

# “An Unhurried Life”

## Part 2 – The Life You’ve Always Wanted John 16:20-24



### Rev. Tom Campbell-Schmitt February 3, 2008

So how has the new year been going for you? Got your holiday bills paid off yet? Filed your 2007 taxes? If you’re a parent of college student, you have to have your tax return finished and copied, so you can send in your FAFSA to find out what size loan or grant your child is eligible for. What I’m saying is that January and February can be crazy and hurried months. Especially when you combine these things with the recent weather we’ve been having, it makes for a challenging time of year doesn’t it?

Today is the second sermon in our series on *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, based on the book by John Ortberg. Over 125 people are studying this in a dozen different small groups and this week we’re looking at a theme that covers two chapters in the book. It is called Slowing Down and Celebrating. There could hardly be a more timely topic for us to consider in these weeks leading up to our annual retelling of the story of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. So I’ve given a name to this morning’s message: “an unhurried life.” Think of it as sort of like the un-Cola commercial for 7 Up: An un-hurried life.

It is getting harder and harder to find a person who doesn’t think of themselves as busy, over scheduled, and hurried. We are constantly running from place to place.

Our society seems to value perpetual motion; we hold up busyness as a sign of significance. We say things like, “Oh, you’re so busy. You must be important.”

There’s probably no other culture in existence that has tried to negotiate a faster paced lifestyle than ours. It used to be that if you missed the stagecoach, it didn’t matter, because there would be another one next week but not any more; even a few minutes delay drives us into depression or anxiety.

Someone has named this phenomenon “hurry sickness” which can harm us in a number of ways: First, by the damage it inflicts on our relationships. You see, when we rush around trying to do more than we should, we get so task-oriented that people become inconveniences. People infected with hurry sickness are TOO BUSY to take time for people....even the people they say they love. Many marriages that WERE once healthy have been devastated by this disease. Lewis Grant states that one of the side effects of hurry sickness is what he calls “sunset fatigue.” Sunset fatigue is when we are just too tired, or too drained, or too preoccupied, to love the people to whom we have made the deepest promises. When we come home at the end of a hectic day’s work, those who need our love the most...those to whom we are most committed end up getting the left overs.

Hurry sickness can cause great relational damage; but second, it can cause emotional damage. Busy people often fall into the trap of trying to “hydroplane” over the surface of their emotions. They don’t have time to deal with things like feelings. You see love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is of course one thing hurried people don’t have.

But as John Ortberg and many others tell us, hurry is not only the great enemy of relationships and our emotional well-being Third, it damages us spiritually as well. And so the spiritual discipline that we ordinary people can learn to practice by God’s grace is to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. That is a key part of what slowing down is about which is what we’re going to look at in a moment.

It’s connected to another spiritual discipline: that of learning to celebrate and be a bearer of joy in life. We are not talking about becoming monastics. We are talking about getting our busyness and hurriedness under control so that we can include celebration and joy as regular parts of our life.

The author of the book we’re studying had just moved with his wife and three children to Chicago. Life was full, and he had called to ask a wise and trusted friend for spiritual guidance. Ortberg asked the question, “What do I need to do to be spiritually healthy?” There was a period of silence, which was broken by these words, “Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” Ortberg acknowledged the reply, and said, “That’s a good one. Now what else is there?” There was another long silence, followed by the words, “There is nothing else.”

Ortberg goes on to say that this man was the wisest spiritual mentor he knew. And from his vast amount of knowledge about God’s ways and Ortberg’s life, this was all the advice he gave. Eliminate hurry.

Hmmmm. Maybe I should take a more careful look at my habits. Just how much of my life is spent in this apparently unholy state? I notice that nearly every morning I crawl out of bed, eat, shower, walking our dog Scooter; then I rush out the door. Words exchanged with Patty can be abrupt and good-byes hurried. I am a very task-oriented person. I’ve got things to accomplish on my mental “to do” list: Get out the annual report, visit someone in the hospital, prepare for that meeting, track down a locksmith for the door that isn’t opening, lead my small group. Oops, I missed lunch. Oh well, there’s always dinner. Stuck in traffic I start to fume. Hmmmm. Maybe I do have a problem with Hurrying.

Probably like you, I tend to believe that when I hurry I am more productive, but research has shown this is not the case. Instead, it only adds to our stress and contributes to poor health and lack of sleep.

Stress related illnesses cost the US \$300 billion a year in medical expenses and lost productivity. Long-term stress increases our cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure, and actually limits our creativity. A survey by the National Sleep Foundation found that Americans are getting 20% less sleep than we did 100 years ago. 51% of those surveyed reported that fatigue interfered with their productivity on the job. What’s interesting is that, compared to 20 years ago, workers are putting in what amounts to an extra month of time on the job each year. US workers have the longest workday of any industrialized nation in the world.

So the evidence is piling up: hurrying isn’t good for our physical or emotional health. But what about our spiritual health? Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist said, “Hurry is not of the Devil but the Devil Himself!” Hurry is a product of worry. And worry is a symptom of self-reliance vs. dependence on God to meet our needs. Hurry interferes with our awareness of and cooperation with God’s agenda for us.

Some of us have what’s known as “agenda anxiety.” This is the feeling we get when we realize that the things we had planned for the day might not get accomplished. Maybe we get this feeling at the beginning of the day when we see that we’ve overscheduled our families or ourselves. Or maybe we experience it at some point during the day, like when that unexpected interruption comes along. We are practically out of breathe when we send up a prayer, “Are you running with me Jesus? Because my spiritual life is kind of a blur right now. Is this how you had planned my day? I guess I’ll never really know because I can’t stop long enough to listen for your voice. But as John Ortberg put it so well in his book: “We can’t move faster than the One we’re trying to follow.”

