**Bumper**

It was a typical cold January day in Kansas. The halls of the Junior High school were loud and bustling as normal.

We started our day, just as every other day, walking the halls before school, gossiping about the latest couple to break up, making sure our outfits and hair, of course, were looking totally awesome.

The bells rang and the school day began. I got to my seat and the day of learning started. After three class periods it was time for fourth period, but before that, lunch.

I dropped my books off in my class and I grabbed my lunch card from my purse. Ugh, I ran out of punches yesterday and forgot to stop by the office before school to purchase a new one. So, my two friends and I headed to the office so I could get a new lunch card.

When we got there, there were the two office secretaries, and they were helping other students like me who were too busy before school to get their lunch cards. Over to the right the principal was talking with a couple teachers.

Seeing the line and knowing we were missing out on important lunchroom conversations, my friend said I could borrow a punch from her card and I could just get my card tomorrow morning.

So, we left the office and headed to the lunch room. We got our lunches and sat at normal table in the middle, left side of the room.

We were oblivious to all that was going on around us, we were in junior high and our conversations about junior high things was way more important than anything else.

After we had been in there a while, a boy from my class came over and started telling us this fantastical tale of what was happening right outside the lunch room.

He wasn’t one to gossip or known to lie or tell big stories, but what he was telling us seemed a bit far-fetched.

At one point, he tells us to look around. They weren’t letting anyone leave the lunchroom. The doors were all locked. There were the biggest 9th grade boys standing at each of the doors.

And as we looked, we saw a teacher come in from one of the entrances. The look on his face said that what our friend was telling us just might be true.

Well, we sat in the lunchroom, with the leftovers of whatever we didn’t eat getting cold. And the time passed, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour.

I don’t remember exactly how long we had to stay in there, but it was most of the afternoon. No one really had much information, except what our friend knew and the little bits that the teachers were willing to tell.

Welcome to Southside Church. I am Robin Harper, the Online Campus Pastor.

Each of us has a story. There are moments and events and experiences that shape who we are.

Some of these events are bigger influences in our lives than others, but the culmination of all of our past moments help to form who we are, how we relate to the world and to others, and ultimately what we choose to do with what is before us.

These events shape our message

A cold day in a lunchroom in Kansas may not initially sound like a life-altering, life-forming event, but for me, it was a moment that has set the direction for my life and the message I want my life to be.

Because of that day, I have spent my adult life working to make a positive impact in the lives of others. And I promise, I won’t leave you completely hanging on the rest of the story – we’ll get back to it, I promise.

In this sermon series, Tough As Nails, we have been looking at what it means to have Grit Over Quit in various areas of your life. The first week we considered what it means for your Mission and then last week what it means to have Grit in Ministry.

This week, we are considering how to be tough as nails and have grit over quit in your message.

There is a book by Angela Duckworth called Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance. She considers what it means for a person to have Grit.

**SLIDE 2** Her research took her to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Student who are accepted to West Point go through a rigorous process starting in their junior year of high school.

There are more than 14,000 applicants hoping to get into this prestigious school. The number shrinks to 4,000 due to the requirement of obtaining a nomination from a member of Congress, a senator, or the VP of the USA.

That group is then reviewed and the number is now 2,500 who meet the academic and physical standards of West Point. In the end 1,200 are admitted and enrolled. These students are the top of their class academically. Many are varsity sports teams captains.

They’re class Valedictorians and Salutatorians. They are top notch in all their endeavors and everyone expects them to excel and go far in their academics and careers.

**SLIDE 3** Yet, they say that one in five cadets will drop out before graduation. And a large portion of those dropouts are in their first summer during an intensive seven-week training program called Beast Barracks – which they refer to as Beast.

Now, I am not one to judge why these students drop out, I recognize these are numbers and statistics on a page and not personal stories. I know that each person has their own story.

And if you or someone you know went to West Point and did not complete the four years, I still applaud you because getting into West Point is no small feat.

My friend’s daughter is there right now and I’ve heard a few of the stories. I think the term Beast is well applied to anyone who is accepted there.

But the point of this story is not so much about the school, but about the research that Angela has done to try to determine why some stay and others don’t, why some people seem to succeed to stay on message.

Her whole book is about the research she has done in various arenas not just West Point but swimmers, spelling bee champs, and many other areas. There is a general assumption that those who succeed are lucky or talented. They just naturally had what it took to be the best of the best.

Have you ever looked at someone else and think “they are just a natural at xyz” you fill in that blank. I think we have all done it.

