

March 11-15, 2024 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 115
Jesus & Boundaries

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we are looking at the benefits of slowing down. Last week we looked at how we could design our lives in such a way that we would begin to focus our energies so that the things we do will end up mattering. Focus is what brings power to anything including your life. So now that we've looked at our most important roles and set some targets to serve those roles and maybe even come up with a BIG DREAM to aim at we are going to look at slowing down.

Say what? How can I achieve my great dreams if I slow down? Shouldn't I increase the pace of my life rather than slowing it down if I'm going to achieve great things?

No. I know it seems counterintuitive but you must slow down if you're going to make a difference in this world and if you're going to make a difference in the lives of the people God has entrusted into your care. Today people are souped-up, stressed-out, and overscheduled. In this brave new world boundaries between work and family are disappearing. Everyone is mobile and every moment of the day is scheduled with daycare, school, after school activities along with ten to twelve hour work days. This pressure cooker lifestyle is so new to our planet that anthropologists are now studying it to see how it will affect us. And nobody's sure. What usually happens when an entire generation becomes so enslaved to something that it defines an entire culture is rebellion by the next generation. I think we're starting to see the form that rebellion is taking with the generational battles between the boomers and the millennials but from what I've read this is just the tip of the iceberg.

So what? What can I do to change any of this? You can choose to listen to what God has been telling us for thousands of years and slow your life down. Now I'm not here to make anyone feel bad who has fallen into the trap of filling every second of the day with activity in order to live a more "efficient" life. I'm not here to tell you how much is too much and what is "just right". I'm only here to shed some light on this issue and hopefully get you to ask the question I'm just starting to ask myself- how much is too much and how much is "just right" from my Creator's point of view?

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. Romans 12:2 (MSG)

So how about it? Have you become so well adjusted to this culture of hurry and efficiency that you've fit into it without even thinking about it? It's easy to do. But if we're not careful it will destroy us and any possibility there is of us living a life of focus and power that will leave more than a ripple when we're gone. Hurry is glorified by our culture but it's not glorified by God. In fact, God warns us of the dangers of hurry:

A person in a hurry makes mistakes. Proverbs 19:2 (GN)

Not only does a person in a hurry make mistakes- a person in a hurry doesn't stop to ask herself or himself if it's smart to be living the way we're living. I think if any of us were asked what happens to a person as life goes faster and faster we'd all warn of the dangers that exist in moving too quickly through this life. But we don't notice when it's happening to us

because, well, life is going faster and faster and we're just trying to survive the rat race. So this week we're going to focus our attention and try to bring some recognition to where we have gotten ourselves.

Tuesday Reflection: So what are the effects of a hurried life style? There are a few that we'll look at over the next few days and we'll start today with lots of stress. That's one of the biggest impacts- stress. When I'm in a hurry I just don't have time to take care of myself:

I had no time to care for myself... Song of Solomon 1:6 (GN)

When I don't have time to take care of myself stress follows pretty closely behind. It's one thing to have a season of hurry but for so many of us our seasons-of-hurry last for years and years. And that impacts our stress levels partially because we just don't have time to take really good care of ourselves. One thing I've really noticed in myself and when working with other people is that if we don't take time to eat when we should or rest when we should or take care of ourselves when we're sick like we should stress goes off the charts. Often when I'm the most stressed out the biggest issue isn't what I think it is. Often the biggest issue is that I need a sandwich or a really good night's rest or maybe even a few days for my body to kick whatever bug is dragging me down. If I am able to do that then usually stress levels shrink. If I'm not- usually because I'm WAY too busy to rest or eat- then the stress doesn't go away. In fact it often multiplies.

That's one reason slowing down is so important- if I don't I won't take very good care of myself which is one of the big things that God asks of me. Do you remember the greatest commands? Jesus after being asked by a legal scholar what the most important command in the Old Testament was said this:

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments. Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

We often focus in on the first two of those commands (love God and love your neighbor) but we ignore what Judy calls the "implicit third command"- to love yourself. Not with the narcissistic love that is selfish but with the self care commanded by the Bible. Why is that so important? Because if I don't take care of myself I won't have any energy left to love God or my neighbor. Which kind of leads to another effect of a hurried lifestyle- less joy in my life.

