

## Christmas: “An Emotional Rollercoaster” “HURRY”

*When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s got to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. Luke 2:15-16*

In one of the earlier messages in this series we discussed how this quick response by the shepherds would have been out of character for these slow-moving, calculating watchdogs. But hurry is certainly not out of character for most of us, especially this time of year. I’m amazed at how often I hear from so many, just how busy they are this time of year, and how often I say it myself. Life is in such a hurry. Maybe we can learn a lesson or two from considering this ‘emotion’; **HURRY** today? I hope so.

In our annual Christian “lament” over the secularization of Christmas, we often mention how crazy consumerism and gaudy gift buying, and political correctness run amuck; have ruined the real meaning of Christmas. I wish to add (another) regret to this perversion of Christmas, which extends far past gift buying and giving, well beyond parties and celebrations, way afar from Christmas, and well into our next new year. Shoot, lets be honest, hurry is an everyday part of every day of the rest of our lives... unless we choose differently. Hurry is not seasonal; it has become inevitable in our modern world.

People are hurrying to stuff all the time. People ‘run to the store’, people ‘eat on the run’. But people are also hurrying away from stuff too. People are ‘running away’ from their pasts, or ‘running from the law’, people are ‘running out of time’. Why are we in such a hurry? For all the running you did this week, what great advantage did it add to your life? How many had to ‘run’ even to get to church today?

My question is if we are going so much faster, shouldn't we be getting ahead somehow? With all the time-saving, and microwave advantages that have been invented in the past 50 years shouldn't life be easier, and slower, and somehow more meaningful? One of the great illusions (some might say 'flat-out lies) of modernity is that hurrying will buy us more time. Circuit City has just issued a commercial promise that you can order anything on their web-site via your credit card, and pick it up in your local retail store in 24 minutes or receive a 24 dollar rebate if it's not ready. Saving...time! Really???

Time magazine recorded back in the 1960s that expert testimony was given to a subcommittee of the Senate on time management. The gist of their report was that due to the dramatic new advances in technology, within twenty years Americans would be facing a serious issue with excess leisure time. We would need to cut back radically on how many hours a week we work, on how many weeks a year we work--and we'd be forced to start retiring sooner. The great challenge, they said, would be figuring out what to do with all the excess time. 50 years later how many of us would say that having too much time is our primary challenge? Somehow the opposite has become true.

I think I have found a potential remedy for the hurriedness of our lives in the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm. I'd like to read verse 1-11, and then visit for a few minutes about the prescription found there to help us slow the heck down! The shepherds might have hurried to the manger, but I have a hunch they had a leisurely, confident, comfortable walk back to their sheep, and the lesson ought to be obvious: The manger of Jesus is the only legitimate place to which any of us ought to hurry; for it's in the manger we find the antidote for hurry. Carl Jung the great Swiss psychiatrist once stated; "Hurry is not of the devil, hurry is the devil!" This time of year...who of us could argue with that?

Listen to this Psalm:

*Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong. For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither. Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.*

*He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper – it only leads to harm. For the wicked will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will possess the land. Psalm 37:1-11*

I find 5 directives there that are directly related to our relationship with the Lord. It is those that I want to consider. Three of them are quite obvious and often mentioned; two of them more intriguing at least to me. Let's consider them all now.

### **1. TRUST IN THE LORD (and do good)**

It would be fair to say that trust in God is the primary point of this entire passage. Learning how to place a dependent trust in God is hard for us self-driven, self-assured, self-trusting humans. I've heard people say to me, "I been burned by so many people, the only person I can trust is myself." I typically respond; "I've let myself, others and God down so often, I'm often the last person I want to trust"!

In what do you place your trust? We've just concluded a stewardship series of sermons where we explored the dangers of placing our trust in our money, or our resources or our earnings, or our retirement accounts. As necessary as each of those items might be to our daily existence; they are an illegitimate source wherein to place our trust!

Some people put there trust in their own human ingenuity. Again, that seems suspect to me! Oh, they might say they trust God, but when push comes to shove, they are relying on their best efforts; separating once again what we say from what we really do.

