

Learning to Love our Limitations

Our limitations can be hard to see, never mind hard to love. We are immersed in a culture that values productivity and potential - and squirms at any constraints on our pathway to personal development. Yet we do hit red lights - and bump into brick walls - and even find that they can be times of better deeper growth as Christians. Why is this? How can we learn to love our limitations?

A limitless God

As we look further into our finitude (another way to describe our limits) we must come before our limitless God. God is not limited by time. He is uncreated, without beginning, eternal.¹ He fills heaven and earth, even transcending space. No circle can be drawn around Him. Present everywhere, He is not limited by time or space.²

God is also without limit in power and ability. He can do all things, except sin, nothing is too difficult for Him. His knowledge is also unlimited. Nothing takes Him by surprise, no puzzle is too hard.³ His wisdom is unsearchable.⁴

As we draw breath and consider the immensity of our God, how do we respond? “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”⁵

Limited People

In contrast we are creatures of dust. The Creator breathes into a scoop of dirt off the ground and man becomes a living being. Contrast the creature with the Creator: man is created, has a beginning, exists in time and is limited to a particular place, contained within a body of dust.⁶ He is called to a particular task in the garden. He is vulnerable and liable to death.⁷ Man has limits. He is finite.

Man is also dependent. He needs help to guard and keep the garden and certainly to be fruitful and multiply!⁸ He needs food and air and water. Man’s limits create needs. But note that these limits (apart from death) are there because of creation not the fall – man

¹ 2 Peter 3:8

² Psalm 139:1-4, 7

³ Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17

⁴ Psalm 139:1-4

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:17

⁶ Genesis 2:7

⁷ Genesis 2:17

⁸ Genesis 1:28; 2:18

has not yet sinned. To be limited and finite, dependent and needy are not sins. They are just being creaturely. Yet our hearts can react sinfully to our finitude.

Knowing my limits

Think for a moment about your own limits. Like Adam, your limits largely are dictated by your body. You had a beginning and you will have an end. Since the Fall, you have a finite lifespan. You need air, water, food and sleep. You need shelter and protection. You can only be in one place at a time and mostly can only do one thing at a time (most of us are poor multi-taskers!). We can't see radio waves and have no ultrasonic hearing (compared to dogs). We have limits in our physical strength. We often have limited control over our emotions. We have a limit to the number of social relationships we can meaningfully maintain. Sustaining focused attention can slide with tiredness and our memories fail us. Our energy levels slump. We cannot change the weather, stop natural disasters, or control countless other aspects of our lives, including the actions of others against us. Are we beginning to feel small?

Limitations also vary between us. Some need ten hours sleep and some survive on four. We have differing energy capacities, intellectual abilities, social skills and attention spans. Some are social animals, some are retiring wall flowers. In other words, a limitation for one person feels like a weakness, whilst another's limits in that area feel like a strength. It depends on where the Creator has drawn the limit for each person. One person's capacity for work on a certain task can exceed another's capacity in the same task.

This leads us to consider how our limitations show up. As we can see, one way would be by comparing – how come I'm so much slower than you are at this? But there are other ways too. The familiar feeling that I just can't get it all done. Or the sense that I am falling short under a weight of expectations. Or that there aren't enough hours in the day. Or if I just had a little more time. Or that I haven't done enough. Or a sense of being overwhelmed. Or the realization that I am not in control. Or when any of these thoughts lead to the thought that if I can just work harder, or stay up a little later, or become a bit more efficient, then I'll get on top of things.

The heart beneath my limits

Why am I driven like this? Expectations can take a ruling place in my heart – what I believe I should achieve (or I think others are expecting of me) becomes a harsh task-master like Pharoah's guards cracking a whip over our lives. We either labour on or give up, defeated with a sense of failure and guilt. Alternatively, pride may drive me into reaching out for things that are too big for me (Psalm 131).

Limitations can also reveal fears, that I am not enough, that I am a failure, that if I don't achieve, I'll not be acceptable, or be loved by God or others. Fear or guilt might also reveal my belief that my limitation is a sin instead of a created limitation. Where can my heart turn?

The Limitless God takes our Limitations

The Word became flesh.⁹ Jesus, God the Son, took a true human body and so entered into all our limitations apart from sin. Jesus grew, ate and slept. The unlimited God took a limited human nature (Philippians 2). He humbled Himself. Theologian Kelly Kapic writes, “The doctrine that the Word became flesh means that God himself affirms our flesh as good, and that affirmation liberates us from apologizing for our creaturely limitations.”¹⁰

Jesus becomes our example of faith and godliness in the midst of limitations. He feels hunger but learns that man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Loving our Limited Lives

I might put up with my limits, or at best grow to accept them. But love them? Seems unlikely, but they are an opportunity to slim down to my proper size, to be relieved of pressures that are too big, and to put faith in the God who is limitless.

Overwhelming expectations can become an opportunity to come to the Creator to ask what He expects of me. My identity is not in my productivity, but in the productivity of a graciously limitless God for me. It is his work that counts, not my activity. I am free from the weight of goals that I turn into gods, because my God fulfilled every goal I needed to in His Son, and gave that righteousness to me. That’s something to love.

Dependence and need feel uncomfortable. They feel vulnerable. But limitations call me to be a child who needs an infinite Father. That need shows Him to be glorious, dependable and good. To be poor and needy leads me to come to God to draw on his riches to supply my need. That’s something to love.

When weary and burdened under the weight of crushing expectations, we come to the One who says I will give you rest. He invites us to come under his yoke and learn from Him in order to find rest for our souls. What is the yoke that Jesus carried? It was to live the life that we could not live and to die the death that we should have died. It was to fulfill all the real expectations upon us that we could never fulfil. It was to live a life of perfect righteousness in a body confined in time and space, so that we could come under that yoke and find rest for our souls and say, thank you. That’s definitely something to love.

⁹ John 1:14

¹⁰ Kapic, Kelly M.. *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (p. 43). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.