

We're actually in part four of a message series called Selfless. If you weren't here in previous weeks, we actually talked in week number one, about being bold in spirit. Week number two, we talked about being faithful in service. Last week, we talked about being extravagant in generosity. And today, I want to talk about being grateful in the grind. It's a phrase that may sound a bit odd to you at first, but I hope it's easy to remember.

Let me introduce this idea to you. For so much of my life, I've lived under the illusion that there's something around the corner, something out there that's coming that really matters and it matters more than what I'm doing right now. There's something around the corner that's going to make the difference. It's that thing that I desire, it's the event that I'm looking for, it's that something that's going to bring meaning and fulfilment and give me that significant moment that I've been looking for. It's not here. It's somewhere out there. In relation to my story I didn't work at school and didn't do well in my highers. I plumped for a course nearish home because it was easy and I had a pal going there as well. I had no real passion for it and I failed one of the exams, but I had already decided to move on to something else and that became the police. In order to get promotion I felt I needed a degree so I did that with the OU. Then I wanted to lead worship but that required me to train as a Reader. Then I did some post grad study in management. Then I needed to study for ministry and the CofS made me do a Masters. Now I'm well into my doctorate.

I'm not saying these are bad things because we do need to look to the future but I found myself whatever season I was in, wishing the current season away, waiting for the next one to come, but, around every corner, there was just another challenge. For much of that I've been pursuing what I want and my family have had to put up with it. And what does culture do? Culture totally and completely feeds into this mindset, right? What does every commercial, every advertisement, everything you see on social media, it all just kinda says gratify yourself, indulge yourself, get whatever you want. You deserve it. The problem is, Jesus said, if you want to follow Me, you don't treat yourself, but He said, you deny yourself.

There's a verse that I want to use kind of as an anchor verse for our message today. It's from the Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

Whatever you do. Whether you're doing laundry, you're picking up your kids from their events, you're running errands for your boss, you're doing something that isn't a big deal. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. When I look at so much of my life, if I'm really honest, whatever I do is mostly for me. I want to do what makes me happy. I want to do what makes me feel good. I want to do what fulfils my dreams. And Jesus says that you deny yourself. Whatever you do, to really have meaning in life, do it for the glory of God. And here's what I'm beginning to recognize - the prize isn't out there, somewhere. The prize isn't what you accomplish occasionally. ***The prize is in what you do daily when you do it for the glory of God.***

So I want to ask three questions and each one begins with “What if...”

1. What if the work is the reward?
2. What if the prize is in the process?
3. What if you can be grateful in the grind?

The Apostle Paul. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

He says he persecuted the church and didn't deserve to be where he was as a leader in the church BUT, he says, by the grace of God I am what I am. He's saying, this is my story, by the grace of God, I am what I am, because His grace to me was not without effect. For many of us, that's our story. We weren't good, we weren't faithful, but by the grace of God, we are now what we are, not because we're good, but because He was good. Now you are becoming who He wants you to be, because His grace for you was not without effect. The sad thing is there may be someone here today and His grace has been without effect, because it hasn't yet touched your heart. You haven't yet been changed by it, and the good news is, you are in the right place at the right time to give yourself to God and allow him to do his work in you.

Paul goes on to say that he worked harder than all of them although it was not really him but the grace of God that was with him. He's saying: I wasn't any good, but the grace of God transformed me. And because of who Jesus is, and because of what He did, I worked hard. I worked harder than the rest of them. But it wasn't me doing the work, it was the grace of God through me doing what God called me to do. What I like about it is I don't think Paul was bragging. I don't think he was complaining. I think he was just stating the truth, matter of fact. By the grace of God, I just worked hard. I've been so transformed by Jesus, because of who He was and what He did, I just got to work. Whatever I did, I was doing it for His glory.

I can't even begin to imagine the depths of the sacrifices that the Apostle Paul made. He was beaten, shipwrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake, he was in prison, he managed to start churches in cities without a single Christian, he raised up leaders and once he preached so long someone died – Paul glorified God by raising him to life again!

I don't know how this would apply to you but you're changing nappies, you're making sales calls, you're doing laundry, you're doing something for your boss, you're making food for someone. You just say, in this moment, at this time, even though it may not be incredibly exciting from the outside, I'm doing it with integrity, with purity of heart, with the heart of a servant, and I'm declaring that this task is for the glory of God. And when you live this way you start to realize that maybe the work is the reward. Maybe the prize is in the process

itself, and not the outcome. And in everyday life, when you're grinding it out, doing just normal things, you can say, I can be grateful. I can be grateful in the middle of the grind.

What I want to do is show you what I call three enemies of the true reward. The first one is what I call the pillow. The seduction of comfort. I don't know how this plays out in your life but at some point it might be that you decide what you really need to be happy and comfortable is a better home. And then just fill in the blanks with the type. If you don't have walk-in closets, it's walk-in closets. If it's not granite countertops, it's granite countertops. Maybe it's a gas stove or a food processor. Whatever it is, if I just had that, then I'd be happy. Same thing with the car. Years ago, you know what I needed? I needed windows that went down when you did this, because mine went down when you did this. Then it's the sunroof, then it's the sat nav, then it's the, you know, whatever it is, if I can just have that one, then I'll finally be happy.

