Colossians 3:17 *Socially Distant: A Well-Ordered Life*

***Maintaining Balance***We are trying something new today. Instead of the television screen I’ve been standing next to the last few weeks, we are going to try **adding in slides here**, in post-production. I feel kind of like a late-night talk show host.

I’ve heard people say that everybody should use this time of social isolation to learn a new skill. For our music director, Craig Cannon, he’s learning to be a TV producer. For me, I’m trying to learn how to talk to a camera. I think Craig is having more success than I am.

Also, and this really has nothing to do with anything, but did you know that the movie **“The Goonies”** turned 35 this year? That is just astounding to me. I can still remember going to the theater in Sibley, IA to see that movie with my Mom and my brother and my best friend Dave. Again, that has nothing to do with the sermon, just thought you should know.

We’re calling our current sermon series **“Socially Distant.”** We’re talking about maintaining your connection to God when you cannot physically come to church. It seems particularly relevant now; but it is a topic that applies at all times. As we’ve been saying: as important as church attendance is—and remember, we did a whole series on that to start the year, I really believe in the value of meeting together—as important as church attendance is, if this one hour on Sunday morning is the sum total of your spiritual experience every week, you are probably not going to have the greatest relationship with God.

Part of the idea of this series—and something that is being reinforced by quarantine—is that each of us needs to take responsibility for developing our personal relationship with Jesus. For ourselves, and for our families.

And what I want to talk about today is how we order our lives. Or, to put it another way, I want to talk about how we fit our relationship with God into the rest of our responsibilities.

Wellness experts and life coaches and time management consultants like to talk about the importance of having a “balanced-life.” This **will often be visualized as a pie-chart with life** divided into seven or eight slices. And the labels on these slices are things like “financial” and “physical’ and “relational” and “vocational” and so on.

And the idea is that you need to maintain a good balance of these things: you shouldn’t let the vocational slice get so big that it crowds out the relational. You need to make sure you are taking care of the physical—get regular exercise, make sure you get enough sleep. You need to have some space for recreation, leisure.

This visual can be helpful because it reminds us to pay attention to some areas that we might have been neglecting. Make sure you are doing some things to stay intellectually engaged, for example.

In the midst of this quarantine, when life routines have been altered so dramatically for many of us, thinking about life-balance can be helpful. I know that I have been neglecting exercise, for example. I haven’t stepped on a scale since this all started, and I’m afraid of what that number is going to be when I do.

But the balanced-life model has some flaws. For one thing, it doesn’t allow much room for people in crisis. When you are scraping to make ends meet financially to keep a roof over your kids heads, or when you are faced with a terminal disease, what does it mean to seek “more balance”? Sometimes the goal needs to be just keeping your head above water, not making sure you carve out enough time for leisure or intellectual stimulation.

And my other problem with “balanced life” model is that it **usually has a slice of the pie labeled “spiritual.”** It encourages us to picture our relationship with God has just one more thing on the “to do” list of life. The life coaches are encouraging us to make time for God, to have a plan to come to church or take 15 moments for prayer and reflection every morning; but the impression is that once you check that box then you can move on to other, non-spiritual activities like work and family time.

But that’s not the Biblical perspective. **The Biblical perspective is that God is** intensely interested in our every moment and activity. Everything we do is done with Him and for Him. The better visual would be to take the spiritual out as a separate slice of the pie and instead encircle the whole chart with our relationship with God, or put it all under the umbrella of the spiritual.

***Whatever You Do***My key Bible text this morning is Colossians 3:17. Here is the Biblical idea of how we should order our lives. **Colossians 3:17:**

**17**And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

What is really striking about this verse is how comprehensive it is. The Apostle Paul says: “whatever you do.” When he says that, he means: “whatever.” Whatever you can fit onto the pie chart of your life. Whatever you do.

Then, lest there be any doubt, he says “whether in word or deed.” The immediate context for this verse is instruction about relationships. How we treat one another. So think about the things you can do as a human being to another human being: most of it is going to break down to words you can speak or deeds you can do. Speech and action. Again, it’s comprehensive. It covers everything.

But, even still, if we are tempted to look for loopholes, he says “do it all.” All of it. All the things. Whatever you do. Whatever you say. Whatever deeds you undertake. All of it.

Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Think of the pie chart of your life as being surrounded by your relationship with Him. Think of your whole life as being lived under the umbrella of the name of Jesus.