And that is a tragedy. If you miss joy you miss what makes this life so sweet. God is a God of joy. In fact, joy is God's default setting. He does get sad and angry but He always reverts to joy. CS Lewis called joy, "the serious business of heaven". And it's supposed to be the serious business of earth as well. But hurry robs us of our joy if we allow it to dominate our lives:

My days go by faster than a runner; they fly away without my seeing any joy. Job 9:25 (NCV)

One way hurry robs us of our joy is that we run out of time and space to love God and love our neighbors. Since we haven't obeyed the command to take really good care of ourselves (and my schedule is a big part of what robs me of my ability to take really good care of

myself) we don't have the energy or space to do the things that unleashes the most joy in our lives- love. Loving God and loving others is mainly what we've been created to do. It has been my experience that when I am living out who and what I was created to be and do I experience joy far beyond anything I could possibly experience just by achievements and wealth (not that I've got a ton of either but you get the idea, right? ;o)

When I'm in the middle of the hurried life even the things that should bring me intense joy just don't. And then I'm left wondering why I'm not happier with the things I've accomplished which often leads to more questions and more feeling of discouragement. That's just a couple of the things that the hurried lifestyle will do to me. I hope today you'll spend a bit of time asking if there's any ways that you resemble any of this.

Wednesday Reflection: Another symptom of a hurried lifestyle is that you will see less productivity in your life. This one is counterintuitive because it seems to me at least that more hurry would lead to more productivity but it turns out it's just not true. In the days after the French Revolution the government decided there was too much to be done for any rest so they got rid of the traditional "sabbath"- a day off once a week that traced its roots back to the 10 Commandments. The French Revolution was not only a secular movement but it was pretty much anti-religion and so the fact that the day of rest was tied to the Bible was another nail in its coffin.

What happened was very interesting. Production went WAY down even though the number of hours being worked went way up. Not only that but accidents went up and quality went down. After just a few years the French government passed a new law- every citizen had to take at least one day off a week. How strange is that? But it's something the Bible has been trying to get through our brains for thousands of years:

Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind. Proverbs 21:5 (MES)

I imagine there were more than a few who smiled when it turned out that the French government had discovered deep wisdom in the Bible. More hurry eventually leads to less productivity. As I said yesterday- God will sometimes ask us to hurry. He will sometimes put us in a season where we are hurried and that's fine (I'm sure God just breathed a huge sigh of relief when He heard me say I was ok with something He did ;o) but we have to be careful not to let our seasons become a lifestyle because when we do not only does productivity slip- so does our connection with God Himself. Growing up I heard this verse quoted all the time but I never had any idea what it meant:

Be still, and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

I don't know if I've even yet got it figured out but I do reflect on a couple of things when I hear it now. First God asks us to "be still". This isn't the only place. Now that doesn't mean He's asking us to never do anything. A lifestyle of "being still" will lead to even less productivity than a lifestyle of hurry will. But if we're never still we will never hear God's voice. There's a comic I see from time to time on Facebook that always leaves me feeling vaguely guilty:

Ever wonder why you don't hear from God more than you do? Maybe it's because like me you've got too much noise in your life. In what is undoubtedly the most recognized passage of scripture in the Old Testament King David talks about what the Lord as "my shepherd" does for me:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. Psalm 23:1-3 (NIV)



My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
- John 10:27

It's interesting to me that the first part of the Psalm tells me about how much God wants to slow me down and give me rest. But God won't force it on me. He won't force it on you. But if I don't allow God to set the pace, the direction and the pitstops of my life then I'm going to have a really tough time hearing His voice and that's going to lead to a lack of connection which is going to lead to all kinds of other issues in my life. So today why not ask yourself how things are going for you in your life. How's your productivity? How's your connection with the Shepherd?

Thursday Reflection: So far this week we've talked about what happens as a result of a hurried lifestyle- today we begin talking about the antidote to the hurried lifestyle (and the things that happen to us as a result of that lifestyle).

And the first thing we are going to have to do if we are going to slow down our lives is to learn to be content with what we have. Contentment is a vastly underrated state of mind:

True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NLT)

According to God, godliness + contentment = great wealth. And the absence of contentment leads to all kinds of issues. You see it in both the Old and New Testaments:

It is better to be content with what... you have. Otherwise, you will always be struggling for more, and that is like chasing the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:6 (NCV)

Chasing the wind. That's a pretty vivid image, isn't it? That doesn't mean wanting more is wrong- it's all about motivation and whether you are content with what you have now which is what contentment is all about. Contentment is not about having zero ambitions. Ambitions are good but ambitions gone wrong are at the heart of so much pain. Ambition gone wrong has destroyed families, marriages, churches, businesses and has destroyed entire nations when someone powerful enough has ambition gone wrong.

