

SERMON NOTES:

EMBRACE GOD'S GIFT OF LIMITS Part 1

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Series

3 March 2024

Today we address the next challenging truth in our sermon series, Mission Impossible Made Possible, from the book Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, on embracing God's Gifts of Limits. These subjects continue to challenge all of us to be real in Jesus in every area of our life.

Now, I love to sing, so much so I joined my Primary School choir, but I was asked to leave because my voice started squeaking!

After I accepted Christ, I discovered worship, (I still loved to sing!) learnt to play the guitar, and tried my best to sing in tune. I even joined the church choir again to learn to sing in tune.

I thought I was doing OK, until my best friend tried to teach me to sing according to the chords we played, and he gave up after three afternoons! I realised my limits are that I sing between the real notes. It's why I have been asked not to audition for the music group! So, I've learnt the only place I sing, loudly, is when I am alone in the shower; it's fun until I get soap in my mouth, then it's a soap opera. By accepting my limit to not lead the singing, I show God's people my love for them. 😊

If you're like me, we just don't like any limits in our lives! Especially speed limits!

WE DON'T ENJOY LIMITS...

We believe that we can do anything and everything at any time. So, we're supremely confident that we can drive a car at high speed, on worn tyres in a thunderstorm. We don't think that this is an accident waiting to happen until we experience the terrifying moment of losing control and colliding with an immovable object. Despite the advice of older and wiser individuals, we tend to believe that we have unlimited freedom and can make our own choices without any consequences. *Nobody can tell **me** what to do!*

We do not want to accept the absolute limits in God's Word that warn us away from sin, because, truthfully, sin is enjoyable. So, we lose sight of how destructive sin is in our lives and the impact our sin has on others. The limits of the 10 commandments are provided for a reason, and as much as we try to deny them, they reveal a loving God who just wants what's best for us. How?

The truth is that limits offer us protection, and keep us from painful experiences, or from hurting others. They keep us grounded and humble, reminding us that we are not in charge of our lives, let alone responsible for running the world. Limits help us overcome our self-will and so submit or surrender to God's will for us. They are God's means to give our lives a fulfilling direction when we choose to listen. Limits help us grow in wisdom. And perhaps most importantly, limits are the places we encounter God in ways that would otherwise be impossible.

Can we now see that limits are a gift from God for our benefit? Because limits are a deeply spiritual issue and can be viewed as guardrails for our lives. They help to keep us moving in the right direction without wandering away from God's direction

for our lives. When we accept the limits that God has placed in our lives, we accept that we are not God, and we cannot do everything. **God is God and we are not.**

How we choose to understand and respond to our limits goes to the core of our relationship with God. It's so foundational that, from the very beginning Satan's strategy has been to target all our limits. The Bible shows us that:

1. LIMITS IN THE GARDEN

God gave Adam and Eve complete freedom in the Garden of Eden, allowing them to enjoy their work and their achievements. Then, God set a limit:

Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT2)

¹⁶ But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

God wanted Adam and Eve to trust and surrender to His goodness and love, but they defied the one limit God set for them. They fell for Satan's sneaky temptation that God did not love them, and that having a limit proved this.

Genesis 3:4-5 (NLT2)

⁴ "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵ "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

Adam and Eve faced a choice, to believe that God knows what is best for them into the future, and so accept the limit God gave them; or to try and be "like God," i.e. 'unlimited!' Their choice still impacts our lives today! God gave us a solution.

2. JESUS ACCEPTED HIS LIMITS

In **Matthew 4:1-11**, Satan tempts Jesus to defy the human limits He had accepted and to choose not to trust God to meet His immediate needs and instead to patiently wait for God to provide the solutions required.

- Jesus was hungry after not eating for 40 days, so Satan suggested "*Turn the stones into bread, You do not have to be hungry!*" (vs 2,3)
- Then Satan suggested that if God really loved Jesus, He would protect Him if Jesus jumped off the highest steeple in Jerusalem. (vs 5,6)
- Finally, Satan said to Jesus: "*You can rule over the world now, without the suffering to come if you just say yes to me.*" (vs 8,9)

Jesus' answer in each case was to quote God's Word and so He accepted God's limits. These choices were based on Jesus' understanding of who God is, upon the guardrails (or limits) that God's Word provides and upon His trust in God.

God places two kinds of limits before us and we need to be able to distinguish between them. We do this by asking two primary questions:

LIMITS TO ACCEPT AND SUBMIT TO

- Let's start with the first and more difficult question: What limits do I need to **accept and submit to?**

Acknowledging the limit, that's ok, but submitting? We don't like to hear that we are to submit and accept God's limits in our lives. Last week Andrew spoke of

RELAXING in God, or trusting Him, which is submitting to Him. The Bible gives us a powerful example of receiving, acknowledging, and submitting to God's Word:

1 Chronicles 17:1-4 (NLT2)

¹ *When David was settled in his palace, he summoned Nathan the prophet. "Look," David said, "I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of the LORD's Covenant is out there under a tent!"* ² *Nathan replied to David, "Do whatever you have in mind, for God is with you."*

³ *But that same night God said to Nathan,* ⁴ *"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD has declared: You are not the one to build a house for me to live in."*

Imagine David, at the height of success and popularity, having more wealth than ever before, thinking – "here's something I can **do** for God!" Even the priests say, "go for it!", but God says no!

