

"LIVING SMART"

A Sermon By

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Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
November 5, 1989

"LIVING SMART"

INTRODUCTION

John Claypool, in one of his sermons, tells a parable about a young man who was applying for a job. As a part of the application process, he was required to take an aptitude test. He arrived at the appointed time and was given some instructions about the test and then ushered into the testing room.

Immediately, however, the young man became enamored with the utensils at his disposal. He straightened the paper on the desk. He sharpened his pencils. He even shined his chair. In fact, he became so engrossed in the materials around him that he never got around to taking the test. When time was up and the tests were collected, he had nothing to show for his efforts but a neat desk, some finely sharpened pencils and an immaculate chair.

Needless to say, the young man didn't get the job. It takes more than just "showing up"...contrary to the wisdom of Woody Allen.

DEVELOPMENT

Now-a-days people in business will sometimes talk about "working smart". That is, it's not how hard you work, but how effectively and how efficiently. Many executives who spend long hours at the office are not necessarily more dedicated than their peers who leave early. Those who burn the midnight oil sometimes have not learned how to use their time wisely. There is something to this idea of working smarter, not harder.

There's truth in what Robert M. Hutchins once said,

"It is not so important to be serious as
it is to be serious about important things."

JESUS STRESSED LIVING SMART

The teachings of Jesus stress time and time again the importance of living smart. Jesus Himself compared them to a man, "building his house on a rock".

He talked about "counting the cost" before we begin to build. "Sit at the lowest place at the table!" He once said, "then when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher' and then you will be honored in the presence of all...." Time and time again He stressed that His teachings were not about "pie in the sky...bye and bye" - but about practical living here and now. It is not enough just to live, but to live smart. Are we? Do we?

John Madden, now a sportscaster for CBS, was for many years coach of the Oakland Raiders football team. During the championship seasons, Oakland had an all-pro receiver by the name of Fred Biletnikoff. Madden once said about Biletnikoff,

"If he had played up to his capabilities he would never have been in the NFL. He was slow, he wasn't very big, and was even a little bit clumsy. I used to scream at him from the sidelines, 'Don't fall down, Fred! Don't fall down!' All he could ever do was catch passes and score touchdowns."

Fred Bilentnikoff was effective. He knew how the game was played, understood teamwork, and had figured out moves that would take him where the defense wasn't. He became a star at his position.

Bilentnikoff played smart. He might not have been able to do everything that NFL receivers need to do, but he did those things that matter the most. That's also the key to living smart. Make sure you do the things that really matter.

They say that when Dwight D. Eisenhower became President he tried to arrange his administration so that only urgent and important matters were called to his attention. Everything else was to be delegated to lower echelons. However, he soon discovered that urgency and importance seldom appear together.

You and I at times may feel that we are being tossed and turned in every direction by those things that are urgent, while many important things suffer and get left undone. I face it all the time in my work here. A pipe may burst or a door may not shut properly...you name it...it's urgent. While an important pastoral concerns dealing with the life of a person gets squeezed out of the picture by an urgent but unimportant matter. It's time we caught our breath and begin living smart.

WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT?

Living smart begins with deciding what really is important in life. That's a good place to begin. That makes sense, doesn't it.

There's a story about a man who was preparing his favorite breakfast of hot oatmeal when his daughter came rushing in with his little grandson. "The baby sitter has been delayed" she said to her father, "and I've got to go to work. Will you watch Bobby for a few hours?"

"Sure" said Bobby's grandfather as Bobby's mother went flying out the door. Then the grandfather scooped up two bowls of oatmeal and said to little Bobby, "Do you like sugar?"

Bobby nodded and then his grandfather said, "and how about some butter, too?" Again Bobby nodded. Finally, "how about a little milk?" "Sure" the boy said.

But when the grandfather placed the steaming bowl of oatmeal in front of Bobby, the boy made a face and pushed it away.

"But when I asked you, you said you liked sugar, butter and milk" protested the grandfather. "Yeah" said Bobby, "but you didn't ask me if I liked oatmeal." His grandfather forgot the most elemental question. And sometimes we forget to do that, too.

We never set our priorities. We never list in our own minds what those things are that matter the most. We allow life to buffet us here and there and we never center in on those things that really matter.

There is an old story about a recipe for rabbit pie that begins with the instruction to "first catch a rabbit". And that's great advice!

. What are those things that matter the most in your life? Are you making certain that those priorities are being met?

One more football story. When Vince Lombardi took over the Green Bay Packers, they were at the bottom of the league. In 1958 they lost 10 out of 12 games, tied 1 and won 1. When they came to the camp in June of 1959, Vince Lombardi said,

"Gentlemen, we are going to have a football team. We are going to win some games. Get that?"

And how were they going to do that?

