybody else.

Last week we talked about the importance of the narrow road. That Jesus says only a few will find it. A few, what is that, three, four, five? That means in this room, there are three, four or five of you that will find the narrow road that leads to the Zoe kind of life that Jesus is talking about, the one overflowing with God's spirit and life and goodness. But the narrowness of the road is what Jesus is pointing to. The difficulty, the arduousness of that road. I always think of passion, actually, as the wide road.

And so today, if you haven't heard, what I'm already saying is that faithfulness trumps passion. Passion is good, passion is amazing, but faithfulness is better. Passion is good, but faithfulness is great. Look and I'm talking as a passionate person. Hannah and I were at Disneyland yesterday and there is this thing, it's like a computerized book, and it asks you questions, and then you answer these questions, and then the way you answer them tells you which character you are. And one of the questions Clocksworth asks you is "are you ruled by the passion of your heart, or the logic of your head." And as I'm reaching to press logic of your head, Hannah goes PASSION OF HEART! I was like no. I'm like I'm logical. No, that didn't happen, I'm just messing with you.

But I am a very passionate person. I preach with passion, I work with passion, but I'm here to tell you that I'm most passionate at the things I've devoted my life to. I was faithful before I was passionate.

First faithfulness then passion. First become a master craftsman, then you're going to enjoy what you're doing. See you walk the narrow road long enough, you start to like it. Any hikers here? Some people choose the narrow road because they think it's prettier, but it sure doesn't feel that way when you get tired, does it. Keep walking, keep going, keep pressing, and you'll reach the prize, you'll reach your best. Your best is yet to come, but you got to pay the price.

You see that's the thing in the kingdom of God. God is not a lottery person, He is a Father. Fathers mentor, fathers train, fathers walk

alongside. And as a father, He comes alongside you in a loving way to show you how much you have within you. He's not worried about the struggle for you. I think He's worried about withdraw. He's worried about you giving up, worried about you quitting. Be faithful. And as Hannah said, what was the word you said earlier, Hannah, in the opening?

(HANNAH TALKING) That's right. You have to fight through the bad days to earn the best days of your life.

So maybe you're going through something today. Maybe you're going through a hard time in your job, your work, your schooling, maybe you're training for a new job and things are going really, really hard, and you're like I can't do this right now. Maybe it's just too hard. I want you to know press through, press through. If you're going to walk away, wait until it's on your terms. Don't walk away because you're tired.

Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness and that is true. I have seen that. It is the churches that have pastors that are there for a lifetime that do the best, not the churches with itinerant pastors every five/ten years. It is businesses with women and men leading them that press through those hard times and refuse to stop growing, refuse to stop stretching. They always want to go the extra mile.

I pull a lot of this idea from John chapter 13. I hope I'm not taking it too far out of context, but this is also true in the spiritual life, and this is really what I'm getting at is that if we really want to have a life that's overflowing in the spirit, we have to have the same devotion that we

would in our craftsmanship to our walk with God. We have to be willing to train, to endure, to get through the hard times.

In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus is preaching and He's just getting crowded in by people, and I love the practicality of this. He's like getting pressed against the water that He actually gets a little raft, stands on the raft and shoves off from the floor so He's standing back about ten feet or so from the land and He just begins preaching and starts talking in riddles. These are called the kingdom parables. And so He'll say these riddles to people and everybody's just confused, and then He'll explain to His disciples what He's saying.

And Jesus says, I like to imagine that there's a farmer nearby, the way that farmers worked back then as they would create rows, much like we do today, and poke holes in those rows, and then they would arbitrarily throw seed. They didn't really like put a seed in the ground, but they would throw a handful of seed, right? So if you're sowing wheat or something like that, and you'd see this.. I like to imagine He's like look at this farmer. This is what the kingdom of God is like. And you see some farmer, got a big hat on, he's been out there faithfully every day sowing seed, and there he is with a satchel hanging over his shoulder and just takes his hand and goes (BLOWS) right, with seed. (BLOWS) Like this. (BLOWS) And Jesus says once there was a farmer like this, and the seed was cast. And so just it's just sort of random, right? It's going everywhere. And some seed falls on the road.

I remember in those days a road on a farm is not going to be a road, it's going to be the area that got trampled on. I think there's times when we've been trampled on by people, especially by religious people. Our heart gets hard. We just say no, no. I just don't believe it. I'm not into it. I'm doing something else. Pastor's kids are this way a lot. People who grew up in church in really strict environments can become this way. I remember my grandpa used to say "many men plant a seed, but some people plant the seed, some people care for the seed, some people reap the harvest, but my job is to till the soil." He wanted to be the kind of person that would break up people who had hardened their hearts against faith to show them God's love. I love that. I do that, I think we do that, too, at this church.