If you and I are every going to get serious about bringing balance into our lives then we are going to have to get real honest about what motivates us. Take an internal look at what drives you. What motivates you? Every other question and action is superficial until you deal with what motivates you to get so hurried. Why do I always have to have more

achievement, money, activities, experiences and pleasures. Getting balanced HAS to start with this question. I don't know about you but I love having enough. I love having more than enough. But can I live well with less than enough of something I think I need? That's the ultimate question:

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT)

Philippians 4:13 is probably about the most taken-out-of-context verse in the entire Bible. We've taken it to mean I-can-do-whatever-I-want-to-because-Jesus-will-give-me-the-strength-I-need-to-do-whatever-I-want-to. But is that what Paul's saying here? Nope. He's saying I can live in any circumstance (even with nothing) as long as I have Christ's power in me. Why? How? Because Paul has dealt with his motivations and values. If you know anything about Paul you know that statement is a miracle. This was the most driven person on the face of the planet. But he "learned" to be content which changed his life.

Once I've figured out my motivations and values that drive me to a hurried lifestyle next comes the hard part- figuring out how to say "no" to the many things that in the past I might have said "yes" to. Heck, the hardest part is probably getting myself out of the stuff I've said yes to and now has me living a hectic, hurried lifestyle:

An impulsive vow is a trap; later you'll wish you could get out of it. Proverbs 20:25 (MES)

I don't know about you but I resemble that remark. I've been working at this for more than a few years but it's still too easy for me to say yes when I should have said no. I still do it all the time and it gets my life out of whack. Since my heart attack in August of 2019 it's become quite a bit easier to say no and people seem to understand better now than in the past but it's my own interior voice asking me to do things that gets me out of balance more often than not.

If you're going to slow down and live a focused, balanced life in 2020 you need to get really good at saying "no". You might even have to tell me "no" and that's ok. For so long churches had the reputation that if you ever said "yes" you could never get out of it. At Riverside we make sure that if you ever have to tell me or another ministry leader no- even after you've already said "yes" then we will understand and applaud your commitment to a balanced life. In a few weeks we'll talk about what matters most in our lives and where we should be putting most of our energy and I think your mission on this earth needs to be a HUGE part of that but your mission doesn't always have to be served within the four walls of Riverside.

So try it today. Ask yourself what motivates you and try to find at least one thing you can say "no" to. I realize that there will be a few of you (probably a VERY few) who aren't already doing too much but for the rest of us this will be a powerful exercise.

Friday Reflection: So yesterday we talked about how to start slowing down and creating a more leisurely life which as counterintuitive as it sounds will actually lead to a more powerful life as you focus what you do. Today we'll pick up where we left off by talking about the power of following God's navigation for our lives. God doesn't want to be your

pilot (He wouldn't have given you freedom of choice if He wanted to pilot your life). He doesn't even want to be your co-pilot. He wants to be your Navigator. He wants to plot out a course for your life and then watch as you willingly choose to follow His flight plan. I know I've talked a lot this week about the dangers of hurrying but there are times when hurrying is the smart thing to do:

I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands. Psalm 119:60 (NLT)

Hurry is the logical (and intelligent) choice when we realize we've been ignoring God's plan for our lives. Hurry away from a life of hurry. Throughout the scriptures God talks about the importance of slowing down and resting. In fact, right in the middle of His top-10-list God drops this commandment:

Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD. Exodus 20:9 (NLT)

Doesn't that sound crazy? Rest? Take a day off? But just think of how much more I could accomplish if I worked all day erryday (how's that for showing my hip side, huh?)? Turns out, no. You won't accomplish more by working constantly without rest. In fact, you'll kill yourself eventually and your productivity will slip. For those of you who like Nascar, you know the importance of a pit stop. But it's got to be tough pulling into the pits and watching all those racers you passed go zipping by. But if you stay out on the track eventually you're going to run out of gas and your tires are going to go flat and then you'll watch as EVERYONE goes zipping by you.

Rest is mandatory. Not just because it's a command (although if your goal is to live a life that honors God and seeks to become a conduit for His power and strength and blessings then following His "commands" is pretty important) but because you weren't built to go non stop without resting. If I'm going to follow God's navigation then I'm going to rest at least once a week:

*God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Psalm 51:10 (MES)*

We all know we have to sleep in order to keep going. If I don't sleep I'm going to come up hard against my limits very quickly. But it's not as obvious that taking a day of rest every week is just as important. We can get away with working non stop for quite a while and not even recognize the toll it's taking on us. But I've learned the Sabbath rest is just as important as a good night's sleep. Have you ever heard someone recommend you sleep-on-it? Scientists now believe that when we sleep our brains do a little housekeeping and file the information we've got into retrievable locations that make it easier for us to problem solve AFTER we've slept than it was for us BEFORE we slept. Ever wake up and suddenly the answer that you were agonizing over the evening before suddenly is perfectly obvious? That's the power of a good night's sleep.

A good week's Sabbath is just as important. Don't believe me? Then try it and see what happens. I can't guarantee the benefits will be as obvious and a good night's sleep but you'll never know unless you try allowing God to navigate your life and Sabbath is a HUGE part of His navigation- heck it made the top 10!