

Reach Beyond

4 February and 11 February (Florida) 2007

Colossians 3:23-24 *The Message* “Don’t do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your God, confident that you’ll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the one you’re serving is Christ. The sullen one who does shoddy work will be held responsible: Being Christian doesn’t cover up bad work.”

Sermon nugget: How do we reach beyond the mediocre and ordinary to live and experience life the way God intended?

I know probably most of you have heard all the stories going around Indy about the Super Bowl, and the Colts. I was out west for some time off and a conference (BTW—thanks, Stan), and felt really out of touch, except for some of the stories that kept coming to me from some of you. Just in case you missed them, I thought it was appropriate to share at least one of them that, in a remote way, has to do with our theme for today.

Did you heard about John Madden announcing a football game in San Diego? He happened to notice a special telephone near the Charger bench, and asked Rivers what it was used for. He was told it was a hotline to God, and since John was having a bit of a problem getting his weekly predictions right, he asked if he could use it. Rivers replied, “Sure, but it will cost you \$200.” Figuring he could use the help, he paid the \$200. His picks were perfect that week.

The next week, John was in New England when he noticed the same kind of phone on the Patriots bench. He asked, and Tom Brady told him that it was a hotline to God. “If you want to use it,” he said, “it will cost you \$500.” Recalling how his picks had gone the last time, he pulled out his wallet and paid the \$500, and once again, his picks were perfect that week.

The next weekend, Madden was in Indianapolis when he noticed the very same kind of phone by the Colts bench. He asked Peyton, “Is that the hotline to God?” Peyton told him that it was, and said, “If you want to use it, it will cost you 35 cents.”

Madden was astounded, and said, “Wait a second. I just paid \$200 in San Diego and \$500 in New England to use the same phone to God- Why do the Colts only charge 35 cents?”

Peyton looked at John and answered, “Because in Indianapolis, it’s a local call.” Now I really don’t think God chooses sides in a contest like the one today, but I do believe that we have God-given talents and abilities that, if we use them well, can help us reach certain goals in life. Let’s think about what that has to do with our topic for today and what it has to say to us.

The term “reach beyond” actually came from a book by Joan Anderson, entitled *A Walk on the Beach*. The author writes about walking along with water on Cape Cod on a foggy, cold February day when she met a woman who became a

significant figure in her life. The woman was Joan Erikson, wife and collaborator of Erik Erikson, a noted psychoanalyst whose stages of human development deeply influenced the field of contemporary psychology. She had retreated to Cape Cod to care for her then ailing husband.

It happened to be at the time when the author was experiencing a midlife crisis, and here she was meeting a woman whose husband had coined the term “identity crisis.” At that time, Joan Anderson was 51 years old, and Joan Erikson was forty years her senior, but Joan Erikson became the person who took the writer under her wing, and helped her understand what really mattered in life.

At one point in their friendship, Joan Erikson shared that when she needed to get hold of her strengths and understand who she was and who she was becoming, she took up weaving. She wound up weaving her life cycle on a loom, and she encouraged Joan Anderson to give it a try.

Finally, the writer agreed to try it, and Joan Erikson became her instructor. The very first step was tying strands of gray from the top to the bottom of the frame. Joan Anderson asked why they were using gray, and Joan Erikson replied, “Because gray is a lifeless, somewhat dull shade, **it reminds me to reach beyond the dull to the more colorful aspects of living.**”

To reach beyond the gray were really words that resonated with me. It’s moving beyond that which is dull, easily within range and somewhat ordinary, to go a step beyond, to reach farther, and stretch more. When it comes to football, that’s what the Colts are doing, and when it comes to life, that’s what we can do, because the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that the spirit of God was talking to Joan Anderson, and to all of us.

God wants us to move beyond the dull toward the more colorful aspects of living. My sense is that God wants us to live life being fully who we’re meant to be, using all our strengths and talents, living passionately and without reservation, being fully engaged in every part of life.

That’s what our Bible passage is talking about today. It’s a writing of the apostle Paul, and although the context he was addressing is different from ours, I think his main point rings out loud and clear. This is how our version reads: **“Don’t just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your God, confident that you’ll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the one you’re serving is Christ. The sullen one who does shoddy work will be held responsible: Being Christian doesn’t cover up bad work.”**

Paul says several things that give us some direction as to what reaching beyond just might be like. He reminds us that our lives are not about just doing enough to get by, coasting along. I wonder how many of us need to hear that? I suspect we could all plead guilty at times to the charge of just getting by, doing just enough, but no more, to meet the request or the requirement. Mostly it never occurs to us to go one more inch, let alone the extra mile.

