

**Jan 27**

**Busyness**

Psalm 90:1-2, 10-12

I need to tell you something, something you might not want to hear. Your time here on earth is limited. You are not going to live forever. Are you shocked? I doubt it. Why, you might be thinking, would I begin a sermon about joy with that statement? It feels a little depressing, doesn't it? After all, none of us like contemplating our demise. Beyond the fact that we won't live forever we are limited in lots of other areas. I can't sing low bass, I am colorblind, there are only 24 hours in a day, I could go on but I think you get the idea. We all live with inherent limitations, some small, some big and ultimately the biggest, the limit on life. Accepting your limitations is foundational to living a meaningful, exciting and joyful life. Yet, "Accept your Limitations" is not a catchy phrase. It won't be printed on t-shirts because no one would buy it, and you will never see it on a bumper sticker. What sells is "No Limits." Our culture is fueled by no limits thinking. "You can be whatever you want to be. Accept nothing but the best."

Now don't get me wrong. I believe you can do just about anything. But I don't believe you can do everything. I hope you don't see this as not having much faith in you. Why the importance of acknowledging limits? If you don't accept you can't do it all and concentrate your efforts on a limited number of important goals—you will never know the satisfaction that comes only when you have purposefully and passionately invested your efforts into the causes that you believe matter most. Instead, you will live a scattered, unfocused life that is rarely productive and almost never creates the deep joy that comes from knowing God has used you powerfully. You can do more than you think you can. But you can't do everything because you are limited. Everyone is. The hours in our day are limited. The energy in our bodies is limited. So is the time we have on this earth.

Today's joy stealer is Busyness. We let the frenetic pace of life dictate our choices, our moods and our priorities and they end up stealing much of our joy. When we align our priorities with God, focusing on what is really important we find a life of meaning, purpose and joy.

The psalmist wrote that we have seventy or 80 years, if our strength endures. The psalmist acknowledging the limited time on earth says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." We don't have forever to figure out what is important, so the Psalmist says better be wise with the choices we make. And, since some of you are in your 80's, your time is almost up and some of you are already living on borrowed time. So today we are going to see how embracing limited thinking will give us a heart of wisdom and fill whatever days we have left with more joy than we might think possible.

One response to the brevity of our lives and the other limitations we face is to attempt to do all we can as quickly as we can for as long as we can. We burn our candle at both ends believing that if we stay busy we will also be happy. But is that the way of wisdom? Talk to busy people and you often find frazzled people. You know you are too busy when you have allowed the busyness of life to steal your joy. All of us find time when we are way busier than we want to be because of events happening to us and around us. We can't do much about that. But when the busyness is because we keep adding more and more into our lives, then we need to change.

You want your life to count. How do you respond to life in ways that are wise and allow you to experience joy? What do you invest in and what do you let slide? To get at these questions we much understand three things.

1. We must understand that priorities are essential. You are today where your decisions have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your decisions take you. *The decisions you make—make you.* Decisions are our priorities taking on flesh. Whenever we make a decision, we demonstrate that something comes prior to the other opportunities we may have. Priorities are an admission that we are limited. Priorities help us because they allow us to say "no" to "the good things" that often get in the way of our doing, "the best things."

Many people are cursed with competence. They can do many things well. If they say they will do it, it will get done and they will do it well. Once people discover this about you, they will come knocking on your door. Because you are a good person and

you want to help people in the name of Christ you are likely to say “yes.” Good for you and bad for you. It is bad because you cannot say yes to every good request.

How do you make certain to do what is most important? You need to not respond immediately to a request for help. Instead, you need to take some time apart, pray about it and ask, “Is this, O God, the best use of my time?” Or another way of thinking about it is to ask, “If I do this will I still be able to give to the things I have already said yes, my best effort?” Here is one of the hard facts of life. If you really prioritize you must learn to say “no.”

Someone has said that the truly free person can turn down an invitation to dinner without giving an excuse. Can you do that? It is hard! You may feel uncomfortable telling people you can’t do what they are asking you to do when it is physically possible for you to do so. Perhaps you have not come to grips with the reality that you are limited. Without priorities you let busyness steal your joy.

2. You need to realize that you are here to be more than a nice person. You are here to fulfill a mission and to maximize your gifts and your time for God’s kingdom. You cannot do this if you say yes every time you are asked to help. Priorities help us overcome our tendency to become distracted. It also keeps us from coasting, believing that since we are busy we must be doing good. It really causes us to look at the choices we make.

Living with a heart of wisdom requires that we have the right priorities. You can have priorities but if they are not priorities that create a life that matters, you are wasting your life. If you don’t think about your priorities you are likely to adopt the same priorities that drive our culture. If someone says a person is successful, they usually mean that the person has made lots of money or they have achieved some level of notoriety or position of power. This is a cultural assumption. Many people prioritize their lives to achieve such goals. They can end up sacrificing families, friends and even their faith in pursuit of wealth and status.

Is this success in the eyes of God? Joy in God comes from our relationship with God; putting our faith first; serving with a servant’s heart, loving our neighbor, and

forgiving. What would be different if our relationship with God was the driving priority of our life? What would this cause us to say yes to doing and where would we say no?

3. Happiness is not your goal. Today, for far too many people, happiness is their goal. They expect their work to make them happy. They expect their relationships to make them happy. Marriages end when the going gets tough. Job changes occur when it is no longer fulfilling. Friendships end when they become challenging. Our culture tells us we should expect to be happy. We get busy trying to make this happen. It is foolish and it is dangerous to make being happy your goal. The more you try to achieve it the more likely you are to become unhappy, anxious and depressed. Jesus says that the fullness of life comes not from focusing on ourselves but in serving others. Things shift when service to God, caring for others or living a life of virtue are seen as the ultimate aim of life. True joy, not happiness, comes when we live with a servant's heart.

Right priorities come from a right understanding of who we are. First, we are created beings. We exist because God created us. We are not here by chance. You were created for God's pleasure and nothing gives God more pleasure than your responding to God's invitation to grow in relationship to God. Life is about relationships. There is nothing more important than our relationship with other people except our relationship with God. We are created in the image of God. We are spiritual beings. Have you ever wondered why people who have everything can feel so empty inside? It is because we are spiritual beings. We yearn for more.

George Bernard Shaw wrote. "This is the true joy in life—being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one...being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

There are two lives that you can live. One is a life of busyness; the other is a life of purposefulness. One is a life obsessed with being happy; the other is a life intent on serving others. One is the way of the world; the other is the way of Jesus. Which life will bring you joy? Choose life!