We see people we admire, and we think they have something I could never have.

You are looking at them at a snapshot in time and want to be like them but think you don’t have the talent or the skill or aren’t lucky enough to be like them.

**SLIDE 4** Who is that person to you? Is it an actor in the latest movie you watched? Maybe a president of a company whose products you love to use? Is it a musician who inspired you to pick up that instrument but you think you’ll never be as good as them?

The football player who has 7 super bowl rings and crushed your favorite team? Ugh… Tom Brady. Maybe it’s a friend who has what appears to be the perfect life – they have the top job, live in the best neighborhood, have the most adorable well-behaved children, and along with their spouse are the model of perfect fitness and health?

But what you are not seeing is what got them to where they are. As the book title says: Grit: The power of passion and perseverance.

Now I won’t give away the whole book – if you choose to read it, let me know, I would love to sit and chat about it. But you learn quickly in the first chapter that as she builds the book, the recurring theme of those she is studying is that it is a combination of passion and perseverance in those she deemed as having grit.

As we are saying in this message series, it is having grit over quit.

Now we can look at all of the examples of people in modern American history and those throughout world history and see those who we would say were successful or notable – or as the definition states, they had grit. You probably can think of someone in your life who is just an average person, but you would say they definitely have grit.

But there is one person who exemplified grit. He did not quit. He had passion. He showed perseverance. Nothing got him off his mission or his ministry or his message. Yes, I think it is safe to say that Jesus had grit.

Ok, I get it, Jesus is God as a human here on earth. If there is someone who is perfect in all ways, it is Jesus. But hear me out. I get it - none of us will ever be perfect like Him – we’re not walking on water, and none of us have lived a sinless life

So yes, Jesus is perfect. But that does not mean we just give up and say we aren’t God so why even bother trying. There are so many lessons we can learn from His time on earth that we can and should apply to our lives.

We’re going to look at a conversation today between Jesus and Peter, who was one of his disciples, as recorded in the book of Matthew chapter 16. This portion of scripture is the section of Matthew where we see the different expectations people had of the Messiah.

The Jewish people had long-awaited the arrival of the messiah and there were many opinions as to exactly what the Messiah would do. They all expected the Messiah to reign as king, but what sort of king and how he would gain his kingship was up for debate.

The religious leaders of the time believed that the Messiah was going to deliver Israel and defeat the pagan oppressors. So when they listened to Jesus and watched how he lived his life and treated people, they considered him blasphemous

Following their line of thinking…

He was not living up to what they expected of the messiah,

so he must not be the messiah

which meant everything Jesus said must be blasphemous.

As you read the interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders, read it from that point of view. The religious leaders made the conclusion that since Jesus was no military leader, he could not be Israel’s messiah.

Then the narrative then moves to the disciples’ expectation of Jesus.

In Matthew 16, starting in verse 13, the conversations begins with Jesus asking the disciples, who do the people say the Son of Man is?

– side note – Son of Man is the title Jesus referred to himself. It points back to the book of Daniel where Daniel had a prophetic dream about the evil that rules the world and about one he calls the son of man who will come to banish evil and make things right.

The disciples respond to Jesus’ question by saying that people think he is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

Then Jesus moves the question to them – who do you say I am?

Peter speaks right up and says “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Which Jesus affirms is the correct answer

Now, let’s jump down to verse 21 which appears to be a later conversation.

Jesus is telling the disciples what will happen to him. This is

**SLIDE 5-6** Matthew 16:21

“…Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead”

Here is where Peter shows that what he is thinking is the same as the religious leaders.

Matthew 16:22

But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

Peter was in essence saying “A king cannot be killed. That makes no sense. If Jesus is to be king, it logically means he kinda has be alive to do that.”

And here is where we see that Jesus has grit over quit in his message.

Jesus knows what is before him. He has lived long enough in a human body to be keenly aware of how incredibly awful and painful this would be

But He was passionate about his message. And he had perseverance to see it through. He knew the consequences for humanity if he chose to quit.

So, here is Jesus’ response to Peter in

**SLIDE 7** Matthew 16:23

Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

Ouch – I don’t ever want Jesus to look me in the eye and say that to me.

Jesus knew His message.

He knew that He was born to die.

He came as a substitute for us.

He did for us what we could never do.

There is no sacrifice or words or actions that we could ever to do on our own to be good enough to make us right before God

We are all sinners, each of us. You and me, none of us can get out of that reality, except through Jesus’ sacrifice.