That's not what it means to live fully, and that's not what God hopes we do with the gift of life that we've each been given. Part of living as a fully engaged person is about giving our best, no matter what we're talking about. Obviously, that doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean being the best we can be, and always striving to learn and grow.

Sara Hall is a woman who's written a book entitled *Drawn to the Rhythm*, in which she tells how she got into rowing a single shell competitively. That activity was one she worked hard at, for both her physical and psychological well-being, and she got to the point that she won several medals. At one point in the book, she talks about what real success looked like to her. She says "Doing my best, not being the best. That's what I train for; that's what I race for. To enjoy the thrill of winning is fine; to fall in love with it is futile—you can't be the best forever."

She says very clearly that giving our best doesn't have anything to do with beating out anyone else. It's not about winning a race, or getting a trophy. It's about giving our all, whether anyone else is watching, or not. I doubt seriously that, when this life is over and if we face any kind of accountability, it will have anything at all to do with how we did compared to other people—whether we were more gifted or less, whether we earned more awards than someone else, or not. It will be a matter of doing the best with what we have—plain and simple. As Somerset Maugham once said, "It is a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it."

Another thing the Bible passage tells us is to "work from the heart." That means to work with deep desire and dedication. We must be totally committed to doing whatever we do with every ounce of our being. It is really all about motivation. While many of us are motivated by the promise of external rewards, Paul is saying that inner motivation, our innermost being telling us what it is to be true to ourselves—that's the very best kind of motivation. Knowing that's how God has created us to live and be can be all the motivation we need to work from our hearts with commitment and dedication.

I think Paul is using the word "work" intentionally. Giving our best isn't easy; it takes effort, effort when we don't feel like it, effort when we're tired, effort when we're preoccupied, effort when we're put out with someone. When we say we have a heart for something, the words are empty unless we take the necessary steps to move toward that goal. We have to do the work.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Suppose we say that we want to be a musician, but we never do anything to become a musician, much less to become an acceptable one whose music can delight others. We don't take lessons; we don't practice; we just continue to say that our heart's desire is to be a professional musician. Probably most of us can figure out that we'll never make it that way. We have to do the work to get there.

I'm sure you've heard the story about the young violinist who dashed up to a cabby, violin case in hand, panting breathlessly, and said, "Quick! How do I get to Carnegie

Hall?" The cabby eyed him and his violin case and answered, "Practice, man, practice." When we work with all our heart, we do whatever it takes to become the person we want to be.

There's yet another thing that the Bible writer mentions a couple of times. He says we're to work from the heart *for God*, and that the one we're serving is *Christ*. What he's talking about we need to understand why we're to give our best. We will want to give our best and we will want to work from the heart when we understand that it's for a higher purpose.

Paul is trying to tell us that living life solely for ourselves is a futile undertaking and leads down a dead-end street. If that's how we insist on living, we will wind up feeling pretty empty and miserable. We will find that the deep void we experience can't be filled with things or activities, and the enjoyment we experience is only temporary and fleeting.

The reality is that you and I exist to contribute, to serve, to reach beyond ourselves and make a difference in this world. That's the only purpose that's worthy for every single one of us—to make the world a better place in which to live. Gail Sheehy, in her book *Pathfinders*, wrote, "My research offers impressive evidence that we feel better when we attempt to make our world better...to have a purpose beyond one's self lends to existence a meaning and direction—the most important characteristic of high well-being." Having a purpose for being is what feeds the soul, and nothing else will suffice. The purpose for us all—each in our own way—is to reach beyond ourselves, to reach beyond any perceived limits, and to make this world better. Can we do it?

Closing:

An unknown author gave the following perspective on life:

What is Life?

Life is a gift...accept it.

Life is an adventure...dare it.

Life is a mystery...unfold it.

Life is a game...play it.

Life is struggle...face it.

Life is beauty...praise it.

Life is a puzzle...solve it.

Life is opportunity...take it.

Life is sorrowful...experience it.

Life is a song...sing it.

Life is a goal...achieve it

Life is a mission...fulfill it.

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we will see life as a song to sing, a Super Bowl game to play, a mystery to unfold, a gift to accept, and a mission to fulfill, and today as a good day to start. How about it?

Have a great Sunday, GO COLTS!!!! and go in peace. Amen.