



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

September 19, 2021

**Live Abundantly...with  
heart, mind, and soul**

Dr. Jo Forrest

© 2021 by Dr. Jo Forrest and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: September 30, 2021

## **Live Abundantly...with heart, mind, and soul**

---

In a culture that pummels us with the notion of scarcity and life is a zero-sum game, lived only at the expense of the other, our faith calls us to instead believe God blesses us.

When we join in God's ongoing, creative act in the way we steward our bodies, community, children, resources, time and work, and technology, we find our best selves blossom and our community expand.

For the next six weeks, we embark on a sermon series and companion adult education series to explore how to live abundantly.

Today, we consider how we steward ourselves, body and mind.

Scripture opens with, "In the beginning, God..." unfolding a story of God's overflowing love, investing each of us with God's divine spark.

And you know the story, in short order, we grew up and grew away from God, fought amongst ourselves, and became exiled.

God called Moses to lead the people out of slavery and give us the key to live the good life.

The Book of Deuteronomy presents his valedictory address, before he sends the people across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

Before we read, please pray with me.

*Eternal God, We too want to live an abundant life and hunger for your words and guidance. Silence the noise and doubt. Ignite*

*within us the desire to do as you command so we may delight you, becoming all you created us to be. Amen.*

Listen for God's word as I read a portion of Moses' sermon from Deuteronomy 6:1-9:

<sup>1</sup>Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy,

<sup>2</sup>so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all the decrees and commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

<sup>3</sup>Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

<sup>6</sup>Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

<sup>7</sup>Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

<sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup>and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

As the Israelites stand at the edge, with wilderness, exile and starvation behind them and the Promised land before them, Moses commands them to remember God brought them from the destruction and for them to flourish they must devote all of their being to their creator.

You may recognize the command following the second “Hear oh Israel” as the Shema, the sacred prayer observant Jews weave into the fabric of life’s rhythms, recited morning and night, when tucking children into bed, spoken in Shabbat worship.

The English translations "heart," "soul," and "might" fail to conjure for us the depth of meaning in the ancient Hebrew.

Heart refers to the center of thinking, emotion, loyalty.

The soul encompasses the unity of body and spirit – never to be divided.

Your might is your inherent capacity to act; your strength, your wealth, your influence, all the ways you make your mark on this world.<sup>1</sup>

These multi-dimensional concepts are windows into the vital and thriving life that God intended for humanity from the beginning and do not divide along the distinctions from the World Health Organization's "physical, mental, social, and spiritual" categories.

---

<sup>1</sup> James Bruckner, “A Theological Description of Human Wholeness in Deuteronomy 6,” *Ex Auditu: An International Journal for Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 2006, p. 1-6. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Vol 1 The Five Books of Moses*, (New York: WW Norton, 2019) 640-645.

These few words address the realm of the human will, the realm of human relationships, and the realm of human vitality as gifts of God.

Our translation also fails to express the permanence of this command. We are to literally write these words into our hearts and on our hands, think of tattoo, so that we never forget who we are or whose we are.

Before Moses literally goes to his grave and fades into history, his final obedience to God commands all generations to love God – heart, soul, and might.

Scholars who plumb the origins of scripture argue that this passage was certainly not written in the time of Moses, but centuries later.

Again, they ignored God, served selfish goals, loved their money, let community unravel, so the Israelites fell, and were banished. Again, they stood at the edge with of the Babylonian exile behind them and desperate to return home.

By the grace of God, they come back and charged to remember this command, every day, and in all generations to love God – heart, soul, and might.

One of the most liberating aspects of going to Divinity School at the University of Chicago was the diverse student body. I had never encountered such variety of ages, ethnicities, languages spoken, and imaginations.

The majority of students at the Divinity School were studying for their Ph.D. and observed all sorts of faith traditions or were avowed atheists.

Only a few of us aspired to serve Jesus through the ministry – kind of like the world outside of the academy.

Amidst such diversity, no one seemed to care what you looked like. Your ideas, your critical thinking, your passion, your dreams—how you were going to express your life—that is what mattered.