Yes, you should be seeking balance. Yes you need to find that right mix of work and home. You need to make sure you are paying attention to your physical well-being as well as your relationships. You need time to be intellectually challenged as well as time to just unwind. But don’t think of your relationship with God as just one more slice in that pie. Rather, think of each of those parts of your life being lived in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now, lets talk a bit more about what it means to do something in the name of the Lord. I have three ways for us to think about that, and they are not mutually exclusive to one another. In other words, as we seek to live our lives in the name of the Lord, we can think about all three of these things:

***Dedicated to You***First, doing something in the name of the Lord means doing it **for His sake**. It means we dedicate our efforts and our actions to Him.

There is another verse in the Bible that is very similar to Colossians 3:17. It’s 1 Corinthians 10:31. In fact, when I am looking for one of these verses, I often turn to other one first. They are that similar. **1 Corinthians 10:31** says:

**31**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

The context is different. Here the conversation is about eating meat that has been butchered in pagan temples. But the language and the principle is so similar. “Whatever you do.” “Do it all.”

And the addition, the thing that makes it slightly different from Colossians 3:17, is the phrase “for the glory of God.” Here’s the idea of dedicating our actions to God. Here’s the idea that we have the reputation of Jesus, the honor of Jesus, in mind with all the decisions and choices we make.

Philip Yancey tells a story about a friend of his who was a hand surgeon. He specialized in microsurgery, reconnecting nerves and blood vessels finer than human hairs. The kind of surgeries this guy did were 12 hour or longer, marathons of detail work and intense concentration. So, one night, this hand surgeon was awakened from deep sleep by a 3 a.m. telephone call summoning him to an emergency surgery.

As he tried to overcome his grogginess, he realized he was going to need a little extra-motivation to focus and do what he needed to do. On an impulse, he called a close friend, also waking him up. He said: “I have to go into a tough surgery right now, and I need something extra to concentrate on this time. I’d like to dedicate this surgery to you. If I think about you while I’m performing it, that will help me get through.”

Now, imagine that: How would it affect your day at the office or your diligence around the home if early Monday morning you called a good friend and said, “I need some extra incentive for excellence today. I would like to dedicate this day to you.”

What would that mean? I think it would mean that you would think of that person repeatedly through the day. If you started to get weary you would motivate yourself by saying: “Perk up—this is for Mikey.” If your task was hard and discouraging, you would dig deep by saying: “Hang in there—this is for Chunk .” You wouldn’t be content with half-hearted work because that would be like saying: “That person’s friendship isn’t really that important. I’m doing this for them, but they don’t really deserve my best effort.” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/this-is-dedicated-to-you>)

Or, think about it from the sports world. One of the most famous stories about Babe Ruth is the way he hit a home run for a sick little boy. The legend has been twisted and stretched over the years, but the core of the story is true. **Johnny Sylvester was an 11 year-old from New Jersey** who was kicked in the head by a horse and was severely ill. He told his father the only thing that could cheer him up would be a baseball from the World Series between the Yankees and St. Louis Cardinals. His father asked a well-connected friend for help. Days later, both the Cardinals and Yankees shipped signed balls to Johnny's dad – with Babe Ruth scrawling, "I'll knock a homer for you in Wednesday's game.”

Sure enough, in game 4 of the 1926 World Series, the great Bambino hit not just one, but 3 home runs. Even though the Yanks lost the series, little Johnny recovered and Ruth later visited his bedside.

Or, **think about the St. Louis Blues**. Last year they won the Stanley Cup, and central to their celebration was an 11-year-old girl named Laila Anderson. She was battling a rare life-threatening immune disease resulting in the body making too many immune cells. At the first game of the Finals played in St. Louis, Laila was given the microphone to pump the crowd up and the team dedicated their win to her.

Now, the cynical side of me wonders about all those athletes that have dedicated a game to a sick child and then gone out to have mediocre performances. We don’t hear too much about that.

But maybe there is something to it. Again, think of how it might change your focus before a big sales pitch or teaching a tough subject in the classroom if you dedicated that effort to someone you cared deeply about?

**The Biblical encouragement** is to dedicate those things to Jesus. Do those things for Him. Whatever you do, do it with His glory in mind.

(By the way, and again, this has nothing to do with the sermon: **did you know that Thanos was in the Goonies?** The guy who looked like a big purple thumb in the Avengers movies is the same guy who played Mikey’s older brother Brand. Josh Brolin. Man, I’m getting old.)

***Selective Attention***Second, doing something in the name of the Lord means doing it with Jesus at the f**ront of mind.** It means you are going to be thinking about Jesus throughout your day.

Social scientists talk about something they call “confirmation bias” or “selective attention.” Basically, it’s the idea that our brains are only able to process parts of reality at any given time. While there may be lots of objects around — chair, table, wall, flower, lamp, picture carpet, noise, hair on your arms — it’s impossible for us to pay close attention to everything that is in our space. Thankfully, our brains filter out most of what is going on around us.