So anyway, He said one seed falls on the ground and the birds come and they eat it up. And everybody's like what does that mean? And He just moves on, He doesn't explain it to them. He says then the second seed, it falls near the rock, and it springs up really quickly but then the sun comes and it burns away and it dies. And they're like, okay what's that mean? He just doesn't explain, keeps going. Another seed, it falls on some of the dirt but then there are thorns and weeds and thistles, and it grows up but it gets choked out and it dies. But then some seed falls on good soil and it bears a harvest.

Later on He's talking to His disciples and they're like rabbi, what did that even mean? That's the weirdest thing you've ever said. That's the

Greek translation. Super weird, rabbi. Jesus says, like I said, the hardened heart, the path is the one that the devil just comes and it doesn't even get into their heart. But it's the next two I want to talk about today because I've been both of these. Remember that we oftentimes think this is the one time you hear the gospel, but that's not what Jesus is talking about. He's talking about the word of God. The word of God is always being preached every day. There are a million podcasts you can listen to on the word of God. The Bible itself is here all the time. And the word of God comes through revelation. God is always speaking to you, and we can respond in one of four ways: we can harden our hearts to what God has to say, we can receive it with joy and spring up but wither, we can let the thorns choke it out, or we can bear a harvest and it's those two that I want to talk about, because these are the ones I struggle with the most.

First, He's like it falls on rock and it springs up with joy. What is that? That's passion! I'm so passionate about the Lord, I'm so excited about this thing that's going to happen, I'm so excited about my new job. I'm going to learn to play guitar! You know what I'm talking about, right? I can play guitar, but can I tell you how many dudes in college wanted to learn to play guitar? And I realized later it's not because they loved music, it's that they liked girls. Am I right? I'm right.

And this is the thing. It's this passion, right? The rock. Like you get passionate but then what happens? Persecution comes. It gets hard.

It gets difficult and then what happens? Just wither away. Then there's another one, the seed that falls, and it's growing, it's taking root, it's doing well, but then what happens? The thorns grow up and what are those thorns? This is so weird the two words Jesus uses: worries and riches. You ever heard those words go together, worries and riches? I thought to be rich means to have no worries. Any rich people here have no worries? Not likely, I know some of you. Yes, riches don't make your worries go away. Worries and riches.

So look – you're growing, you're doing, maybe your business is doing well or your faith is growing and flourishing, but things go really well for you financially or you just get bogged down about the stress of the day, and the word of God gets destroyed or the calling, the thing God wanted you to do gets destroyed. It's the seed that falls on good soil.

Look, soil doesn't stay good unless you care for the soil. I remember when my Grandpa Persley, when he lived with us in Oklahoma for a time, had this garden in the backyard. And grandpa you like really cared for that garden really well, right? He never let anything go to waste: coffee grinds, eggs, anything that was disgusting, he was like do not throw that away, its going in my garden. Right? To make the seed good? And so he had this garden with tomatoes and things, and then later they moved to Missouri and we still had that garden there, but what happened? It was just like (BOOM) right, just weeds everywhere.

You want to have good soil, you want your seed to grow on good soil, you got to care for it. You got to work at it every day. You have to care for it, you have to treat it. Good soil doesn't stay good unless you care for it. You must be like the farmer, you must be like the craftsman, like the bricklayer. Stop believing that it's always easy and start believing that it gets easy when you start training.

Learn to love discipline. Learn to love the fruit of faithfulness, the fruit of enduring, the fruit of saying I will be here five, ten, twenty years from now doing this better than I'm doing it today, even when it gets hard, and I promise, you will be passionate when that twentieth year comes because you're going to be the best at it! You're going to be one of the few because it wasn't about passion, it was about faithfulness. And the gift of that faithfulness is a passionate thing in your life. Isn't that good?

To be a disciple literally means to be disciplined. A disciple means a disciplined one or a trained one. To be trained means to do something that isn't natural. Passion is natural. Faithfulness is not. Fun, enjoyment, entertainment, its natural. Doing what's hard is not. It is not natural to turn down an Oreo McFlurry. Those are good, man. It's not natural to play scales over and over and over. We talked about this last year, but musicians you know, right? You know, like you become passionate about the thing, but your passion will only get you to a

plateau. The way to become like these guys in your music is to press through those moments that are horrible.

I remember when I was learning piano and I had to do some of these pieces, Rachmaninoff, you're just like oh I can't do it, this is horrible. And you know what it's like in the music that you're playing that the training part is horrible. It's horrible. And there's this part of you that's like no, I'm just going to keep going. That's not passion. That's faithfulness. Passion is when you've worked through the hard bit, passion is when you know it perfectly and you don't have to look at sheet music, and you can play from your heart. You want to have that kind of experience, you need discipline. You need training. You need to stick with something.