His birth, life, death, and resurrection are the only way we can be seen as blameless before God.

Jesus clearly knew his message.

He was in all ways the only one who could ever make us right before God.

Consider all of his life.

His birth -he was born as a child of a virgin – not even today’s modern science can top his conception.

His life – He lived sinlessly – not even one, not even a little white lie, nothing

His death – sometimes we glamorize Jesus’ death – and we hang pretty white clean crosses to represent it, but his death was one of the most gruesome barbaric ways to die. It was an inhumane death.

And he knew it was coming – and He didn’t quit. He stuck to His message.

And then there is his resurrection. That is what gives us hope.

He did not stay in the grave. He is not among the list of supposed “gods” who died and stayed dead. He walked out of the grave and showed us that his message is true.

**SLIDE 8** Jesus did not quit… he is the ultimate example of grit. When the stakes were high, and literally the fate of the world was in his hands, he stayed true to his message.

His resurrection shows that we can believe his message, and even better yet, his message can be our message.

I want to shift to Peter for a bit.

Peter is someone I think we can relate to. He wanted to please Jesus. He wanted to have the right answer. He wanted to show the world his message.

But I think we can say that Peter showed grit… but not before he quit.

Right after the interaction with Peter proclaiming that Jesus is the messiah, Jesus then says a blessing over Peter.

**SLIDE 9-10** Matthew 16:18-19 NLT

“Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven.”

Now that is something I would love for Jesus to look me in the eye and say to me. And I’m sure for Peter, he walked a bit taller after that.

But then… the quit.

Jesus is walking with the disciples toward the mount of olives, he tells them they will all desert him.

And Peter, immediately says “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.” Matthew 26:33

**SLIDE 11** To which Jesus looks at him and says “I tell you the truth Peter – this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” Matthew 26:34 NLT

I’m not sure which is worse. For Jesus to say to Peter, “get behind me satan” or “you will deny you even know me”.

Peter does exactly what Jesus says.

He quit.

It’s a good thing the story doesn’t end there, because that wouldn’t give us much hope to having grit in our own lives.

You can read in the book of John chapter 21 where after Jesus resurrection there is a reconciliation between Peter and Jesus.

And then go on to read in Acts, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, 1st & 2nd Peter how he chose grit, spent the rest of his life taking the message of salvation through Christ to anyone who would hear.

I would venture to guess that Peter hearing the rooster crow and recognizing he had denied Jesus, just as Jesus said, was the key event in Peter’s life that changed him forever. He then chose grit.

This year has been a true test of grit.

Some of you have come out on top, started new businesses, gotten in shape, read a stack of books, spent lots of time with your families, and are excelling.

And others of you may say, I tried, I really did, but I’m just tired. I feel like I’m trudging through tar. Everything I try to do seems to flop. I spent more time behind a computer screen in one year than I have in 10. My interactions with my family have been snippy and short.

Does this mean one group has grit over the other? Am I telling you to just dig in harder or just give up?

Nope. It just means you’re tired, it means you’re human. None of us have ever lived through a time like this before. There were no preparation drills to get us ready.

We didn’t have a class or a sermon on how to thrive in a pandemic. So, give yourself the same grace you would give to others.

I do not want anyone to walk out of here today feeling guilty – guilt does not come from God. Conviction, yes. Guilt, no.

So, do what you need to do to take care of you. Rest. Take a nap. Go for a walk. Have lunch with a friend. Read a book. Listen to your favorite music. Focus on your physical self.

But more importantly, focus on your spiritual self.

Spend time daily in the Bible. Take one verse and meditate on it for a week. Write down all the ways God is speaking to you through it.

Pray. Just give it all to God. He can handle it. The good. The bad. The ugly.

God wants to know and be a part of all you are dealing with.

Testify. Tell others what God is doing in your life. Look for where God is at work and Praise what You see him doing. Testify in words and song and writing and dance – however you love to testify of His goodness… do it.

Remember, having grit is a combination of passion and perseverance. You have in you the greatest message the world needs to see and hear.

**SLIDE 12** The world needs to know the hope and message of Jesus living in you.

We were finally allowed to leave the lunchroom and go home for the day. The lunchroom was located in the elementary school, which connected to the junior high though a long hallway.

We weren’t allowed to go down the hall or back to our classes to get our stuff, we were told to just go to the bus. My class where I had dropped off my books had an outdoor entrance, so my friends and I went to the door to see if we could get our stuff.

Our teacher was standing there…just staring. He told us we could quickly get our stuff and leave immediately through the outside door.

