

“Life’s Too Short to . . . Work All the Time”

Today we’re wrapping up this series of messages entitled, “Life is too short to…” We’ve looked at how life is too short to play it safe and to make comfort the primary thing we’re after. We looked last week at how life is too short to carry a grudge, because all that will do is destroy us. And this week we’re going to look at how life is too short to work all the time.

But I want us to talk about sickness for a minute. You know about sickness. There are all kinds of sicknesses that we face in life--everything from disabling and deadly diseases to simple things like being home sick or car sick. But have you ever heard of hurry sickness? That’s a phrase coined by Dr. Meyer Friedman who found that hurry sickness is as deadly as any illness out there.

Let’s start with a quick quiz to see if this affects your life right now. Just pull out a pen and your outline and do a little tally as I go through these indicators. I’m going to read 8 statements and you just put down an “S” if it’s seldom true for you, or the letter “O” if this is often true of you.

Number 1: **I live in a chronic sense that there is never enough time.** No matter how fast I run, I feel like I’m always behind. I’m always playing catch up. As a rule, is that seldom true for you or is that often true?

Number 2: **I have an increased sense of irritability.** I just find myself getting angrier at people.

Number 3: **I have physical tension in my body, in my muscles.** I find myself often drumming my fingers or bouncing my knees or tapping my toes or clenching my jaw.

Number 4: **I am preoccupied and unable to be fully present in the moment.** I have to remind myself to keep looking somebody right in the eye and listening to them. My mind keeps wandering because there are so many things I’m juggling. I just get preoccupied.

Number 5: **I have experienced the loss of a sense of deep gratitude and joy.** I get up in the morning and instead of being grateful, because it’s another day and it’s a gift and I get to be alive. Instead of that, I find myself just overwhelmed with all the stuff I’ve got to do. I’m just on autopilot.

Number 6: **I find myself talking fast.** You find yourself finishing not just your sentences, but other people’s sentences. That’s a gift to others so they don’t have to do all that work themselves. But they often don’t receive it as a gift from you.

Number 7: **I lack vitality.**

Number 8: **I feel that even though I keep going faster, I am somehow missing out on life.** Even though you keep trying to run harder and harder, something is slipping through your fingers, and that something is your life.

OK, add up the number of S’s and O’s. If you have 1 or 2 O’s you have a strong ability to control the pace of your life in the face of many demands, or you don’t have many demands on your life right now. If you have 3-5 O’s, you have hurry sickness, and if you don’t change, it will only get worse to the point where your spiritual and relational life will suffer even more. If you have 6-8 O’s, you are in crisis mode and operating in a very dangerous place near collapse.

The man who developed this quiz did some of the first research on the type A personality profile because he found that this hurry sickness was destroying people’s hearts. This impatience, this hurry, was killing them.

There’s an engineer at Purdue University who was impatient because it took so long to get charcoal briquettes to light when he was trying to barbecue. That’s just a pain. You’ve got to wait all that time for those little things to get warm. So he pumped pure oxygen into the Weber grill to speed up the process. And that worked pretty good. It worked so good, in fact, that he decided that it would be even better to use liquid oxygen, the kind they use in booster rockets.

So he did. And that worked pretty good too. In fact, it burned up all the charcoal, all the food, and the grill in three seconds. He said, “It was pretty bright. You didn’t want to look at it. The meat got a little well done, but on the good side, it only took three seconds.”

Here's a problem in our society, not only do we live with this kind of stuff—not only do we tolerate it, we glorify these traits we glorify hurry sickness. We glorify exhaustion, fatigue, being over-scheduled, over-committed, overworked, because these are signs that I am an important person.

A couple of years ago I sat in on a discussion with several other pastors about why there are fewer and fewer people considering full-time Christian ministry. We came up with several good reasons, but the one that crossed my mind was too embarrassing to share at the time. I asked myself, "Does anybody look at me in my job and say, 'I want to do that! That looks like an amazing calling to pursue.?'?" As I asked that question I thought, the answer is "no." Nobody really wants to do what I do and a big part of the reason is that over the years I've carefully made sure that people know about all the meetings I have to go to, and all hospital visits, and funerals, and staff issues, and building campaigns, and capital campaigns, and you name it.

I've changed, but for years I made sure that my existence was validated, because I led an exhausted, insanely paced life. But it's come back to bite me because nobody wants to live that life. So I've changed the pace of my life AND I've changed how I communicate it. Because I live an amazing life and if God's calling you to full time Christian ministry, I want you to know it's awesome. Life's too short to do it any other way.