"You are going to learn to block, run and tackle. You are going to outplay all the teams that you come up against. (And then threw in the clincher) You are going to have confidence in me and enthusiasm for my system....hereafter I want you to think of only three things: your home, your religion and the Green Bay Packers."

We would quarrel with the order but certainly not the spirit of Lombardi's challenge. He had narrowed his priorities to those simple things that he considered important. I think we can learn from this. For we, too, must decide what is really important in our lives. "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing!"

THE DISTRACTION OF LITTLE THINGS

There is a second secret to living smart. Living smart says, "Don't let the little things distract you". "Don't sweat the small stuff" says a good friend.

Somewhere I read about an English home owner who declared war against the mole that had been burrowing unsightly tunnels throughout his property. Moles are nocturnal animals and so he drove his Jaguar onto the lawn to hunt the mole down with the aid of his headlights. The only trouble was that his car stalled. When he got it started again, it lurched forward into gear and got out of control. Onward it rolled until it crashed into his house. The car's fuel tank ruptured and burst into flames which quickly reached the house and within minutes the house was on fire.

The situation got out of hand. He couldn't even phone for help. The telephone cable was burned through before he could place a call to the local fire department. Some hours later he was heard to say, "I still want that mole dead".

We appreciate his frustration. We've all had moments like that...making mountains of molehills. He lost his perspective. Somehow his priorities slipped out of gear....it happens to us on occasion.

It's been said that former astronaut and now Senator from Ohio, John Glenn, has a reputation for sticking to his priorities. It was he who refused to go to the door and receive the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson. Why? Glenn's wife was quite ill in bed and needed his attentiveness. John Glenn's relationship with his wife was more important than his greeting the president.

In our Scripture Lesson for this morning, we find Martha busy with many things. She was trying to be a gracious hostess. Who could fault her for that? It's hard work. I'm sure that Jesus understood and appreciated that. But at that particular moment it wasn't the most fruitful way for her to be spending her time. The Master was in her home...in the living room. Where was she? In the kitchen. True, she could bake Him bread but He could offer her the very bread of life.

She could set the drink on the table, but He could treat her to Living Water. She could make sure He felt at home, but He could offer her an Eternal Home. It wasn't that Martha wasn't working hard. It was that she wasn't really living smart. She let little distractions get in the way of what was truly important. There is one more thing to say before we feast on the Bread of life.

IT BEGINS WITH A COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Living smart begins with a commitment and it's a commitment to Christ. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" said Jesus. "And everything else will be added to you...." The smartest thing that Martha could have done at that particular moment was to emulate her sister, Mary, and sit for a few moments at the feet of Jesus.

In a Scandinavian country there is a statue of Christ. A tourist standing in front of it appeared dismayed. A local resident asked him what his problem was. He replied, "I cannot see His face". The resident then explained,

"If you desire to see His face, you must kneel at His feet...."

There are some present this hour whose greatest need right now is to spend some time kneeling or sitting at the feet of Jesus. Our lives are out of kilter. We're going against the grain. Our values are out of focus. Our priorities are hopelessly skewed. Like the poor man who destroyed his house and his car, our molehills have become mountains. Be careful you don't end up destroying more than a car and a house. It could be a life. We need to stop where we are and sit at the feet of Jesus and learn once again from Him.

"Lord...help me to know what those things are that really need to matter the most in my life...and help me always to put you and the things that Jesus stood for first in my life".

Begin with your commitment to Christ and then let the rest of your life flow out from there. That's the difference between simply living and living smart.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your Spirit, O God, in these quiet moments... when we sit and kneel at the feet of Jesus. Visit our sick with the quiet assurance of Your care. Encircle the bereaved with Your warming and healing Presence. Point our markers on the trail for those who have lost their way. Douse with the cold waters of common sense any who might this day may be on the verge of some destructive action or unhealthy, unwise decision. The race we run, O Lord, even at its longest is quite short. We would run it well and to Your glory. In the spirit of Christ, we pray.

PARK AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
FINANCIAL FACTS AND FIGURES

PLEDGE INFORMATION

1987 GOAL: \$100,000 from 230 or more pledges

DEDICATION SUNDAY: November 23rd

- I. Total Needs - 1986 \$ 245,984.
- II. Of this amount, we must raise \$ 100,000. in pledges from members and friends of this parish.

Pledges of financial support will be received on and before that Sunday. Pledge cards will be placed on the Altar by the ushers and pledges will be dedicated in a special Litany of Dedication.

III. Other Sources of Income:

Holiday Offerings	\$ 7,900.
Day School	64,284.
Plate Collections	8,500.
Use of Church Gifts	20,000.
Other Sources	18,300.
Trust Fund	27,000.

In 1986 (this year) we received 221 pledges. As members and friends move away in the 1986-1987 transition, we anticipate losing 20 pledges totalling \$15,000.00.

