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Title: Carpe Diem – One Life To Live (One Day At A Time)

Text: Philippians 3:7-14

How many are familiar with the words “carpe diem?” It originally comes from the Latin language, meaning, “seize the day.” Make today count as you’re not guaranteed tomorrow. True or not – I read earlier this week that the average man spends 3500 hours of his lifetime shaving. That’s nearly 146 days of a man’s life. That would be 85 40-hour work weeks @ 5 days a week. Interestingly enough, there was only one dwarf in Snow White that shaved? Anyone know his name? Dopey! I’m not recommending that you quit shaving, BUT I do recommend that you never neglect the more important things. The writer of Ecclesiastes warns us of the importance of TIME 28 times in chapter 3 alone. He reminds us that time is a unique commodity. It may only be used once. You cannot redeem time. You cannot bottle time. You cannot hold onto time. Time flows like water through our hands.

I want you to imagine that you’re involved in a play, in a community theatre production of, say, *My Fair Lady*. Gentlemen – you’re ‘enry ‘iggins, and Ladies, you’re Liza Doolittle. Either way, you’ve spent weeks and months preparing your part. Opening Night is now right around the corner, and tonight is dress rehearsal. You know what dress rehearsal is? It’s that low-risk-run-through in an empty auditorium where the director gets a chance to make sure everyone knows what they’re doing. But, right before curtain, there’s a last-minute turn of events. The producer approaches you and says, “Tonight we have a special guest – a top talent agent has flown in from New York to watch your performance. He’s considering you for this very role on Broadway.” This changes the dynamic quite a bit, doesn’t it? No longer is it a mere dress rehearsal. It is now the performance of your career – up to this point, anyway. How well you do tonight could determine your future. Suddenly you’re profoundly aware of the significance of the next two hours. And, of course, you give it ALL you’ve got. Next, let’s imagine that it’s not just a local community theatre production of *My Fair Lady* that we’re talking about. Let’s imagine that we’re talking about your LIFE, and where your performance today has the potential to take you. One lesson we learn throughout scripture – and we have focused on it throughout this series – is that this is NOT a mere dress rehearsal that we’re experiencing today. It’s NOT just a dry run. It’s the REAL THING! Every day, day after day. It’s GAME-ON for all of us. We have a tendency to live, sometimes, as if today doesn’t count. We live as if we’ll have another chance on another day to do things the way they ought to be done ... and so today we coast. But, the Bible teaches that TODAY matters – and as long as it’s called TODAY, it matters more than any other day in your life.

I’m wrapping up a series this morning called *Fixed Focus*. It’s about the power of INTENTIONAL LIVING. All the things that life brings your way have a tendency to blur your vision, and make everything look fuzzy and unclear. But, when you know what your priorities are, and you know what matters most, and you live your life committed to DOING what matters most, then the most essential elements become clear and sharp and easy to identify. In week one, we looked at what it means to live a ONE-LORD LIFESTYLE. Jesus said, “You can’t serve two masters,” and only He has the right to be Lord of all. So, as the writer of Hebrews said... “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus*” (12:2). Last week we talked about the defining characteristic for every church and every believer: LOVE. Jesus made it clear that our expression of love for others reflects the extent of our love for God. We are to love one another with the kind of love that expresses itself through what we do – even to the point of personal sacrifice. Now, today we’ll bring the series to the finish line. We’ll focus on an idea that has been referenced repeatedly in recent weeks: I’m talking about making the most of every day. Maybe you remember the movie *Dead Poets Society*. It was about a literature professor of an elite prep school back in the fifties who resurrected an ancient Latin phrase. This phrase has since re-entered the vernacular, perhaps due to the popularity of this film. Carpe Diem. It means “seize the day.” Grab it. Hold it tight. Give it all you’ve got. We have only one life to live. As Hebrews says... “*Each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment*” (9:27, NLT). We have ONE life to live. That is why the Psalmist said... “*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*” (Psalm 90:12). That phrase, “*number our days aright,*” has a two-sided meaning. It means “help us understand the brevity of life,” and “help us plan our days accordingly.” We have one life to live. In order for your life to be all that it can be, you need to learn to live it to the fullest. That’s Carpe Diem. That’s seizing the day. And it’s what intentional living – Fixed Focus Living – is all about.