Trust in the Lord and do good. As a prescription for overcoming hurry, this is a good start. When we feel like it's all up to us, we have to hurry to get more done, to reassure ourselves that we are important, to prove to the world and ourselves that we are trustworthy. I implore you this Christmas (and beyond) to place your trust firmly in God, and hold all other trusts, all other trusts...in suspended suspicion! To get off the hurry train, #2:

## **2. TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD (and He will give you your hearts desires)**

This is one of the two I find most interesting. Take delight in the Lord. Most of us find our greatest delight in our families, our friends, our hobbies, our interactions with the things of this earth that we have come to love. And though those things might not be wrong, or bad, or evil, they too are illegitimate sources of serious delight! Family members can disappoint us, and some of them die. Friends can betray us, and sometimes turn against us. Most of us grow too old to pursue our youthful hobbies, and few of us as the end draws near find much comfort or joy in the continual dusting of 'stuff' we wish we could give away!

Better to find your delight in the Lord! Delight is both a noun and verb that means to take pleasure in, to find or enjoy very much the pleasure of something. I like the thought that our delight ought to be in God and God alone. And when we can place our delight in God, the promise is even more intriguing! He will give you your hearts desires! Pursuing the "things" we think will delight us, we think can delight us, often proves futile, like chasing a butterfly. Few of us can catch butterflies, but if we sit still, remain quiet, we might be surprised how often they will come and land on our shoulder or our head. So too, choosing to find our greatest pleasure in God; allows God to reinterpret our life, and soon come land softly on our shoulder with the real joy and fulfillment that no thing can duplicate! The Good things in life...aren't things.

I know that some folks try to interpret this passage to mean that God will give us everything we want. I'm not sure, but I think the fulfillment of this promise has more to do with the quality and character of our delighting in God, than with getting what we think we want. If we would really find our deepest delight in God, then our hearts desires might look radically different than the lists we continually present to Santa Claus! If we would really find our deepest delight in God, maybe we wouldn't have to be hurriedly driven to grab all the gusto this life often promises, but fails to deliver. Slow-down strategy #3:

### **3. COMMIT EVERYTHING TO THE LORD (and He will help you)**

This command has become a vague, trite, cop-out for too many irresponsible people. "Well, you just have to commit it to the Lord..." "Well, if you were 'really' committed to God you wouldn't be poor, or sick or whatever." "Well, if you would just commit it to God, then your life would be great...just like mine!" Sometimes hearing about how much more I should commit my life, makes me sick!

I know commitment is the key to being a Christian, and I know I fail miserably in this endeavor...but I keep trying! The key here is not the word commit...it's the word everything! I have to commit my half-heartedness, and my willfulness, and my sinfulness to God just as much as I need to commit my life and family to God. I'm not trying to minimize the significance of commitment, but to reveal that real commitment often means acknowledging that even when I think I'm totally committed, I'm not totally committed. I'm still human, and that too is a gift from God! AMEN? And as such, a struggling human, I'm blown away with the addendum to this command: "And He will help you/me!" Help me with what? MY COMMITMENT! Your commitment! It is our job to daily, continually, commit everything to God, and yet God asks us to join Him in the ongoing sanctification process of becoming more like Jesus everyday, every year, every decision, even every failure! I'm glad He promises to help me...or I'd be lost! #4:

#### **4. BE STILL IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD (and wait patiently for Him to act)**

Maybe it's because of the noisy Christmas season, but today, I feel like this is 'key' for me to slowing down, this is crucial for me to slow down the run-away train that my life often becomes. Maybe it'll be for you just what you need to hear today, so please pay attention.

I'm not going to advocate that you add more 'quiet time' to your already over-hurried schedule; but I'm going to ask us all to consider, stopping the machine just once in awhile to be still in the presence of Jesus.

I can't help but think about the weary disciples returning from another long ministry trip, with rejections and rebukes; begging for Jesus to give them a break. They had been so busy doing ministry, they didn't even have time to eat! The needs were so pressing, they couldn't stop. Their ministry was so vital, so crucial they couldn't possible give it up, even for just a few minutes. Jesus told them to come away with him, and rest; just like he practiced Himself with His heavenly Father.

I learned this lesson many years ago in Monterrey Mexico. While visiting with a Pastor and Mission society, we discovered that 1000 people lived on each city block of the 10 square blocks that surrounded their center. They were at that time experiencing a 90% conversion rate for people that they could reach with the gospel message! Don't you think that might inspire greater witnessing knowing that 9 out of 10 people you shared the gospel with would be converted? Yet, these simple Mexican believers spent valuable time each day praying, worshipping, fellowshipping...all the time I'm wondering why we weren't out there witnessing for Jesus, winning those lost souls.

