

The Gospel and Emotional Health

Receive the Gift of Limits

Mark.1.35ff; Luke 10.38ff; Colossians 2.15-3.5; 2nd Timothy 4.20

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(Mark 1) In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. ³⁶ Simon and his companions searched for Him; ³⁷ they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." ³⁸ He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." ³⁹ And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. ⁴

(Luke 10) Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

(Col 2-3) When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. ¹⁶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. ²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

(2 Tim 4.20) Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.

We've been looking at *The Gospel and Emotional Health*... the series is loosely based on a book by Peter Scazzero (*The Emotionally Healthy Church*). We've already seen that spiritually healthy people are also emotionally healthy people...the one follows the other. So...if a person has all these markers suggesting that he's spiritually mature (e.g. years as a Christian, famous leaders that he knows, degrees from Christian institutions of learning...mission trips... church leadership experience, jargon etc., etc..) but "*has not love*" (1 Cor 13)... doesn't have those inner motivational and root qualities that generate behavior ... he's NOT as spiritually mature as he thinks he is.

Today, a fourth quality: the spiritually/emotionally healthy person RECEIVES THE GIFT OF LIMITS. He or she knows when to say "no" both to bad things...and even to good things. She understands some basic truths about who she is and about how the world is and about what it means to be redeemed and what that doesn't mean. Spiritually and

emotionally healthy people have had those truths seep into their motives and aren't easily pressed into a mold of someone else's expectations or someone else's goals or convictions. He's comfortable in his own skin and secure in his identity and calling under God.

Let's look at receiving the gift of limits:

First – Impediments to the Receiving

Second – How the Gospel Beats the Impediments

Third – Enjoying the Gift of Limits

First, what are the mindsets or attitudes that resist accepting limits? Let me look at EIGHT (there may be more, but I'll LIMIT our discussion to EIGHT).

ONE is the idea that bigger is better. We live in a BIG STATE. We like big stores... big discounts... big events ... big churches ...big numbers... big houses ... big cars...big muscles, big shots etc. And that means we have to strive and work for all these big things OR we may experience this low-level sense of dissatisfaction and FOMO if we don't have bigger, better and more.

A SECOND resistant attitude is "be whatever you want to be...don't let anyone kill your dreams!" "You're 5-foot 1 inch and 39 years old, out of shape...but... YOU CAN BE the next *Miss America* if you just set your mind to it – don't let anyone steal your dream!"

I'm not saying that 39-years is old or "*over the hill*". I'm not even saying that it's a good thing to be in a pageant or to be *Miss America*...just that a college student who has no aptitude for mathematics is NOT likely to be a nuclear physicist. And to set these standards ("*You WILL be an offensive lineman in the NFL...no matter what anyone says!!*") Call it possibility thinking or positive-confession or baseless optimism but maybe ...it may be just... out of touch with reality and it ignores the limits God has imposed on us.

The next obstacle to receiving the gift of limits is the sense that "*No one's gonna tell me how to live! I'm my own person! I'm my own boss!... I follow my own heart!*" That person eventually faces the limits of a prison cell...or a psyche unit...it may start as individuality...or personal autonomy but it ends in selfishness, loneliness and loss.

Fourth, people-pleasing – "*I want everyone to like me (without limits) I want my kids to like me ... my coworkers... my party-friends and my Bible-study friends... I make everyone happy all the time.*" But eventually, that person becomes such a chameleon that he makes no one happy and he's a ghost (no sense of self). Another word for this is FEAR.

Fifth, the work-a-holic, (this is a variety of people-pleasing ...people-impressing, fear of people), this person has no limits on what he/she will do to succeed... No number of hours is too high ...and yet, it's a horrible self-centered form of escapism and idolatry (the worship of applause!) ...and ends in loneliness (a dark, self-imposed exile...extreme limitation).

Sixth: guilt manipulation, people who won't take "no" for an answer because, "*You really should be there at this event or this ministry or this service opportunity - do your part!*" Religious and charitable groups are famous for this. And it works!

Seven, commitment-phobia – *“I don’t want to get married because I don’t want to limit myself...haven’t declared a major ... let’s play it by ear...I’m keeping my options open...I want to do it all and not miss out.”* The tentative life rarely (if ever) has a happy ending or makes a lasting impact.