But the result is that our brains tend to consciously notice whatever is at the forefront of our minds. So if someone is in a bad mood (maybe you spilled coffee on yourself), the brain will recognize that you’re in a bad mood and will begin to shape your perception of everything else in a way that confirms the world is a terrible place.

The same goes the other way. If you something happens that makes you happy, you’ll start to see the world in a more positive light.

That’s selective attention, we tend to notice whatever is on our minds. Another example might be the car you drive. If you get a new car—**say a Jeep Cherokee, Latitude model**—suddenly you start to notice all the other cars like it on the road. I didn’t even know there was such a thing as a Latitude model until we started shopping for a car. Now, I see them all over the place. Did everybody decide to buy this car at the same time we did? No. I just didn’t notice them before. It wasn’t at the front of my mind.

What this means is that if you are seeking to live your day in the name of Jesus--if you are dedicating your day to Him--then He is going to be much more at the forefront of your thoughts and you are likely to factor His will and His values into your day much more frequently because you are thinking about Him.

The Bible puts it like this, in **Colossians 3, verses 1 and 2**:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

What are you setting your mind on? Where is attention focused? We’re much more likely to see God’s hand at work, as well as to discern what choices he would have us make, if we have set our minds on Him.

***Put His Name on It***Third, doing something in the name of the Lord means doing it **as Jesus would do it.** It means going about our day in a way that would mean, at the end of the day, we would be comfortable signing the name of Jesus to it.

Generally speaking, in the Bible, a person’s name has to do with his or her character. So doing something in Jesus’ name means to do it in his character. It means doing it as Jesus himself would do it if He were in our place.

**2 Corinthians 5:20** says this:

**20**We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Do you think of yourself as an ambassador of Christ? Do you think of yourself--as you interact with co-workers, with your family, with other drivers on the road--as a representative of Jesus? Do you think: people are seeing Jesus when they see me? People are listening to Jesus when they listen to me?

As followers of Jesus, the things we communicate to others and the deeds that we do need to be consistent with what Jesus would communicate and what Jesus would do. That means the more the word of Christ richly dwells within me the easier it will be to reflect His character. The greater my understanding of Jesus and His commandments, the greater will be my ability to live according to what He wants.

The attitude of doing whatever I do in the name of the Lord is simply this:

* I want others to see the Lord Jesus Christ living through me.
* I want Jesus to manifest His life through me in what I say, what I write and the deeds that I do.
* I want my light to so shine before men that they will glorify my Father who is in heaven because that light is reflecting Jesus.

There is a name for this process.

Historically, when Christians have sought to order the events of ordinary life around growing in Christ-likeness, they have developed what is called a “**rule of life**.” That sounds sort of legalistic, but it’s not meant to be. The word rule comes from the Latin word ***regula***—that is, something that is done regularly. A “Rule of Life” then means being intentional about asking where God fits into the various slices of the pie chart of our lives. Instead of chasing after a balanced-life, the Biblical goal is a well-ordered life. A life where we are intentional about imitating Jesus in every part of life.

Here’s what we can do: Take those different **parts of the pie-chart** and ask yourself how living in Jesus’ name influences the choices and priorities you will set.

You might even want to take out a piece of paper and write some of these things down.

So, for example, if you’re thinking about your physical well-being, you might note that the Bible says our bodies are temples of the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19-20). That means you need to take care of it. That might lead you to setting a goal of at least 5 hours of exercise per week. Or setting a goal of at least 7 hours of sleep per night. Or cutting down on the ice cream.

Or, if you’re thinking about your relationships, you might think about the truth that children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3). That’s going to make a difference when you are tempted to be irritated by them. It will influence the amount of time you invest in them. Or, if you’re married, you might think about the Biblical teaching that our marriages are meant to reflect Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:32). How would that change the next argument you have with your spouse? How would it influence the way you seek to serve one another, instead of being served?

Let’s take one more. What about a rule of life for the way you think about finances? The Bible tells us not to put our hope in wealth, but to seek to be rich in good deeds (1 Timothy 6:17-18). How does that factor into your financial planning? What does that mean for your budget, and the things you are saving for?

Developing a rule of life is not meant to be set of practices that you must repeat day after day; but it helps us to ask what Jesus would do in every situation we encounter. The idea is to focus on Jesus’ presence with you as you go through even the most inconsequential moments of your day. Keep directing your thoughts back to him. Dedicate your efforts to His glory.

Ask for his help and his guidance.

A well-balanced life might not be achievable, especially in the midst of worldwide crisis. But a well-ordered life is:

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It’s no: instead of seeking a “balance