The problem with being too tied down to our agendas is that we can miss those opportunities to further God's kingdom here on earth. How difficult is it for us to be interrupted to meet a need? I admit, it's difficult for me. I have to force myself at times to set aside my plans to cooperate with the plans God has for me. I have to remind myself that I am here to be God's hands and feet; I am part of God's body on this planet.

So what do we do about the Hurry in our lives?

Slow. Take life slow. Force yourself to drive the speed limit, whether you're on time or running late. Allow someone to get ahead of you in line.

Stop. The other day on my way to the church; it had snowed during the night and I noticed some kids sledding on a hill over at Gabriel Park. They seemed to be having so much fun that I pulled my car over to the side of the road and just stopped and watched them. I was tempted to join them but I didn't think they would be willing to share their sled with a total stranger. We need to stop and take in God's wonderful world; stop and listen to those who need our attention.

Sabbath. One day each week, take a day to rest from your usual responsibilities. Our Sabbath is on Friday. We leave our house and take a walk or a hike or a bike ride or maybe even drive over to the coast or up to Mt. Hood for the day. We try not to "talk shop." The point is, we spend the day differently from the rest of the week and feel a sense of Sabbath rest.

Solitude. Solitude allows us to be free from the forces of society that try to squeeze us into its mold. Think of all Jesus accomplished in his short lifetime here on earth. He was busy yet he took times of solitude. Solitude allows us to be quiet before God and listen for an answer to the question, "How can I cooperate with what you want to do today through me?"

Solitude can be several hours in a place free from distraction and interruption. It can be driving in the car to our next appointment with the radio off. It can be spending a few minutes alone with God in the morning or at night before falling asleep. Time set aside to open ourselves before God and listen to his voice.

Seek. Seek someone who will help you with disciplines like slowing and rediscovering the joy of living. Someone whose heart is well ordered and allows God to write the day's agenda. And don't be surprised if that person turns out to be one of your own children or grandchildren.

That's what happen to Ortberg who tells the story of being impatient with his young daughter Mallory who was doing a joyful Dee Dah Day dance in a circle right after her bath, while he was trying to dry her off. He firmly told her to get over here so he could dry her off and to hurry. Innocent little Mallory then asked a relevant question. "Why?" Mallory inquired. Her father didn't have an answer.

He had no meetings to go to, no sermons to write, nothing to do and nowhere to go. But since he was in the habit of doing everything in a hurry, he insisted that Mallory also hurry to get dried off. But he took her question to heart, "Why, Daddy, Why? So he stopped his hurry and decided to join in the Dee Dah Day dance with his daughter going round and round in a circle together. She gave him good marks for a man of his age. Mallory was teaching her dad that joy is at the heart of God's plan for human beings, because joy is at the heart of God.

Lewis Smedes has written: "To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence." C.S. Lewis said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." The Apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

Our faith puts joy in the non-optional category...Joy is a command. Joylessness, then, is a serious sin, one that religious people are particularly prone to indulge in.

Some time ago I read a story about a devout Jew who sought an afterlife. So he went to his rabbi and asked what he needed to do. He was told to avoid all the good and lavish things in life. So he lived simply and humbly. He avoided laughter, wealth, fine parties, rich music, good food, private clubs and gala parties. When he died, he was ushered into heaven. Three days later, he was kicked out of heaven, because he didn't fit in. He couldn't enjoy heaven. He couldn't celebrate the joy there.

The point of this story is not to advocate a life of decadence and self-indulgence; rather it urges us to see the many everyday celebrations all around us. Be open to celebration and joy! It is there for the taking.

The Old Testament is filled with commands to feast and celebrate. In the passage we read earlier the prophet Nehemiah counsels his grieving congregation, "This day is holy to the Lord your God, do not mourn or weep.... Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your Strength."

Let's face it: sometimes we act as if we were baptized in vinegar instead of the refreshing water of God's Spirit. We walk around looking like a bunch of sour-pusses. How important then to realize that joyfulness is a learned ability that each of us can acquire. But you must take responsibility for our own joy; no one else is responsible. We must learn to pursue joy and to practice the discipline of celebration, not in a hedonistic way, but in a Spirit-filled, edifying way. Look at the instruction Jesus offers us in our New Testament reading from John 16. He tells his followers that his crucifixion is coming and when it does they will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.

But Jesus assures them that their pain will turn into joy. Just as a woman in labor starts out in pain and finishes in a rush of joy in bringing a beautiful child into the world, so also, Jesus' disciples will see him in his resurrection, and their sorrow will turn into joy. They will come to know in their own experience the truth our faith gives us. They will hear Jesus say to them, "I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

So how do we learn to replace hurry with celebration? We can start right now during these moments of worship by shouting with the Psalmist, "This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it." How about turning to someone sitting next to you right now and saying that to them? We can also celebrate the joy of God's presence through the gift of music. Not just instrumental music, but singing and even dancing. Again the Psalmist is instructive, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth." Celebration is not only joy we express for what has happened and is happening; celebration expresses joy and trust about the future. We have confidence and trust that the future belongs to God. We live in that hope because as the song says, Jesus is the Lord of the Dance.

One more way we can celebrate is with a meal. I know there is a down side to this. After all, gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins. But think about the connections between eating and celebrating. It is hard to have one without the other. Birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, retirements and nearly every other significant event in our lives involves eating. Maybe that's why eating in Jesus' eyes is a sacrament. This morning Christ's invitation goes out to each one of us. He beckons us to come and celebrate the feast he has prepared.