



Prioritize This Skillset

Do You Want to Improve the Quality of Your Life?

The other day I saw something on the freeway that bothered me. A driver abruptly changed lanes and cut in front of another driver. It was unnecessary, he could have easily and with much less risk smoothly pulled in behind the second driver, but he didn't. He had to get in front of the person in the next lane. The driver now behind the one who changed lanes, irritated immediately switched lanes, sped up and passed the first driver and cut in front of him, now taking the lead. What bothered me most about this is that the irritated driver who made sure he got in front of the driver who cut in front of him was me. There are many possible terrible consequences to my action. Not least of which would have been road rage developing in in either or both of us. An accident could have been caused. Stress levels escalated in both drivers. What was needed was something we should treasure more than riches, success, or popularity. It is one of the most important qualities we can ever strive to gain. It can be just what you need in times like what I faced.

Perhaps you don't know much about Chinese bamboo. The tree produces one of the hardest materials found in the world and is even stronger than steel. Chinese bamboo not only is strong, but also flexible. The fibers of the Chinese bamboo are naturally antibacterial and enable it to kill almost all bacteria in 24 hours. Bamboo fiber used for clothing prevents odor and makes for cleaner sheets, towels, and clothes. It also makes for a great material for dressing a wound since it prevents infection. Bamboo charcoal is a great way to deodorize homes and is often used in candles and even deodorant.

A poor farmer was able to purchase some seeds for Chinese bamboo and decided they would be an investment for his family that would provide for them for generations. He planted the seeds and faithfully brought pails of water each week to the places where the seeds were buried. The farmer kept out the weeds and gazed expectantly at the spots where the seeds were buried but saw nothing. No sign of anything. For a year he took care of the seeds, providing fertilizer and loving care to them, knowing how valuable the bamboo would be for his family. Nothing. The next year the faithful farmer continued his careful nurture of the seeds, each day expecting to see a shoot sprout from the ground but always he was disappointed. Hand carrying his pail of water to each of the places where the seeds were planted, the farmer dejectedly sprinkled the water to provide for the seeds, not knowing if they had died. Finally, the farmer had to plant other crops to provide for his family, crops that could earn him what they needed to survive but crops that would not do financially for him what bamboo could. Neighbors began to mock the poor farmer for his wasted time and effort trying to grow bamboo. Three years, no sign of any bamboo shoots. Four years, nothing. Five years carefully nurturing the seeds with water, weeding and fertilizing. A thousand times the poor farmer wondered why he invested in the seeds. Gave his time to them. Even his family members thought he was crazy.

One day, just as dreary as the other thousand days he stared down longingly at the spots where his pitiful bamboo seeds lay buried, the farmer is shocked by what he encounters. Bamboo sprouts are bursting from the baren ground everywhere. He screams with joy! His family rushes from the home to see what terrible thing has happened. It isn't horrific news though. With great wonder they look about and see the bamboo shoots everywhere. And they seem to be growing before their very eyes. The family dances and shouts for

joy. Neighbors came and gathered. The village watches in amazement as the bamboo grows that day three feet. It was then five feet, ten feet, forty feet, sixty feet. In just six weeks, the bamboo trees were ninety feet tall. What enabled the poor farmer to reap this valuable crop that would provide for his family a small fortune? What kept him watering and fertilizing and weeding when not a single sprout he saw, not a leaf sprung from the ground in five years. It was patience. Patience is perhaps the most valuable personality trait you can develop, something that will bless you in every way.

Listen to the wise words of James. **Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.** (James 5:7-11 NIV) There are three points here that are most important to consider, each of which could be a valuable study on their own. 1. The Lord is coming so be patient. You face problems daily. Everything from an irritating co-worker or neighbor to a broken hot water heater, there is always something to frustrate you. Be patient. Don't get angry or worried. Decide to trust God. Pray and ask Him to help you. If God is coming to bring you the perfect life, then He can see you through this, whatever you face. Much trouble comes with being impatient. Mistakes are made. Stress increases. Relationships collapse. Many of your biggest problems arise out of a lack of patience on your part.

2. A sure sign you have a patience issue is if you grumble about others. Whether it is to them directly or behind their back, grumbling is generally more a sign of your own struggle to be patient than any problem of the other person. Grumbling is as common as cockroaches in humid regions of the world. It is however almost always an indication that something is not right in you. Martha famously grumbled about her sister Mary to Jesus. "She isn't helping me in the kitchen", Martha complained to Jesus. His reply was classic. **"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."** (Luke 10:41-42 NIV) Martha thought Mary was the problem when in reality it was Martha who had it wrong. The best way to make yourself right in every situation that irks you is to turn to Jesus and get your mind on Him. Focus on Christ and He will guide you through what you face, turning your frustration into joy.

3. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. One of the most famous stories Jesus told is generally known as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son". That is a fine name for it all in all, but I would label it, "The Parable of the Compassionate and Merciful Father". The second son asked for his inheritance before his father even died, a rather cruel and thoughtless request. Knowing full well the heart of his son was not going to change on its own and being willing for him to learn the hard way what real love was, the Father let his son pursue his lusts. The son wasted all of his inheritance on prostitutes and partying and when he wound up penniless and living among pigs literally, he decided to return home and see if he might interest his father in becoming his father's slave. Here is where the story gets interesting. **So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.** (Luke 15: 20 NIV) The text tells us that the father spotted the returning son far in the distance, really far away. To make that discovery, the father had to have been hypervigilant, constantly watching for him. Not waiting for his son, his prodigal, embarrassing, self-absorbed, corrupt, infantile adult son to reach him, the father ran to him and immediately upon reaching the son, threw his arms around him and lavishly kissed him. What is translated "kissed" means to kiss affectionately. This is no weak acceptance of a disappointing son; it is extravagant joy at having that prodigal in his arms. The essential foundation of all patience is a determination to love unconditionally and without regard for the "sins" of the one God gives you to love. Patience pleases God and shows faith in Him

that “He has it” even when you don’t. Trust God to make each situation work out for your good and you will have supernatural patience to deal with whatever you face...and that will be wonderful.