

5: The gift of limits

“if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor 5:17)

Emotionally Healthy People understand the limits God has given them. Instead of living a life that is frenzied and covetous they are joyful and content.

Read the story “The Dilemma of the Bridge”. How does this make you feel?

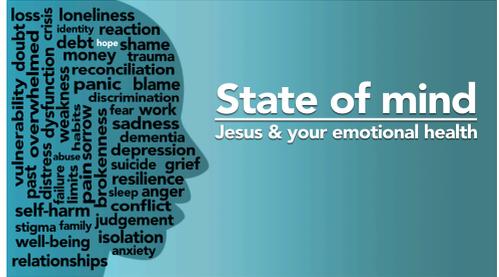
What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about boundaries and limits and what you say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to?

How did Jesus embrace limitations?

How did they equip and enable him to be and do what God had called him to?

To be human is to live within limits. When we refuse to live within limits, we are refusing to live with a basic reality of human existence. There is a finiteness to what we can do.

There is a finiteness to how many relationships we can engage in meaningfully at any one time.



There is a finiteness to time-how many hours there are in a day, how many days there are in a week and how much can be done in those blocks of time.

There is a finiteness to our energy. There comes a time when we are tired, sick or injured.

These are times when we are reminded that we are human - finite beings living in the presence of an infinite God. God is the infinite one. God is the one who can be all things to all people. God is the one who can be in all places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. You are not.

Our unwillingness to live within limits-both personally and in community-is one of the deepest sources of depletion and eventual burnout. -Ruth Haley Barton

The Dilemma of the Bridge

Rabbi Edwin Friedman tells the story of a man who had given much thought to what he wanted from life. After trying many things, succeeding at some and failing at others, he finally decided what he wanted.

One day the opportunity came for him to experience exactly the way of living that he had dreamed about. But the opportunity would be available only for a short time. It would not wait, and it would not come again.

Eager to take advantage of this open pathway, the man started on his journey. With each step, he moved faster and faster. Each time he thought about his goal, his heart beat quicker; and with each vision of what lay ahead, he found renewed vigour.

As he hurried along, he came to a bridge that crossed through the middle of a town. The bridge spanned high above a dangerous river.

After starting across the bridge, he noticed someone coming the opposite direction. The stranger seemed to be coming toward him to greet him. As the stranger grew closer, the man could discern that they didn't know each other, but yet they looked amazingly similar. They were even dressed alike. The only difference was that the stranger had a rope wrapped many times around his waist. If stretched out, the rope would reach a length of perhaps thirty feet.

The stranger began to unwrap the rope as he walked. Just as the two men were about to meet, the stranger said, "Pardon

me, would you be so kind as to hold the end of the rope for me?"

The man agreed without a thought, reached out, and took it.

"Thank you," said the stranger. He then added, "Two hands now, and remember, hold tight." At that point, the stranger jumped off the bridge.

The man on the bridge abruptly felt a strong pull from the now extended rope. He automatically held tight and was almost dragged over the side of the bridge.

"What are you trying to do?" he shouted to the stranger below.

"Just hold tight," said the stranger.

This is ridiculous, the man thought. He began trying to haul the other man in. Yet it was just beyond his strength to bring the other back to safety.

Again he yelled over the edge, "Why did you do this?"

"Remember," said the other, "If you let go, I will be lost."

"But I cannot pull you up," the man cried.

"I am your responsibility," said the other.

"I did not ask for it," the man said.

"If you let go, I am lost," repeated the stranger.

The man began to look around for help. No one was within sight.

He began to think about his predicament. Here he was eagerly pursuing a unique

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opportunity, and now he was being side-tracked for who knows how long.

Maybe I can tie the rope somewhere, he thought. He examined the bridge carefully, but there was no way to get rid of his new-found burden.

So he again yelled over the edge, "What do you want?"

"Just your help," came the answer.

"How can I help? I cannot pull you in, and there is no place to tie the rope while I find someone else who could help you."

"Just keep hanging on," replied the dangling man. "That will be enough."

Fearing that his arms could not hold out much longer, he tied the rope around his waist.

"Why did you do this?" he asked again. "Don't you see what you have done? What possible purpose could you have in mind?"

"Just remember," said the other, "my life is in your hands."

Now the man was perplexed. He reasoned within himself, "If I let go, all my life I will know that I let this other man die. If I stay, I risk losing my momentum toward my own long-sought-after salvation. Either way this will haunt me forever."

As time went by, still no one came. The man became keenly aware that it was almost too late to resume his journey. If he didn't leave immediately, he wouldn't arrive in time.

Finally, he devised a plan. "Listen," he explained to the man hanging below, "I think I know how to save you." He mapped out the idea. The stranger could climb back up by wrapping the rope

around him. Loop by loop, the rope would become shorter.

But the dangling man had no interest in the idea.

"I don't think I can hang on much longer," warned the man on the bridge.

"You must try," appealed the stranger. "If you fail, I die."

Suddenly a new idea struck the man on the bridge. It was different and even alien to his normal way of thinking. "I want you to listen carefully," he said, "because I mean what I am about to say."

The dangling man indicated that he was listening.

"I will not accept the position of choice for your life, only for my own; I hereby give back the position of choice for your own life to you."

"What do you mean?" the other asked, afraid.

"I mean, simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends. I will become the counterweight. You do the pulling and bring yourself up. I will even tug some from here."

He unwound the rope from around his waist and braced himself to be a counterweight. He was ready to help as soon as the dangling man began to act.

"You cannot mean what you say," the other shrieked. "You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me."

After a long pause, the man on the bridge uttered slowly, "I accept your choice." In voicing those words, he freed his hands and continued his journey over the bridge.

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