I hope you'll understand that God never called us to easy. He called us to deny ourselves. Easy never changed the world. And yet the pillow cries out, the seduction of comfort. In the church it's almost the opposite because we don't want to change. We'll put up with changing the hymn book as long as we keep the pews. In church the comfort comes from the familiar even although we know we need to change.

There's also the distraction of what I call the shiny thing. The allure of constant distractions. You know what's important but the email comes in or bing, notification. Oh my gosh, I wonder what she posted on Facebook. And the next thing you know, you're in there. You try to pray and your mind is full of all the things you just need to get on with. Netflix, it just keeps on running straight into the next episode and the next show is recommended 99% chance that I'm going to like it. And it's the shiny thing. It's the carrot and the donkey – the donkey continues to chase the carrot - and you never ever seem to find real satisfaction because you've been fooled by the shiny thing.

Then, there is the enemy called the towel. The perpetual temptation to quit, to throw in the towel. When things get difficult, this isn't worth it. Throw in the towel. Trying to get our finances together, trying to get out of debt. Here's another bill. Charge it, let's go out to eat and let's go shop for a new dress. You know, throw in the towel. Christianity, I can't tell you how many times I've heard some version of this. Well, I tried God. I went to church twice. You know, I read my Bible for a day. I'm throwing in the towel. I'm not making that much of a difference. This is just too hard. Throw in the towel. We were talking about this at the POR conference last week – so many of us feel guilty because we don't have the sort of quiet time we think we should have. We have this idea in our heads about what we should do but the reality is different and so we feel guilty and give up, but then we feel guilty about giving up. So we try again. What about trying a new, different way to be with God – find something that works for you.

Listen, you can throw in the towel or you can pick up the towel and wipe the sweat off your brow and get back in the daily grind of doing whatever you do in this moment for the glory of God. And suddenly you realize, the work is the reward. The prize is in the process. And you can be grateful every single day in the grind.

The normal graduation speech goes like this. Follow your passion, follow your passion, follow your heart, do whatever your heart tells you. Here's the problem, your passion doesn't always pay the bills. Your passion doesn't always keep the lights on. The problem with passion is that selfish passion is about us but there's a higher calling and it's not selfish passion but it's selfless purpose. It's a higher calling. And once you start to recognize that you're following God's purpose, what you'll find is that passion always follows purpose. When God is the starting point, whatever you do, you do it for his glory and you start to realize, even in the middle of what you may not have chosen, God still has a purpose.

Think about Paul for a minute. The guy was passionate about something. Paul had his own passions. There were things that he was excited about. What he was not passionate about, let me promise you, was getting beaten and left for dead, but he pursued God's purpose. And suddenly he would say things like Acts 20:24. *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*

Paul says my only dream is to fulfil God's purpose. And what is that? The task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. What does purpose do? Purpose helps us feel passionate about ordinary things. Something mundane, something ordinary starts to take on meaning. Whatever I do, even if it's boring, even if it feels insignificant, I'm doing it for the glory of God.

What normally seems ordinary becomes more extraordinary because it's not just a task, but it's a purpose directed by God and passion always follows purpose. Paul says, I run with purpose in every single step. Imagine that. When I wake up and say, God, today this is Your day and whatever I do, whether it seems big, exciting or small and insignificant. God, I am choosing to find purpose in this. I am going to do this for Your glory. I'm not running like someone running aimlessly. I am running with purpose in every step. I'm directed by Your Spirit. I'm empowered by Your Word. I'm loving people everywhere I go. When I walk into the room, your Spirit comes into the room with me. The prize is now. The prize is here. This is the day that the Lord has made. And because of the grace of God, I will rejoice and I will be glad in it. You see, life isn't about me. It's not about indulging myself. Not about treating myself. It's about denying myself. And when I deny myself, guess what happens? Week number one, we become more bold in spirit because we speak boldly about what we believe deeply. And because the grace of Jesus has so transformed us, we cannot contain His goodness and people are amazed by our boldness. We also become faithful in service because serving is not something that we do. A servant is who we are. I am a servant of the Most High God. And when I serve others, I am serving Christ. When I'm selfless, I become

extravagant in generosity. I give without holding back because we truly believe, as followers of Jesus, that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. Therefore, we lead the way with irrational generosity.

And when I recognize that I have been transformed, by the grace of God and for His glory, then whatever I do is not for me. But it's all for the glory of God as I run with purpose in every single step. And as I serve Him faithfully in His purpose, the passion follows, because I'm not doing it for me, I'm all doing it all for Him. And then one day, I wake up in the middle of the mundane, and the middle of the normal and I say, God, I have experienced You here and I am full of Your goodness and overflowing with Your joy because I've discovered that the work is the reward. It's a joy to serve You and to sacrifice for Your kingdom. The prize is in the process. You are with me, Your Spirit is guiding me and strengthening me. And I am grateful in the grind. Finding joy in all things, rejoicing always, because Your Spirit dwells within me and You're working in all things to bring about good. So therefore, I can be grateful in the grind. And whatever I do, I will do it for Your glory because of who You are and what You've done for me.