Eight, what Francis Schaeffer called the *“new super-spirituality”* – the idea that God wants us to be always happy and healed and successful; a refusal or an inability to see how pain or sickness or any apparent evil might have a larger purpose in God’s plan. It fails to recognize man’s chief end.

Limits – we all resent them at some points in our lives...speed limits, weight-limits, subscription limits, age limits, time-limits, limitations, restrictions, regulations, restraints, deadlines and yet the good news of Jesus Christ actually reorients us to limits and we begin to see them as gifts from God to be enjoyed and celebrated.

In the first passage, we find the Ideal Man – Jesus Christ, God incarnate and He’s limiting Himself. He’s healing the sick. He’s set up in a kind of headquarters in Galilee and everyone’s coming to Him...the disciples think, *“What could be more practical and better than this!”*

BUT at the very moment of success... Jesus Christ slips away ...for prayer! And they “hunt” for Him... “Everyone’s looking for you!!” “Oh really”, says Jesus, ‘Let’s leave!’ “Leave?? Why leave?” “Because I have to preach – it’s why I came.”

“You mean you’re gonna leave all those people unhealed?... You’re gonna miss out on this great humanitarian opportunity?... disappoint all these people?”

Next verse, “And He left...” He limits Himself to fulfilling His mission – “this is why I came...to announce the Kingdom.” He’s crystal clear on His life’s purpose – it’s freeing!

In the second passage, my two friends, the sisters Martha and Mary. Martha wants to serve Jesus Christ (that’s always a good thing...right?)... BUT she doesn’t want to limit herself by serving Him the way He wants to be served... She wants to be the hostess the role assigned to her by her society. She wants to be elaborate in her hosting (v.40).

She’s like that tailor. You’re going to a big award ceremony and you take your suit or dress to be let out because ...ya’ know... you’ve gained a little weight.

And the tailor really wants to do something special... so to surprise you, he sews sequins and rhinestones all over your dress or suit to make it look really amazing... And a week later, you go to try it on, and you look like Elton John or Beyoncé (but you are NOT one of those!) and you just can’t wear this to the award dinner...

And the tailor is beaming with pride as you come out of the dressing room... but you just can’t help looking unhappy. And he’s crushed and angry at your disappointment. And you have to explain, “You served me YOUR way but not in the one way that was important to me AND you never let it out (made it bigger) so I can’t wear it anyway....”

Martha gave Jesus everything she wanted to give but NOT the ONE THING He wanted.

Her sister on the other hand sees that God is sitting in her living room and she gives Him her ears... She limits herself and in so doing she learns that He has come to die for her.

He will soon go to Jerusalem to hang on a cross and be covered with her shame and guilt. Because she limited herself and focused and listened, she got it. And seeing the significance of what He was saying, (Mk 14; John 12) she broke open a sealed bottle and poured out \$10,000 worth of perfume on Jesus as He prepared to die... In the Garden, He smelled that fragrance and saw that symbol: "I must be broken like that perfume bottle – broken so the fragrance of grace will fill the world."

Mary was no slacker (or navel-gazer) her service was truly beneficial...it was the symbol that encouraged the redeemer to finish His task of redemption!

In the third passage, Paul's telling the church at Colossae that they didn't have to fear guilt-manipulation and didn't have to be people-pleasers! In fact, they were now obligated to reject that stuff!

"When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the cross. Therefore let no one act as your judge." (Colossians 2.15-16)

Jesus Christ has already BEEN judged. God has silenced all the spiritual powers who stood to accuse you... so why do you allow your neighbor to accuse you? (You no longer have to keep up with the Joneses! They're not your authorities – God disarmed the authorities in the Cross!)

So when people come and say, "Hey, you don't look traditional enough ...or hey you don't look super-spiritual enough...or hey, you should be following a lot more rules and moral principles (v.21 "do not taste...do not touch...do not handle!") ... or you need to be involved in this and that ...Real followers of God get involved - maybe YOU should too...don't ya' think?" – Paul says, "Don't do it!"

"But, Paul, isn't that just how religious communities sort of keep themselves in line...accountability...a little guilt and shame has its place...don't ya think?"