So today I want to talk to you about living with a make-the-most-of-this-day mentality – seizing the day, each and every day. I’m not advocating that you work 24/7. God expects us to rest at the end of every day. God made us that we need rest. God Himself created the earth and then He did WHAT – He rested. If God, who never wearies, made it a point to

rest, we who tire certainly need to rest. I hold that God didn't rest because He needed to, but to show us the importance of rest and honoring the Lord's Day. So even if it's your day of the week to rest, then *Carpe Diem* – seize the day! Live EVERY day to the glory of God. Make your days count for eternity. Yet, seizing the day likely means something different to us in each of the seasons of life. For some, it would mean putting in a hard day's work. For a toddler, it may mean playing hard. For a student, it may mean studying particularly hard. For someone with disabilities, it may simply mean doing whatever they can. In order for this day to be all that it has the potential to be, you would do well to make three daily resolutions. These three daily resolutions we help you keep your focus fixed on that which really matters most. Three things. Here they are.

1. PUT THE PAST BEHIND YOU. In the first week of this series I talked about the two ways we tend to dwell on the past – and neither one serves us well. IF the past was particularly BAD, we have a hard time letting go of the MISTAKES we made or the SINS we've committed or the HURTFUL THINGS WE'VE EXPERIENCED at the hand of others. It's HARD to let go of a difficult past. We keep asking ourselves: "Why did I have to do that? Or why did that have to happen to me? Why couldn't it have been different? A hurtful past often brings bitterness and shame and regret into the present. It takes away our ability to focus on what matters most. Sometimes we don't just dwell on the past, we CLING to it – because the past was SO MUCH BETTER than what we're experiencing today. As in: Back then I had more money. Back then I was in a better place. Back then my troubles were few and my problems were small. Back then life was simple and care-free. Why can't my life today be like it was back then? The back-then-mindset prevents us from focusing on the meaningfulness of today. This is why Paul said... *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..."* (vs. 7-8). If you want your life to go where God wants it to go, you need to make it your daily resolve to PUT THE PAST BEHIND YOU. This is rarely a once-and-for-all matter. It's a once-again matter. The PAST keeps creeping back, sometimes haunting you, sometimes taunting you, and it is our DAILY OBLIGATION to put it behind us ONCE AGAIN, as many times as necessary. ILLUSTRATION: On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech was playing California in the Rose Bowl (over 90 years ago). Late in the second quarter, Roy Riegals recovered a fumble for California. In his excitement, he became confused and began running in the wrong direction – for sixty-five yards! He thought he was about to score. Instead, one of his own teammates tackled him at the 2-yard line. That meant his mistake put California 98 yards away from where they needed to be; 98 yards away from where they could have been had he had a better sense of direction. The mistake was serious. A few plays later, Georgia Tech got the ball back and scored. In the locker room at half time, Roy Riegals sat in the corner with his face buried in his hands, crying. The rest of the room was silent. The coach didn't make his usual half-time speech, but shortly before the team was to take the field for the second half, he said, "The starting team will go back onto the field to begin the second half." The whole team left the locker room except for Riegals, who remained in the corner, his head hung in shame. He said, "I can't do it, Coach. I can't play. I've ruined the team." The coach said, "Get up Riegals. The game is only half over. You belong on the field." Guess what? Your game isn't over yet, either. Regardless of the past, you still have the rest of the game (the rest of your life) to play. And, YOU belong on the playing field.