So today I want you to walk away with two words from the Bible. Two that are not very common in our day, but are very, very important for people who want to get life right. For people who realize that life's too short to get this wrong. These two words have the power to bring us clarity and health. The first word is written by the Apostle Paul to a church at Corinth.

This is what Paul writes: **"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV).** The first word I want to focus on is this word "abound." We don't use it much.

It meant to overflow, to be full or to excel in something, or to have tremendous energy for the work that God has for you to do. In another place, Paul says, **"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..." (Colossians 3:23, TNIV).** The idea here is God gives everybody work to do, whether you get paid for it or not, whether you're a volunteer, retired, whether you do work in an office, at a church, whether you go to school, whether you do it at home, in the neighborhood. Part of how God made us is to contribute, to create and make the world a better place. God says, "Don't just punch a clock; work with all your heart."

I mean, wouldn't it be great to get to the end of your life and be able to say to God, "I abounded in the work you gave me to do. It may or may not have looked very impressive to other people. It wasn't perfect by a long shot, but I really did try to do with all my might. I tried to work with all my heart, as though I was doing it for you, God."

A thought that came to me this week about this is that God's way works. In tough economic times, who do you think is more likely to lose their job, the one who has been working at their job as if working for God himself, or the one who's been working only when somebody else was watching? There are companies who will use times like this to let go those who are selfish, hard to work with, and lazy.

God's way works. In good times and bad, abound in whatever it is you find yourself working at. As a mechanic, stockbroker, hairdresser, retiree, stay at home mom or dad. Do it as if working for God himself. If you're not doing that already, how would your job performance change if you started today? Abound.

We're to abound in the work of God, but abounding isn't all there is. Here's the other statement that I want for us to look at today, and these are the words of Jesus as they were recorded by John. Jesus says to his followers, **"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (John 15:4-5, NRSV).** In other words, "Apart from me you can't become the kind of person that you need to become all by yourself just by trying really hard. You must abide in me." That word "abide" is a very important word. We don't use it too much today, but Jesus did. Sometimes it is translated "to remain." So when Jesus says that we're to abide with him, the idea is that we are to live always connected to him in an unhurried, peace-producing, ongoing relationship. We abound, we work, we give it all we got, AND we just be.

I don't want to live in the frenzied pace of a world that is certifiably insane. I want to be a really good dad. I want moments with my daughters and with my wife. I want to savor every bit of the mystery, and wonder, and love of marriage. I want to have deep, life-giving friendships. I want to have my mind more formed by Scripture than it is by television.

So on one hand, I want to abound in my life. I want to run the race. I want to fight the fight. I want to throw myself into the work that God has for me to do. I want to grow, risk, sacrifice, leave everything I can on the field, always abounding in the work God has for me to do.

And on the other hand, I want to abide. I want to walk deeply with God. I want to pray. I want to listen. I want to love. I want to learn to be content. I'd like to be still and know that he is God. I want to abide and I want to abound. But, here's what I find. I find that in this world, in my life, there's often a tension—an enormous tension at trying to both abound in what God gives me to do, and abide in the love God wants me to live.

Let me ask a few questions to help us get our brains around this tension. First, **When can I expect this tension to go away?** Anybody want to take a guess? When you die.

Jesus wrestled with this tension throughout his whole life. He gets baptized and he's ready to start his work as a teacher, as a rabbi. But before he does, he goes into the desert and spends a significant time alone with God, fasting and praying in solitude. He goes and just abides before he does anything.

Then he begins his work, and people start coming to him, the Bible says, from all over the region. And it's very draining. So, regularly, Jesus went away to abide again. Mark makes this observation about Jesus: **"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35, NIV).** He was abiding.

So, he does that for a while. Pretty soon, Peter—one of his disciples—and some of the other guys come to Jesus and say to him, "Where have you been? Everybody's looking for you. You've got no pager, no cell phone, no electronic leash, how are we supposed to find you?" And it's real interesting. Jesus doesn't say, "Hey Peter, back off. I'm abiding. Leave me alone."