It wasn’t until I got in the car of my neighbor where the story of my friend was confirmed and we heard the horrific details of all that happened.

It was a couple minutes after my friends and I had left the school office that a 9th grade boy had come into our school with a rifle and a handgun and began walking the hallways.

As he walked past the office, our principal went into the hallway and called the boy’s name and asked him “where are you going with that?” The boy turned, raised his weapon and shot my principal and a teacher, who was my next door neighbor.

He then proceeded down the hallway, where he was confronted by another teacher and a student, who he shot as well.

My understanding is that he walked through the entire junior high school, looking in classrooms and then proceeded to the elementary school, again looking in classrooms, but for some reason, never looking into the lunchroom, where his intended targets had been put as guards of the lunchroom doors.

He eventually left the school and was apprehended later.

My principal, Mr. James McGee died that day.

This event is the only fatal school shooting in Kansas history.

As you can imagine, anytime the news reports a school shooting, it takes me a bit to get “back to normal.” As I tell you this story, I still see the lunchroom, I still see my teacher’s face, I still remember that day.

Some of it is fuzzy. Did we hear something as we walked to the lunchroom? And I ask the question, What would have happened had we waited to get my lunch ticket?

But the point of this story is not about me, it’s not about my classmates, it is not even about the boy. It’s about Mr. McGee.

Mr. McGee was 35 years old. His career had included time as a Marine in Vietnam and later as a Marine Corp officer. But he wanted to be in education. He wanted to make a positive impact in the lives of teenagers.

This video is of Mr. Rick Kilmer, who is the teacher I saw in the office talking with Mr. McGee just moments before the shooting. Listen to how he described the life of Mr. McGee.

**Video** - 2:32 – 4:28

Each year, on January 21, students and teachers that were there that day join together, either in-person or through a Facebook group. It is hard to believe that this year has been more years since the shooting than Mr. McGee was alive.

As Mr. Kilmer said, Mr. McGee was a follower of Christ and wanted his faith to be known to all. Did you notice, after all these years, the impact Mr. McGee had on Mr. Kilmer? That grit to be a servant to make the message of Christ known still stuck with him all these years.

A few years ago, one of the teachers was sharing a memory of Mr. McGee and told us of a story I had not heard about him before.

A week or so before death, Mr McGee had shared a testimony in his church about things going on in his life. He spoke of his family, his wife, his children and his newest little one on the way.

He spoke of his job and the kids at school. And he ended his testimony by sharing that the words of a hymn had been encouraging him and challenging him as he was going through these times.

He wanted all to know the message that God is in control and that he was surrendered to him, no matter what.

There are moments and events and experiences and people that shape who we are. I didn’t know it at the time, but as I matured, I knew that I wanted to be like Mr. McGee.

I wanted to live a life that had meaning and purpose and exemplified the message of God to those around me.

I wanted to spend my life being a positive influence on those God put before me. For 24 years, I was in student ministry with middle school and high school students, sharing God’s love with them.

And for the past 6 years, my focus has been on taking the Good News of Jesus to our congregation that joins together in our Online Campus.

I don’t know what God has for me, but I do know that I will choose to have Grit Over Quit in sharing the Message of Jesus to the world around me.

So, what was that hymn that Mr. McGee shared in his testimony? It was penned by a man whose 4 daughters had died in a shipwreck on the way to vacation in Europe.

In one moment, he lost what we would say was everything. As he traveled by ship to be with his wife, he wrote these words. These lyrics have been the testimony of many who have said, “life is hard, trials are everywhere, but no matter what, my message is that it is well with my soul.”

So, what about you? What is your life’s message? Has life thrown everything terrible at you? Are you questioning everything? Does it feel like there is no hope?

As we pray, I want you to consider your life’s message? Do you have grit over quit in your message? Have you forgotten your message? Has life kicked you in the stomach and you just want to give up?

Today, I want you to recommit to a life of grit. A life of surrendering to the message of Jesus and living each day knowing your part of the message.

Pray

If you need to keep praying and talking with God, then please, take all the time you need. If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus and allowed his message to transform you, then do it now – why wait?

**SLIDE 13** You’ll see on the screen qr code to access the say yes to Jesus card. Pull out your phone, scan the code. On this card it leads you in a prayer. Read it. Pray it.

I want you to walk out of here today, determined to have grit in the message of your life, that you are a follower of Jesus and are surrendered to whatever that means. We’re going to this old hymn that Mr. McGee testified to being his strength and his life’s message.