I think one of the biggest, biggest, biggest mistakes we're teaching young people today is to do what they're passionate about and not teaching them to be faithful. You look at some of the most successful people on earth, almost all of them landed where they are on accident! They're like oh, I became an engineer, I didn't really want to do that, and then I just kind of pressed through and got my degree, and then like I thought I could create this great program, I started working on it, and I was like well hold on, and I just kept getting better and better, and getting mentored, and then I was like whoa, whoa, and the better I got, the more I enjoyed it, and then you know five years later, I created

Amazon. That's not real, but I don't know if that's true, by the way, but you hear stories like that.

It's not natural to love your enemies. It's not natural to forgive people who have hurt you. It's not natural to not hurry. It's not natural to live without anxiety. It's not natural to make a difference in your neighborhood. You want to do that, you got to train. You need to walk the narrow road. Your best is yet to come, but you got to be faithful. It's fun at first and fun at the end, but the middle stinks. Stick with it, you'll get through.

Guy named Cal Newport wrote a great book on part of this idea which is a lot of the research is starting to show that I'm right, actually, and I forget the name of the book. It was a Steve Martin quote, and I wrote it down: "so good they can't ignore you. Be so good they can't ignore you." And the only way to be good is to be trained, is to be disciplined so that you can have the freedom that comes with practice.

There was a study in which they asked university students to tell them what they're passionate about to see what they would pursue after they got out. A lot of people had no idea what they were passionate about and that itself was a crisis because all of the stuff about following your passion, it's like I don't have a passion. I'm not a passionate person. This is horrible.

And the rest of them, 97% were hobbies that had no marketable skill. I am passionate about weaving baskets. I tried to pick something I

didn't think anybody was good. Thank you, Ernie for laughing at that. Yes, I'm passionate about this or that. And the truth is, he was saying that what this is does, just following what you're passionate about, just creates what's called a passion plateau, and it's that training, that rigorousness that gets us through.

And the research just shows that you don't get good at what you enjoy, you enjoy what you get good at. It's the other way around. When you get really good at something, you enjoy it and you become passionate. And if you have discipline, passion and masterfulness around something, you get the ultimate thing in the world and that's obsession. Nothing like being obsessed about something. Be obsessed about the Lord. Be obsessed about what He's doing in your life and get to a place where you're not afraid to be stretched and pulled. Don't be afraid to be in a place where you're being stretched. In fact, if you're not stretching, you're probably not training.

Progress is so fulfilling, isn't it? There's something about getting good at something. When you press through sort of the middle hell that we were talking about, that purgatory of training, and you get to the other side and you start to feel like well I'm good at this. This is something I'm good at this. Learning a language or getting good at your craftsman, beating an addiction, these things, this idea of progress is so, so great.

And so if you want to truly live the life that God has called you to live, don't be afraid of the pain. In fact in a way, don't be sadistic but learn to love the pain and see it as a symbol of growth. It's that stretching, that stretching that makes us better when we're going through the hard times. You have to have some of the bad days to get through to your very best days, as Hannah said.

Jesus actually tells us this. Anybody who hears these words of mine, and puts them into practice is like a man who built his house on the rock. The winds blew, the rain fell and the streams rose, but it withstood because it had its house on the foundation, right? Train now before the bad days come. Be ready, build your life on the gospel before the bad days come so that you'll stand and get through. Train your spirit. If you really want to live for the Lord and you want to be a disciple of Jesus, build something into your life that trains your heart into being more like Jesus. Memorize scripture. Take time to meditate. Practice silence and solitude. It is so important that you have something worked into your life where you are training your life into the stuff you don't want to do. And train in a skill. Find something in your life, no matter how old you are, where you're training into something, maybe there's something in your life you want to do, train in it and be faithful to it.

Friends, most of all, I want you to know that faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. Passion is great, I love passion, but if you want more passion in your life naturally, you've got to get really good at something.

You want to be passionate about the Lord? Train yourself into His kingdom. Spend time with the Lord. Be around people who are like Him. Get a mentor in your life who's going to help you grow and be more like Jesus, and watch how over time, it could take years, you'll see, incredible fruit in your life.

I'm just going to pray for you now. Lord, we thank you that you love us, and I ask in Jesus' name Father, I ask Lord that you would give us a desire to endure the suffering and the struggle. Help us to see struggle differently than most people see it. Help us to believe that within every struggle is an opportunity or a treasure to be found. Many here under the sound of my voice, Lord, have become brittle in spirit and they don't know if they can endure another day. I pray for *coeur*, Lord, the French word for heart, I pray that you would encourage everyone under the sound of my voice that you would give them just what they need to endure another day for you, Lord. To believe that their best is yet to come, and to always make progress and keep changing and stretching and getting better. Help us to learn what it means to train into your kingdom, Lord. We love you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.