

Loving God in a technology growing hectic lifestyle modern world

John 21:1-17

April 10, 2016

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I will remind you that the sermon titles for the month of April were suggested by members of our current confirmation class. They submitted their lists anonymously, but I do know who wrote this one, one of our two confirmation mentors, Lauren Reisinger.

It's a great title isn't it?

Loving God in a technology growing hectic lifestyle modern world

It is busy, choppy, crammed full, just like our lives are busy, choppy, and crammed full, just like Lauren's life is busy and choppy and crammed full! The first two words "loving God" get swallowed up by all rest, just as my relationship with God, just as your relationship with God, can get swallowed up by "all the rest," all the stuff and activity and distraction that fill every one of our days.

The next generation of followers of Jesus, Lauren and her generation, will face challenges that we did not. The world is changing ... fast.

There is almost unlimited access to information, to data, to knowledge, but are we any smarter? Are we any wiser? Read Plato, read Sophocles, read Shakespeare, read Kierkegaard, read the book of Job, and you tell me: do we know more or less than they about our world, about ourselves, about human nature, about the human capacity for wisdom and courage and humility and nobility?

We are living longer and doing more, because we have the time, because we have the tools, but tell me: are we accomplishing more? Have we done any more with our eighty-some years than say, Mozart, with his thirty-five, or John Keats with his twenty-six? Or Jesus with his three years of ministry?

And we are connected, connected in real time to almost anyone and almost everyone on this planet. But are we really more connected?

I remember driving north on Park Avenue some years ago under the 218 overpass, seeing two middle school girls walking side-by-side, both on their cellphones, together but not together. I thought it was so funny. But what is so sad is that it's not funny anymore. It's normal!

You go out to a restaurant and people are on their smartphones. I thought eating out was supposed to be a social event. Even at family gatherings, even at our family gatherings, you get six people in a room sitting together, and half of them are looking at their phones.

What happens when our lives are bombarded with information, when our schedules are overstuffed, when we are constantly distracted from the people right in front of us? We suffer. Our relationships suffer. We become less human. Is that overstating it? And our relationship with God suffers.

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That's the second reason Lauren's title is so well put: it's about loving God. Loving God, not finding God. She could have said, "Finding God in a technology growing hectic lifestyle modern world," as if our busy lives crowd God out, push God to the sidelines, leave no room for God in our lives. But that's not true. God is there. God is always there. We just need to pay attention, to be aware of the God who is already there, to love the God who is already very much present in our lives.

So, Lauren wants to know: how do we do that? Let me make a few suggestions ...

Beginnings and endings. Whenever we do Bible study, I always tell class members: pay attention to beginnings and endings. Because beginnings and endings frame the picture, highlight the main concerns, tell you what matters. Beginnings and endings give you the key to making sense of all the rest, all that comes between.

How do you love God in the midst of your hectic life? Pay attention to beginnings and endings! How do you start your day? How do you end your day? What do you think about first? What do you think about last? Who do you think about first? Who do you think about last?

You love God by putting God first, and last, making God your first, and last, priority. It's not complicated. Just talk to God as you awake and think about your day: a simple prayer for strength or for direction, or a simple thank you -- thank you, Lord, for this day.

And it may seem silly to you, but almost every night in bed after I have said my prayers, I will say, "Good night, Lord." It doesn't matter what you say, but that you say it, that you say something, to God. Whatever you say, when you start and end your day that way, you are telling God, "I am yours."

The second way you can love God in the midst of your hectic life is by making sabbath. Like praise, the sabbath is intended for our benefit. Jesus reminded people: "The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath." Sabbath is not so much a duty, but a discipline, a discipline like a good diet or regular exercise practiced for the sake of maintaining health and fitness.

Making sabbath is about taking time for rest, taking time for remembering, taking time for God. It's about consciously breaking the routine, not because the routine is bad or wrong, but because you are not the routine and the routine is not you. It's about breaking the routine so you can remember what

the routine is for, so you can remember not just what you are doing, but where you are going, and why.

Going to church, attending worship with friends, is part of keeping sabbath. But it's not so much like going to school to learn something, or attending a class to better equip yourself. It's more like ... a date! Like spending time, making time to spend time, with the one you love, and with the ones you love, with the ones God loves.

It's not about deciding to go to church because "I need it this week," -- though that may well be true! -- but because I want to show God that I love him, because I want to show myself that I love him, and because God's people need me. Don't just come to church because you need it, but because I need you, because we all need you. We love God better together. We remember how to love God better, especially in the midst of our busy and distracted lives when we are together.

And you love God by loving Jesus, and you love Jesus by taking care of his sheep.

I often tell couples as I meet with them for marriage preparation: "the best thing you can do for your partner is to take care of yourself." Do you get my meaning? When I take care of myself -- when I am healthy and happy and strong and confident and free -- I have so much more to offer my partner, and what I have to offer my partner is so much more valuable.

When I am well, I can love you well. When you are well, you can love God well. One of the best things you can do for God is to take care of yourself, to take care of one of his precious sheep, namely you!

Love God by taking care of yourself physically. Eat well, get good rest, keep yourself fit, and get enough physical contact, enough affection -- touch, hugs, kisses, handshakes -- to keep you healthy, to keep you strong, to keep you human, to make the best of the gift that you have to offer to God, and to your neighbor, which is yourself.

Love God by taking care of yourself emotionally. Do things that bring you joy. Go to places that bring you joy. Be with people who bring you joy. You know yourself best -- what brings you joy may be different from what brings me joy. Some people recharge emotionally by being around lots of people, some by a quiet conversation with a close friend, and some by time alone. Some find joy in getting outside, some by reading a book, some by creating something, and some by spending quality time ... with my puppy!

Do what brings you joy, because that will bring God joy. You know that! Think of someone you love -- your spouse, your child, your grandchild, a dear friend -- doesn't it bring you joy, the greatest of joys, to see them happy? Why would it be any different for God? God must be overjoyed to see us full of joy.

I struggle sometimes with feeling guilty for enjoying myself, as if doing something just to bring myself pleasure is somehow selfish or wrong. One of the best things I can do for God, one of the best things you can do for God, is to take care of yourself.

Love God by taking care of yourself spiritually. If something is standing between you and God, take care of it! Ask God to forgive you -- for your neglect, for your carelessness, for your sin -- and then accept God's forgiveness. Be well. Be free. There is probably little you could do to grieve God more than to refuse the forgiveness God offers you or fail to benefit from it.

Take communion regularly. Communion is what it says it is -- communion, communing with God, drawing close to God and to God's people. Communion is about intimacy, about being connected, about coming home to the place we belong, about coming home to the One to whom we belong.

And take care of his sheep. You love God by paying attention, by taking notice, by taking care of his sheep

*she gave me a smile, but I was too busy
looking for you to really notice*

*in my rush to get to the house to see if you were waiting,
I had no time for a chat*

*she kissed me softly on the cheek
but I was too busy searching the Bible*

Don't miss him! Don't look past her! When you did it for one of these, Jesus said, you did it for me. Where there is love, God is there, and God is loved.

That's the real problem with our technology growing hectic lifestyle modern world lives. We may be so busy, so preoccupied, so self-absorbed, we may have so many things to do, even so many good things to do, that we miss him. God is there. God is already there. You just have to look. You just have to pay attention.

You will have the chance today. I know you will have the chance today. Someone will cross your path today, maybe someone you know well or maybe someone you hardly know. Someone will cross your path today who needs you, who needs to be loved by you, who needs you just to notice, just to pay attention, for one brief moment.

And if you do, when you do, you will know what it means to love God in a technology growing hectic lifestyle modern world!