Income received from the above sources accounts for the difference between the total amount of \$245,984. and the \$100,000. we must raise in pledges from the people of this parish.

For 1986 a profile of the individual giving of the people of this parish would be as follows:

IV. Operating Expenses:

Ministerial Costs	\$62,218.
Program Expense	34,050.
Administrative Expenses	62,088.
Building Maintenance and Operation	54,801.
Benevolence Program	32,827.

PLEDGE CARDS
RECEIVED

AMOUNT PLEDGED
PER PLEDGE CARD

45	From \$	-0-	125.00
37	From \$	126.00	249.00
38	From \$	250.00	399.00
43	From \$	400.00	599.00
30	From \$	600.00	999.00
28	Over \$	1,000.00 +	

While other sources of income are important, some are uncertain. Pledges from members and friends remain the chief source of funds for meeting all expenses involved in the operation of the programs of the Church.

Total Needs: \$ 245,984.

TODAY AT 12:30 P. M.

Those who are serving as canvassers for this year's Financial Drive will meet in Fellowship Hall (third floor) for a time of instruction and inspiration.

Sixty persons have been enlisted to serve and we urge all workers to be in attendance, if possible.

There will be a light luncheon for the canvassers after the coffee hour. This will also be on the third floor.

TODAY'S BLOOD DRIVE

Again this year, our neighbor up Park Avenue - the Brick Presbyterian Church - is sponsoring a community Blood Drive. We are invited to publicize, promote and participate in this worthy endeavor. It's being held today, from 9:15 to 2:45 pm. The location is 65 East 92nd Street. See Betty Berg for further details. Pledge cards and general information are available downstairs in the Russell Room.

Dear Members and Friends,

The special affection which each of us has for this particular Church can be expressed in many intangible ways...in the giving of our time, our loyalty, our talents, our energies, and in the warm regard we hold for each other and for those who are our leaders.

These intangibles are vital to a Church's health and survival in this city, but financial support is vital and essential, too.

We are in that month of the year when each of us is asked to be "tangible" - to decide what proportion of our personal financial resources we can commit to the life of our Church in the year ahead.

I am convinced that our Church is doing splendid work in a unique section of the world's greatest city. I also feel that we can do even more. This community in which we live offers unlimited opportunities for partnerships with Christian endeavors. We must work to make our Church an ever-growing and ever more vital influence in this city which is our home.

The program for meeting the challenges and opportunities for service in 1987 was mailed to you on Thursday of this week. We seek your response and hope that you will want to consider committing yourself to the program of service through the presentation of a pledge of financial support at the service on November 23rd.

Sincerely,

Larry Morales
Chairman, 1987 Financial Canvas
Park Avenue Methodist Church

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, November 5, 1989

I. HOLY COMMUNION / AN INVITATION

- A. It has long been the custom of this church to celebrate the Sacrament....we like to announce for the benefit of visiting friends....table of our Lord is open...one does not have to be a member...we invite you to receive the Sacrament here this hour...trusting that the time for you may be an occasion of spiritual renewal...
- B. Procedure...elements will be served to you in the pews. Upon receiving them, please hold them until all have been served...and then together as one family of faith, we shall commune.

II. PICK UP YOUR COPY

- A. Be sure to pick up your copy of the November issue of our monthly news sheet. Copies are by the door and thanks once again to Lucy Dinnes, editor, who does such a grand job of writing up our concerns...bring them all together with such a flare and touch of warmth and enthusiasm.

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. The parish concerns are "lifted up" for you in the bulletin. Review them on your own...noting the meetings scheduled for this week - Trustees, Day School Evaluation Committee, Membership, and Education....busy week. Keep in minds the "Hounds" (Tuesday evenings) and the Aldersgate Class (Wednesday evening).
- B. The Church Fair approaches...remember to give your "FARE" SHARE of time and energy to this "all-church" activity...the big fund raiser for the community concerns we support. The "Chair" of the Fair is "X - 334"....Jacque Notestine.... that's her number in today's marathon...so go over and cheer her on...and if time permits as she goes by...tell her you've signed up for the Fair...that will spur her on...give her a lift! X - 334...not 007.

IV. FINANCIAL CANVASS

- A. Our Financial Canvass is now underway. Dedication Sunday is two weeks from today. The stewardship materials have been mailed far and wide....look it over...talk it over with one of the canvasser when you're called...hopefully respond with

a pledge of financial support. Hopefully, all of you will want to include the church in your program of giving for 1990.

- B. I came across this quotation this week. Edna Ferber once said,

"Some people make the world. The rest
just come along and live in it...."

To which group do you want to belong?

V. OFFERING

- A. There's a special envelope in the pew today...for those who wish to respond to the hurricane Hugo victims and the earthquake victims through the Church. Envelopes are there for those who wish to make a special gift.
- B. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit...

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