And Paul says, "That approach may provoke shame, guilt and fear and may sublimate or drive bad behavior underground BUT it can't change you or make you loving..." (Col 2.23 *"[tactics that] are of no value against fleshly indulgence."*)

Only God's grace can change your hearts. Paul goes on to say, "You've been raised up with Christ...so become what you're destined to be, what God has declared you to be...set your mind there."

People will not limit the stuff they try to put on you... "should do this ...should do that..." But don't be manipulated by guilt and fear OR you'll soon be performing like a religious monkey!

Instead – just say no! You can...you must! (v.16) *"Let no one act as your judge...(v. 18) let no one defraud you of your prize...(v. 21) why do you submit to these unbiblical rules?"*

YOU shouldn't judge others AND you have just as much obligation not to allow them to judge you...it's not only the Christian's privilege – it's his responsibility! Learn to say "No!" – receive the gift of limits!

If you allow people to judge you and guilt you into things and impose standards on you that are not from God – you are, in a sense, denying the Good News that Jesus was already judged for you and that He silences all the prosecutors.

Your life doesn't come from people patting you on the back... or you meeting society's standards *"You've died (to that stuff) and your life is hid with Christ in God!"*

The last verse is included to combat what Schaeffer called the "new super spirituality". Paul had been given the gift of healing (Acts 19.11 -12). At one point Paul's handkerchiefs were somehow empowered to transmit healing to people... But here he speaks of having to leave a fellow missionary, Trophimus, sick in Miletus...I'm sure he prayed...but

Why didn't God heal that man? Why doesn't God heal everyone who's sick?

Because there are limits...NOT to God's power but to His purposes. Even if you get healed, you'll eventually die ...until the end when the last enemy, death is vanquished and all that's broken is fixed...

For now...away with that kind of fanaticism that fails to read the NT and fails to see that believers in Jesus Christ live between the ages -- the old creation still groans under the curse. Even believers live in a fallen world...where God still has a use for sickness and pain and death.

SIX quick applications: (How to enjoy limits in the Gospel):

1. The Gospel frees you to say no to people because you are not depending on people to feel good about yourself. The Gospel even frees you to say no to yourself because you are not dependent on unlimited self-autonomy..."your life is hid with Christ in God" That unlimited source of significance and life enables you to set limits – you HAVE infinite affirmation.
2. Being free from the judgments of people doesn't mean you're free to be apathetic or selfish. Become convinced from God (in His Word) what's right and wrong - pursue the right and avoid the wrong... Love people not to relieve your guilt but because God has destined you for love...set your mind on that, on what God has declared you to be...and then become that. If you can love others in that attitude, it really will help people like Mary's love was a help to Jesus Christ in His darkest hour.
3. We need to be open with one another to say, "Uh...I feel like you're pressuring me and if I said "yes" it would be to get you to like me...and that's an act of unbelief toward Jesus Christ ...so....no."
4. You may fear that this teaching will result in fewer volunteers here at Park Road... It will and it has...we would rather have people serve for the right reasons than to be guilted into it and then get all bitter on others like Martha. Service to God is a privilege (not to say it's not difficult at times) but if you don't feel happy and chosen in your service, you're forgetting the gospel and who you ARE and the answer is to repent.
5. Learn to receive the gift and practice of Sabbath. "Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2.27) It's a gift from God so learn to take a day for worship and rest.

6. At the start we gave eight impediments to receiving limits as a gift. There's really only ONE: fear. We fear what people will think of us. We're counting on people to affirm us and NOT God because of Christ.

Number SEVEN...oops! I said SIX applications ...didn't I? 'looks like I've exceeded my limits – lets pray.

QUOTES

You can do anything you set your mind to, man

– Marshall Mathers, "Lose Yourself" (from
the *8 Mile Soundtrack*; 2002)

It becomes the standard greeting everywhere: *I am so busy*.

We say this to one another with no small degree of pride, as if our exhaustion were a trophy, our ability to withstand stress a mark of real character. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset, to whiz through our obligations without time for a single, mindful breath, this has become the model of a successful life.

– Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal,
and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (2002; p.2)

Q: What is the chief end (purpose) of man?

A: Man's chief end (purpose) is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

– *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (question one; 1647)