



Slower Living

Week 4: Enjoy Life

Brian Mattson - 06/28/2026

I told you all last week, in confidence, that I have a poor track record of saying yes to everything. My natural personality tendencies are to try everything. Do everything. Meet everyone. The byproduct of that kind of personality can mean that sometimes I do life a mile wide, and an inch deep. So I've been challenged—or rather challenging myself—to focus my time and energy during this sermon series to invest in the things that matter—relationships.

The first week, Heather talked about taking a pause. A rest. A break. A sabbath. We are people loved by God before we even knew God. *That* is our defining characteristic. Not what we do or what we make. Loved by God and called to rest, for when we find rest, we then find fruitfulness.

Lori talked the second week about clearing out the clutter. Not the stuff and gadgets that litter our house—though that is often good clutter to clear—but the clutter in our minds. There are things we need to keep, things we need to share, and things we need to let go. Sorting our minds allows us to focus.

And last week, I invited all of us to focus and invest in what really matters in life—relationships. New ones, old ones, lapsed ones. Because when we focus on people instead of things or status, we are modeling Jesus's own behavior.

Today, I want to talk about enjoying life. Really savoring it. The practices we defined the first three weeks will help set us up to do just that, and live what Jesus calls an abundant life. It's not that we are trying to hack life and squeeze the last drop out of it, maximizing our efficiency with the days we are given. Rather, these methods open up our time, minds, and energy to truly experience a vibrant life rather than hurrying to and fro in a vicious cycle. As we begin, I offer these uplifting words from the teacher and author of Ecclesiastes:

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?

A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down and hurries to the place where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.

All things are wearisome, more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing or the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in the ages before us. The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them.

- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Wow. Ok, so maybe not that uplifting? What's the point of all this living we are going to be doing if the end result is the same, regardless of how we live? We are all going to die...eventually. I hope that's not a spoiler for some of you. It *is* a reality, though, and we can't spend our lives fighting against one of the true absolutes in life. That sentiment—the reality of death and the passing of time—is a theme throughout Ecclesiastes, a book that walks the line between despondency and optimism. We all walk that line at times. I'm not sure what the science or research says on this, or if it's true for every single generation, but life sure seems like it speeds up the older I get. Does it feel like that to you, too? Is this just another example of when the writer of Ecclesiastes says "nothing is new under the sun?"

Luckily, that same author who seems so apathetic about life at times also gives us some of the best advice ever. Advice that sounds a little cliché, but it's good to be reminded of on a regular basis. He repeats his downtrodden words throughout the book, but it's dotted here and there with a call to love life. Here's a particularly beautiful refrain from Ecclesiastes 9:

This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. [So] Go, eat your bread with enjoyment and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

- Ecclesiastes 9:3, 7-10

In essence, this passage says that enjoying life in the midst of the good and the bad, the mundane and the enchanting, is a God-ordained activity. Not just enjoying it, but reveling in it. Wear clothes for a celebration. Put oil on

your head to signify the divine of every day. And this holy life—each breath, tear, smile, and laugh—only exists in the land of the living. In Sheol, when we enter our eternal slumber, those things will be no more. We don't really know what happens when we die, but I know that what we do now matters to God and it mattered to Jesus. Enjoying our lives should be part of the routine.

The part to remember, though—the most important part—is that life is not about more stuff. More possessions. More status. More power. More toys or cars or houses. Those things *can* be used in faithful ways with and for other people, but accruing stuff is not the point of life. Jesus warns about that exact thing in the parable of the rich fool.

This parable happens in the middle of a larger section of teaching when Jesus gets interrupted by a voice from the crowd. Someone yells out, “Hey Jesus, tell my brother to split the family inheritance with me.” I'm sure this got a few laughs from the crowd, but Jesus uses it as a true teaching moment. You see, the rich man in the parable, rather than sharing his abundant harvest with others, instead knocked down his storehouses and built bigger barns. The rich man was concerned with hoarding more and more. Jesus tells them, though, that in the Kingdom of God, when our lives align with God's purposes, we are freed from the concern of having more possessions. And as my commentary says, we learn to grasp less and release more, opening us up to enduring treasure. Shared treasure. That kind of treasure is the joy of abundant life.