Accustomed to walking into conference rooms and offices filled with suited folks who dressed for success, so the other startling, visual reminder that this is not your corporate world were the number of tattoos I saw.

Bare arms and legs of summer shorts and sandals exposed imaginative diverse body art.

In a class on the Book of Job, I became friends with a Ph.D. candidate in literature – maybe because we were the only two who were not fluent in Hebrew.

He sat so still in lectures and never, never took notes, and sat so very still. Finally, I asked. As an undergraduate, he'd been taught to show up prepared and then pay attention, really pay attention. After class, he'd make notes.

Towards the end of the spring quarter, my curiosity won out and I asked about the image inked on the top of his foot.

His face softened to a smile and said, “it is the last line of Cormac McCarthy’s novel, *The Road*. Do you know it?”

Well, “yes,” I replied, “it won the Pulitzer.” Then fear crept though my mind that he would ask me about some obtuse aspect of this dense post-apocalyptic novel. This guy was wicked smart.

*The Road* chronicles a future time after the country lay in ruin from disease and an environmental meltdown. A father attempts to lead his son to safety as savages murder anyone in their path.

After so much death, the son grieves, and receives comfort from a woman who speaks to him of God and God's eternal breath that passes from man to man through all time. Grace remains.

The novel closes with an image of mountain trout whose bodies were patterned with the map of the world at its beginning. The final line reads and tattoo-ed onto his foot, "In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery."

Hate to say, I've forgotten this student's name.

I imagine by now; he will have written of this "deep mystery," his deep hope for humanity, with his unique God-given gifts in ways our world desperately needs. He fundamentally believed in the divine grace to restore our lives, even if humankind makes a mess of things.

I imagine by now, this hope that he experienced would inspire his teaching to bring out the best his students, to nurture them to bring their entire being – body and mind – in ways that also delight God and contribute to our common good.

To remind ourselves to love God with your entire being, through words or some symbol, wearing a cross, and daily habits humbles us to allow God's will to flow through us with a divine creativity beyond our reach.



## **Live Abundantly...with heart, mind, and soul**

---

To place God at the beginning and end of our existence, we participate in God's grand design for human flourishing.

And we cannot forget the completeness with which God meets us in our lives. Against all human comprehension, God chose to inhabit a human body, with flesh and fragility, walk in us and with us.

Jesus repeats throughout the gospels, the greatest command is to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And he adds one more way to love God; love your neighbor.

Westminster stands today because of all those who came before us who committed to love God and to love their neighbor. Through Westminster we belong to God and one another when our children and our children's children witness us participating in this legacy.

You know you are loving God with heart, soul, and might, or body, mind, and spirit – whatever words resonate with you, when you find yourself able to manage through the wilderness, that is grace, and when we make a mess, you still yearn for a better life, that is hope.

You know you love your neighbor when the things that affect them impact you. Whenever their lives are incumbered, you feel it too, and seek to bring them along.

Love God and love your neighbor. Simple. Abundant.

As I was sequestered away writing this sermon, out of the blue, one of you, I'd not heard from in some time texted me the following poem. Both the act to share and the content of

this poem express the ways we bless one another by giving in this congregation...

**“Wildly Unimaginable Blessings”** by Alden Solovy

Let us dream  
Wildly unimaginable blessings...  
Blessings so unexpected,  
Blessings so beyond our hopes for this world,  
Blessings so unbelievable in this era,  
That their very existence  
Uplifts our vision of creation,  
Our relationships to each other,  
And our yearning for life itself.

Let us dream  
Wildly unimaginable blessings...  
A complete healing of mind, body, and spirit,  
A complete healing for all,  
The end of suffering and strife,  
The end of plague and disease,  
When kindness flows from the river of love,  
When goodness flows from the river of grace,  
Awakened in the spirit of all beings,  
When G-d's light,  
Radiating holiness,  
Is seen by everyone.

Let us pray —  
With all our hearts —  
For wildly unimaginable blessings,  
So that G-d will hear the call  
To open the gates of the Garden,  
Seeing that we haven't waited,  
That we've already begun to repair the world.



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
412-835-6630

[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)