This was a critical moment for King David. His choice would either qualify or disqualify him as a true king with a heart for God. David's response was to "be" before he started "doing." He stopped, sought to be still, prayed and during his time in God's presence, realised that God had a complete plan that he could not see. David chose to surrender his will to God's limit for him because he knew that 'God is good' and that 'His plans are for our best.'

Psalm 115:3 (NLT2)

³ *Our God is in the heavens, and He does as He wishes.*

It may appear to us that God does as He wants but we forget that He is still in control of everything, and He knows the future! Only God sees the complete picture of our time on earth from the past, our present and the future.

David faced a core spiritual question at that moment, one that we will all face in our lives: "Do I trust God, believing He is good and that He is in control of all things?"

Like David, can we conclude that our knowledge is too limited to recognise all of God's plans and even His goals for us? Not only today but into the future!

Limits are not always just supernatural – there are some personal limits we must recognize in our lives first. Here are some key areas we need to honestly assess:

1. The limits of my personality and temperament.

It's what energizes us, how we organise our lives, whether we are spontaneous and creative, and how much we need to be in control. There are many online personality tests available that help us discover our personality. I remember the first tests I did showed that I liked to be in control, orderly and structured. Now I look at my office and cry!

2. The limits of seasons of life.

The Bible says: "*For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NLT2)*". There is a reason that parents with newborn babies are always tired – their focus is on sleep (the lack thereof!) Teenagers think they know everything, and young adults challenge the current environment – and that's good because the older we get the less we want change to happen! Those who retire have more time for prayer, for studying God's Words and for mentoring. These are some of the seasons that we live through with God's presence and guidance.

3. **The limit of marriage or singleness.**

Being married is a limit – and that’s not a negative! Marriage means taking the needs of my wife and family into consideration when making decisions. Being single has different kinds of limits, “*Where will that 100” TV fit?*”. How can we (either married or single) demonstrate a healthy relationship with God to others? Where can my schedule be changed to give and receive love in a healthy community with church members? It’s all limits!

4. **What are the limits of our emotional, physical, and intellectual capability?**

If our work week regularly exceeds 60 hours a week, we soon become exhausted, unable to think, angry, confused easily, forgetful etc...If we do not take time to be still and allow God to re-create us, we are on the road to frustration, depression, and even physical sickness.

Whilst on a project, programmers kept upgrading the software during a computer network upgrade at Nedbank. This meant I was working long hours and soon reached a point of exhaustion. After expressing my frustration to management, my employer sent me (and the family) away for a long weekend. The programmers took over the late-night work and the boss handled the early morning meetings, and things changed after that.

5. **The limits of time.**

We only live one life and we cannot do everything! Every minute that passes is one minute we have less to spend on this earth. So, what is important? How can we make the most of every opportunity we have? What’s our priority? We need to choose how we spend our time carefully and wisely:

“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12 NIV).

Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Ephesians 5:16 (NLT2)

What are our limits? *I realized after some prayer that my limit was not to lead a church as a visionary senior pastor. God didn’t call me to do that, but His limits for me were to administrate, to organize and to help others in their spiritual growth.* What limits do you need to receive and submit to? Tough question, isn’t it?

Let’s get to the second question.

LIMITS TO BREAK THROUGH

- What limits is God asking me to **break through?**

What does it look like to break through limits by faith? The Bible mentions these people who experienced breakthroughs:

- Sarah was ninety and Abraham was “as good as dead” (Romans 4:19). Yet, God made Sarah a mother of nations.
Romans 4:19 (NIV)
Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.
- Elijah was a prophet prone to serious bouts of depression, and yet he was mightily used by God.

- The twelve disciples were not highly educated, naturally gifted, or had a huge Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram following. They had no prior leadership experience that would have prepared them to lead the most important movement in human history.
- Timothy, apparently fearful and shy by nature, was called by God to lead a large, influential, yet very difficult church at Ephesus, which was beset by divisions, problems, and conflicts.
- Mary was a teenager from a poor family, living in a small town of fifty to two hundred people in Nazareth, at a time when an unmarried, pregnant young girl was shameful. The punishment for ignoring this limit was death by stoning. Yet she was God's chosen vessel to give birth to Jesus.

God used each of these individuals in extraordinary ways as they broke through their limits by faith.

We set many limits for ourselves that God desires to break through! Here's an example: *'We don't want to pray for anyone because we believe that God cannot use us! Our excuses include we're too young, too old, or too sinful; we can't speak publicly, we're too afraid of what people would think of us, we don't know what to say or we're just too rebellious!'*

Here's the truth – God loves us enough that we're called His children, His Holy Spirit in us gives us all the courage and the words to say; we have no further excuses. There is no ageism in the Kingdom of God, we're all youngsters – when viewed in terms of eternity! In God's family, everyone gets to take part in His mission for us.

FINALLY

So, in summary, we just dislike limits, but God has put them in place like guardrails in our lives, helping to keep us on track for Him. So, there are some limits we need to break through (not speed limits!) and others we need to receive and submit to. We keep on asking God for wisdom when faced with these limits as to what our response needs to be.

There will be more challenges on facing our limits next week.