I need to relearn the lesson, and maybe you do too! If Jesus, God's son, the Divine/Human incarnate found the necessity of meeting with God non-negotiable, who the heck do we think we are? Are we so indispensable to the operation of our family that we have to do it all?

Are we so valuable to our business or job, that we must put in more time than anyone else? Are we so important to the operation of this world that we can neglect God...then we truly are in way over our heads, and we are in trouble! For God's sake, slow down! Get off the train! Stop your hurrying and scurrying around...you're making me tired! We must be still, be quiet, be alone, be patient...and watch God do His miraculous renewing work. Sometimes our hurry keeps us from Jesus. We must stop that! And #5

##### **5. HOPE IN THE LORD (and you will possess the land)**

I'm not sure how to apply the principle of possessing the land, but 'the land' those Hebrew readers/hearers would consider was the Promised Land. We might want to consider Heaven as the possession we'll possess as we place our unhurried hope in the Lord! I think to state it simply would be good. When we place and find our Hope in God, then eternities values become our earthly realities! And when we start hoping in God, we can stop running crazy around this world! So much of our hurry might be beneficially sacrificed at the altar of eternity, with a corresponding reduction in the nonsense that fills our schedules, drains our energy, depletes our bank accounts, destroys our families, and hurries our lives! Our hope is not in things of this world, but in the realities of an eternity filled with Jesus. Our hope is not passing and transitory, but firm and steady. Our hope is not just spiritual, but actual. Our hope in God removes from us the pressure to win, succeed, overcome and endure; replacing each instead with a profound and divine sense of confident resignation that God is still God, we are not, and it's all going to work out in the end! AMEN?

John Ortberg is an accomplished author and pastor on staff at maybe the largest church in America. Suppose his life is busy? Wonder if he ever finds himself hurried? I read this week of a story he told about coming to a place in his life in recent years, when he was at his wit's end with busyness...ever been there?

He decided to call his mentor, a wise old retired seminary professor and ask his advice. He called long distance, recounted his many responsibilities, obligations, commitments and appointments. Following the litany, he asked his most trusted friend to recommend a pathway to get out from under this stress. There was a long pause; finally his professor friend replied: "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." Ortberg had his note pad out and in lightning speed he jotted that down. There was another long pause, and Ortberg became a little impatient, so he said: "Eliminate hurry from my life. That's good. I've got that. What else?" Ortberg said that his mind was already sending anxiety signals to his body about things that needed his attention, and this was a long-distance phone call and he wanted to cram as many units of spiritual wisdom into the least amount of time possible. Another long pause. "There is nothing else," the friend said. "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." From his immense quiver of spiritual wisdom, his friend had drawn only one arrow to address a complicated challenge.

Our friends the shepherds hurried to the manger to find Jesus; but there is little else in this world that deserves such hurry. Trust in the Lord, Delight in the Lord, Commit everything to the Lord, Be still in the Lord, and Hope in the Lord, and for heavens sake...ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life!

Let's hurry up and sing the hymn...I've got somewhere I need to be! Just kidding!

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1. \_\_\_\_\_ **IN THE LORD (and do good)**
2. **TAKE** \_\_\_\_\_ **IN THE LORD (and He will give you your hearts desires)**
3. \_\_\_\_\_ **EVERYTHING TO THE LORD (and He will help you)**
4. **BE** \_\_\_\_\_ **IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD (and wait patiently for Him to act)**
5. \_\_\_\_\_ **IN THE LORD (and you will possess the land)**

## STUDY / DEVOTIONAL GUIDE FOR EMOTION:

### ***“Hurry”***

This week I would like to suggest that we read Psalm 37 each day, and spend time each day considering how we might implement the following 5 strategies into our lives. I also want you to pray and ask God to help you find specific and practical ways to slow down the ‘hurry’ of your life.

**Monday: “Trust in the Lord, and do Good.”**

**Tuesday: “Take Delight in the Lord, and He will give you your hearts desires.”**

**Wednesday: “Commit everything to the Lord, and He will help you.”**

**Thursday: “Be Still in the Presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for God to act.”**

**Friday: “Hope in the Lord and possess ‘the land.’”**