

Lilias Trotter: Which Passion Will Prevail?

Born 14 July 1853

Missionary to Algeria for 38 years

Died 27 August 1928



Lilias was born in London to Alexander and Isabella Trotter. Lilias's father died when she was twelve and as a result she learned to lean on her heavenly Father now that her papa was gone. Her mother Isabella encouraged Lilias to be involved in local missions outreaches and also to develop her extraordinary natural artistic gift.

When Lilias was 23 her artistic ability was noticed by John Ruskin, a noted artist and critic who was the voice of the art world in his day. He took Lilias under his wing, tutoring her in England and helping her refine her skill. He could foresee for her great future in the art world. After three years under

Ruskin's tutelage, he became frustrated that she was distracted from her art. She was spending too much time in the streets of London and not enough time with her paint. Ruskin told her that if she would devote herself to art, "she would be the greatest living painter and do things that would be immortal."

Lilias was faced with a very difficult decision. She realized that she had two passions—two all consuming passions—competing in her life: art and ministry. She knew that it was not possible to be wholly consumed twice. She could not give herself completely to two so distinctly different masters. However, she realized that it was possible for one of the passions to become the master over the other. Which should it be?

For several days Lilias prayed for God to make His calling on her life clear. She loved art and her ability to paint beautiful scenes, and she knew it was possible for God to use her in that world, but in the end she said, "I see as clear as daylight now, I cannot give myself to painting in the way he [Ruskin] means and continue still to 'seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness.'"

Now she was free to allow her passion of ministry to flourish. She enjoyed her art as a gift, not as a passion. Little did Lilias realize that the skills in ministry God was developing in her would be used for years in Algeria. Her training ground was the streets of London and the YWCA, and she was also influence by the preaching of Dwight L. Moody. She grew in faith and strength, especially in the matter of prayer, and more and more her heart's desire was to see people touched and changed by Christ. Lilias wrote,



There should be neither undergrowth, nor overgrowth, but balanced growth. Spiritual equilibrium alone will bring forth much fruit both in us and in others. We were created

for more than our own spiritual development; reproduction, not mere development, is the goal to mature - reproduction in other lives.

God would soon take her to North Africa where she would share the light of the Gospel in a very dark place.

Many years after she decided to pursue ministry over art, she realized even more strongly the importance of focusing on Jesus, rather than all the good things He gives us. She wrote:

Never has it been so easy to live in half a dozen good harmless worlds at once—art, music, social science, games, motoring, the following of some profession, and so on. And between them we run the risk of drifting about, the “good” hiding the “best.”

It is easy to find out whether our lives are focused, and if so, where the focus lies. Where do our thoughts settle when consciousness comes back in the morning?

Where do they swing back when the pressure is off during the day? Dare to have it out with God. . . and ask Him to show you whether or not all is focused on Christ and His glory.

How do we bring things to a focus in the world of optics? Not by looking at the things to be dropped but by looking at the one point that is to be brought out. Turn your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him.



Note: Watercolor painting by Lili Trotter

References:

Faithful Women & Their Extraordinary God, by Noel Piper, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2005.

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