



Two bricklayers are asked, “What are you doing?”

The first says, “I am laying bricks.”

The second says, “I am building a church.”

Angela Duckworth
Author | Psychologist
(b. 1970)

Probably you have heard a version of this story, which can be traced back to the late 1600s. After the great fire of 1666 in London, world’s famous architect, Christopher Wren, was commissioned to rebuild St. Paul’s Cathedral. As the master builder, Wren observed the construction work and he approached two bricklayers with the question, “What are you doing?” The first one said, “I am laying bricks.” The second said, “I am building a church.” Their answers reveal a difference not in action but in direction.

Like these two men, each one of us has a function and a responsibility that comes with growing ‘to-do’ lists and familiar tasks. Like them, we too have a calling. It is an invitation to look at what is beyond: the ‘bigger picture’ that reveals the direction toward which our actions point. While it is true that we are laying bricks, it is also true that we are building something.

If demanding times keep our eyes down focusing on the tasks, we can lose sight of what it is we are building. In such cases the work becomes increasingly burdensome over time and we can lose the will that working towards a purpose brings. In these times it’s important to pause and lift up our eyes to look around and connect with the larger goal. What are you seeing? What is being built as a result of our efforts? Is there someone or something that can remind you of this bigger purpose during busy times?

When we connect with our purpose we are able to find meaning in what we do, find common space with others along the way, and shape who we are becoming in the context of our calling. For all of us in health care, we do our daily tasks and go about our days. These tasks are part of a larger picture of working for the Common Good - of helping people to find healing and hope.

Whether your task is repetitive as the bricklayers’ and whether you are met by the Master Builder himself, remember that like these men you too are contributing to something bigger!