At that moment, Jesus says, "All right, let's go to some nearby villages so I can teach. That's why I've come." Then he chooses to abound for awhile. And his whole life is this rhythm between abiding deeply, being alone with the Father, and then abounding in the work that the Father gives him to do. And every human being who's interested in following him has to wrestle with that tension. And that tension will not get any easier in our lifetime. You see, just when you've got a rhythm to abounding and abiding and holding those in tension, something will change in your home, or job and you'll need to recalibrate a new rhythm. You and I have are going to wrestle with this tension between abiding and abounding until the day we die if we're really going after it.

That leads to a second question. **Who is responsible for me getting this right?** Want to guess? I am. Who's responsible for you getting this right? No, I'm not responsible! You are responsible for that one. Not your boss, not your pastor, not your spouse, not your parents, not the company you work for. It's you.

So many people live as if somebody else is responsible to arrange their lives correctly. But God will ask everybody in this room one day, "Did you abound in the work that I gave for you to do, and did you abide in my love?" And when he asks that question, he going to ask you. He won't ask your supervisor. He won't ask your parents or your spouse or your kids. He'll just ask you, "Did you abound? Did you abide?"

And that leads me to the last observation I want to make, which again, I'll put in the form of a question. **What must I do to help me keep abiding and abounding?** Because this won't happen automatically. There are a few key things that are foundational.

The first one is **solitude**. Jesus himself did this often, and his followers did as well. They set aside chunks of time where they go to be alone with God. Do you ever get tired of how noisy our world is and how cluttered and frenzied? How are you ever going to get free of that? How are you ever going to get free of the pressure of people at work, maybe in the home, serving in the media, telling you to buy more, do more, earn more, climb higher?

You see, solitude is about freedom. When Jesus would go to be alone with the Father, then he would hear that voice say, "You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased. No matter what anybody else thinks of you, you are my beloved Son." And Jesus would abide in that love. And then he'd be free to abound in God's work and just help people.

So what does it look like for us to do this in our real lives? **It begins with finding your 5.** Start with 5 minutes of solitude every day. The same 5 minutes as much as possible. In the morning. At lunch. Before bed. Start with 5. Set an alarm on your phone, write it on your planner, whatever, but stake it out. Don't be heroic and try to do a couple of hours. Find your 5. A quiet place to talk and listen to God, to read a small slice of scripture. Begin with 5 and then let it grow from there. But it won't happen if you don't make it happen. Solitude is fundamental. It's a fundamental practice in following Christ.

The second foundation element in abounding and abiding is **gathering together.** In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews says, "Don't neglect the gathering of yourselves together to worship God and to learn together." It's what we're doing right now. The Bible says that people in the early church, they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching which was the teaching of Jesus.

Now, why would they devote themselves, arrange their lives around this kind of stuff, when they, just like us, had lots of things to do? They had work and play and families to raise. It's because they were convinced that without a consistent, steady diet of teaching from God's word and worship with God's people, they did not stand a chance of living lives that are bound into God's work and abiding in God's love. Don't miss times of worship. Make the one decision to be in worship each week to feed your soul.

Down through the ages, followers of Christ have found that we need solitude time. We need gather time where we learn. Then we need to **be part of a little community**, a small group of people we're in with relationship with who can know me and love me.

Occasionally, I have bad days, bad weeks, and when I wake up in a funk I just hope that it's a Thursday, because on Thursday mornings I meet up here at the church at 6:30 with my little community. My band of brothers that I can get honest with, share my struggles with, be held accountable to, and find support from and pray with. After an hour or so with them, by the time I leave, almost always, I am ready to abound.

But that wouldn't happen if it weren't for an opportunity to have relational abiding time. Now, at Saint Paul's small groups are our best shot at helping people into community, because it's the best way to experience real community. And if you haven't arranged your life around that, I hope you will. I hope you'll get into a group and let God help you enter into community.

Life is too short to get this wrong. I have a sharp awareness of just how short life is. Probably because I've spent quite a bit of time with people who are dying, and the families of who are grieving. But I have a dream that one day, God will say to me, and to you, and to our church, "Saint Paul's, you abounded in my work. You took big risks. You dreamed great dreams. You rolled up your sleeves and sacrificed your comfort, poured yourselves out. You abounded in my work, and you abided in my love. You spent intimate time alone with me. You devoted yourselves to gathering together to study my word and to give worship and praise.

"You formed deep relationships. You entered into community. Saint Paul's, you abounded in my work, and you abided in my love. Good job." And I hope God says that of you one day. And it can be that way if you want it. Abound and abide. Life's too short to do it any other way. Abound and abide. And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. John Ortberg, teaching pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, for his resources for this message series.