I want to grasp less and release more. Do you want that too? You might think that comes naturally to me. I know last week I told you that I want to do everything—and I'm really good at attempting just that. But living that way means I'm less focused on the people and experiences closest to me. The ones most meaningful. I run to and fro, always busy, sometimes effective, rarely planned out. Some people are just the opposite. Always scheduled, sometimes effective, rarely spontaneous. The middle ground of life—as with most things—is probably the best place to live.

I believe Jesus modeled that for us too. When our lives are so planned out that there is no room for interruptions, or conversely, if they have no direction and everything is a crisis, interruptions can overwhelm us. And when we live in those two worlds, whether that is completely planned out or the lack of a schedule, we are basically saying my calendar, my needs, my wants are the most important things. I don't have room for God's timing or the Spirit's prompting because everything is written in stone, or nothing is written down at all and I don't have time to handle one more thing.

Jesus embraced interruptions. They became teaching moments, like the parable of the rich man who built bigger barns. They were the miracles that punctuated his travels in the gospels. A woman touches his cloak when he's in the middle of a different interruption, and instead of treating her like an annoyance and moving on, he stops. The disciples wanted to just be on their way, but Jesus slowed down. Jesus recognized that this interruption might be meaningful instead of a nuisance. Jesus lived with enough margin to allow for the spontaneity of life. He showed how to be present with interruptions instead of irritated.

Plans are beautiful things. Schedules and routines provide the framework for our busy lives, but when they become rigid and immovable, are we sapping a little bit of joy from life? Many of the most memorable encounters in the gospels happened because Jesus was interrupted with a question, a challenge, or a need. That is often true in my own life.

The stories we tell and retell as a family or with my oldest friends, the ones that cause us to laugh through tears, usually happened because of an interruption or a spontaneous something or other. We plan vacations and get together, but the people and conversations that show up unannounced are often what sticks with us. And if we're so planned out there's no room or margin for spontaneity, OR if we're running through life without a plan and unable to pay attention to the present moment, it's so easy to miss those opportunities

I watched this happen in real time this week. On Wednesday, Brent and I were heading to lunch at Pitts Chapel for a fundraiser, and there in the parking lot getting out of his car was Ron Carrier, one of our board members. He was coming downtown to eat at Pickelman's on his lunch hour. We told him about our lunch plans and invited him to join us. Now, I don't know if he was looking forward to a quiet lunch by himself to gather his thoughts, or if he was in a hurry, but Ron thought for a moment and decided to change plans and join us. He even drove!

What was going to be a nice lunch with a co-worker turned into something bigger and better, and if Ron didn't have the margin in his life to change plans, we all would've missed out. We had a lovely time over hamburgers and conversation. We talked to each other, Pitts Chapel members, and even took a peek at the historic sanctuary. He might have a slightly different perspective of this whole encounter, but that's okay. He's not preaching today. This is my story. All I know is that Ron was willing to lean into life when it's often easier to lean into what's comfortable and familiar.

I don't know about you, but I'm looking at life through a slightly different lens after these four weeks. I want to slow down, take a breath, clear my mind, focus on people, and then feast on the joy of life. We aren't asked to be like the religious elites who lived their lives in dry and dull ways, slaves to the law. We aren't made to be aimless wanderers either. I believe when we order our lives to align with God's will and purposes, joy is easier to be found. Interruptions become something else altogether. Episcopal Priest, Joseph Yoo says:

Maybe the goal isn't to become the kind of person who never gets interrupted. Maybe the goal is to become the kind of person who can recognize an opportunity when one arrives disguised as an interruption. People are not interruptions. People are the point.

- Rev. Joseph Yoo

I had a very wise pastor a few years ago who said something similar whenever I would vent about a long chat I had with someone at the church, or some other interruption that I didn't really have time for. She said *meetings are the ministry*. In essence, I needed to change my perspective. Interruptions are important. Spontaneous adventures are magical. Casual conversations can make lasting impacts. It's probably true, in a sense, what the author of Ecclesiastes writes; that there's nothing new under the sun. When you stand far enough away from it all, it can sure look like that. Seasons change. People are born and grow up. There's love, hate, work, sleep, and at the end we all perish. But if we zoom in and get close enough to really see how magical this whole thing is, *everything* is new under the sun. Each breath is a holy moment. Every snuggle with my kids or dinner with my wife is a brand new experience. Lunch with old friends or coffee with new ones gives a freshness to the day. And if you happen to bump into someone unexpected in the parking lot, invite them to join you. It's not an interruption. It's an opportunity to experience a new kind of joy.