2. TAKE THE ROAD BEFORE YOU. What's the road before you? Well for Riegals, it was the second half of the game. It's the next job, or the next sales call, or the next assignment. It's the next try. Even if all your life has been spent running the wrong way, and you find yourself now tackled at the two-yard line, 98 yards from where you ought to be, you leave the locker room, because the game is NOT over. You BELONG on the playing field. Paul understood that he couldn't take the road before him if he kept looking over his shoulder, so he said... *"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"* (vs. 13-14). This means that each day we need to ask ourselves: What can I do TODAY to make the most of TODAY? In week one, we talked about paving a path for your heart to follow – and so we need to ask ourselves: What can I do today that will move me in the direction of a closer walk with Christ? In living out your purpose in life, we need to ask: What good thing can I do today that would be pleasing to God, and would bring glory to His name? And as we've talked about living a life of love, we need to keep our eyes open wide on a daily basis, looking for the next opportunity to show love – even when it's inconvenient, even when it calls for sacrifice. We do this on a daily basis. You take the road before you. You press on. You make this day look like every day ought to look: focused on Jesus, pursuing your purpose, loving others. That's what every day should be about.

3. AIM FOR THAT WHICH IS BEYOND YOU. Another way to say it is that you keep reaching for that which is above you. I saw this piece of décor at Kitchen Kettle Village on Friday. It says, "Dream one size too big." Philippians 3:14 in the King James Version says... *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Wherever God is calling you, He's calling you to STRETCH. Wherever God is calling you, He's calling you to REACH. Paul makes it plain...

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect. But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (vs. 12). He says it again... *“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead”* (vs. 13). Where the NIV says *“straining toward,”* the KJV says *“reaching forth.”* Yes, it’s a reach. And it may seem at times like an impossible reach ... but, you keep reaching. It may seem impossible that this marriage could ever get back on an even keel, but you KEEP REACHING for a better relationship. It may seem impossible that this business plan could work, or this degree could be attained, but you KEEP REACHING for success. It may seem impossible that you would ever experience power over sin, but you KEEP REACHING for victory. Seizing the day means that each and every day you dare to reach again for something that is above your capacity to reach and beyond your ability to grasp, but you know it’s worth the effort because it is leading you heavenward, it is part of the higher calling you have received in Christ Jesus. ILLUSTRATION: In 1960, Dashrath Manjhi was a common laborer from Gelhour Hills in Bihar, India. His community was somewhat remote, with limited access to vital services, because traveling involved going around a three-hundred-foot mountain that stood between the towns. Dashrath decided that what his community most needed was a road through the mountain. Since no one else was going to do it, he decided he would. He sold some goats to buy a hammer and chisel, and set out chipping away at the mountain each day after work. Of course, people said he was crazy and his project could never be completed, but he just kept chipping away with his hammer and chisel. 1960, chipping away. 1961, chipping away. Then 1962, 1963 ... let’s fast forward a couple of decades ... 1980, still chipping away, 1981, chipping. 1982. And the project is finished. The road is 30 feet wide, and 25 feet high. Now, instead of having to travel 55 kilometers for access to services, the people of his village have to travel only 15 kilometers. What an example of reaching for that which is beyond you. And what an example of making the most of each day. Can you really carve a road through a three-hundred-foot impasse of a mountain with just a hammer and a chisel, all by yourself? Yes, you can. In twenty-two years you can do it, when you reach for it every day, and you keep chipping away. If you want your life to become what it can be, you need to make it your daily resolve to aim for that which is beyond you, and keep reaching for that which is above you. And you DO IT EVERY DAY!

CONCLUSION. We can’t afford to go through life with a dress rehearsal mentality that tells us that today really doesn’t count toward the grade – that the REAL performance begins sometime down the road. NO! NO! NO! It’s TODAY! This is NOT a dress rehearsal. It’s the REAL THING! Today matters – and, as long as it’s called TODAY, it matters more than any other day in your life. You have ONE LIFE TO LIVE, and you can live it only ONE DAY AT A TIME – TODAY! So, let’s carpe this diem. Let’s seize it and make the most of it – by putting the past behind you, by taking the road before you, by continuing to aim for that which is beyond you and reach for that which is above you ... the HIGH CALLING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Let’s make it our endeavor to LIVE INTENTIONALLY, with a FIXED FOCUS on that which matters most.