THE IMPORTANCE OF VIGOR

INTRODUCTION

Vigor is a character trait worth pursuing no matter what your age, even though it sometimes gets associated with old folks. Like the word *spry*. "He's 85, but he's still spry..." It's meant to be a compliment, but it conjures up images of a skinny old man jumping up and clicking his heels, shouting "Yeee-hah!" We say things like, "He still mows the lawn with a push mower! He sure is vigorous for his age!" So if we are going to pursue this trait, we need to rescue the word from the realm of octogenarians.

COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF VIGOR

The original Latin root of the word vigor had to do with thriving and flourishing. That's a good insight to start pursuing vigor. *Thrive*. A plant that produces an abundance of blossoms is said to be thriving. A business that leaves no question concerning its viability or its ongoing success is called a "thriving business."

Applied to human beings, we think of someone who is very energetic. We imagine a person who is running on all eight cylinders, the engine revving, ready to pop the clutch and peel out into the day. A vigorous person doesn't saunter, mosey, stroll, dawdle, or lolly-gag. When they unload the groceries, they don't shuffle along...pick up one bag...head into the house...set it down...look around waiting for someone else to help...get sidetracked opening the mail...head back out into the garage...pick up another bag... You get the idea. A vigorous person has the car unloaded before the garage door barely has time to close.

A vigorous person goes after things with passion, like there's bound to be something good in the effort, something worthwhile, something to be gained by completing a task. But not just to get it done. To get it done well. Well enough to feel satisfaction before they move on to the next thing.

The more I describe a vigorous person the more I realize how few vigorous people we tend to see. How many people do you know who put their whole self—heart, soul, mind and strength—into every task? Not many. But when you come across one, it's usually a pleasure to see. And even more, it's a pleasure to benefit from their work. I don't think the statement, "I wish you weren't so vigorous," has ever been uttered in human history.

Why is vigor so important to others? If you've ever watched the *Tour de France* you might have seen an example of racers charging up steep mountain roads for miles at a time. Very likely you will have seen the potential race winner tucked in behind one or two team mates pedaling in front of him, putting out incredible effort on behalf of their leader. As long as he stays close behind them, their effort makes it more likely he will conserve strength and win the stage, because he's riding *in their draft*.

That's what vigorous people do for us. Their energetic efforts lighten our load by giving us strength and inspiring us to persevere. It's like we get pulled along in their draft, just like a cyclist in the *Tour de France*.

I would bet you'd love to have someone say to you some day: *"Watching you gives me hope and energy to keep going and do my best."*

Here's my definition of vigor. It's short and sweet. **VIGOR IS... putting your whole self into every task.**

No matter what type of personality you have, any person can become vigorous. Any person can develop higher standards of personal goals and outcomes that makes it harder to give anything less than your best. You can actually train each of the components of your "self"—mind, emotions, will, and body—to function with eagerness, pace and grit.

Does it sound daunting? Probably. But remember, here's your motivation. It's the motivation we've been strengthening throughout this prayer season. We choose to develop our character to pursue the goal of Christlikeness. We learned in one of the first days about the "Transformative Power of Character" —that becoming more and more like Jesus is a partnership process between the Holy Spirit and you. God's effort and yours.

And it is undeniable that Jesus was and is vigorous. He put and still puts Himself fully into everything He does. He comes after us with reckless abandon to save us and transform us. He gave up everything and still does in order to make these things happen.

Let's look at one way Jesus displayed vigor that on the surface doesn't seem "vigorous." He prayed a lot.

> **Luke 5:15-16 ...crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.**

But how does that require vigor? Imagine the vigor it takes to make the time for prayer knowing you would have to put out extra effort to make up for lost time. So Jesus made hard choices to lose sleep in order to pray. Sometimes early in the morning:

> **Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.**

Sometimes he prayed all night:

> **Luke 6:13-16 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.**

He gave up sleep in the night to be with people all day. That's vigor. Plus having vigor is not only about your energy level. Vigorous people go all out making sure they achieve the best results they possibly can. They don't settle for "that's good enough" if something better can happen. That's also why Jesus devoted Himself to pray at night or early mornings even when He had had or would have very full and draining days of ministering to throngs of people. He wanted to be fully prepared, and for Jesus that meant taking the necessary time to receive instructions from His heavenly Father. Jesus made it clear that everything He said and did came from the Father.

> **John 12:49-50. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it... So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."**

REFLECTION:

Now just think of your life and the extra amount of work and effort required if you committed to the amount of late night and early morning prayer Jesus did in order to keep His days free to serve others. I'd call that vigorous. So here's a couple questions to consider.

- **Keeping in mind the definition of vigor as "putting your whole self into every task," on a scale of one to ten how vigorous are you?**

- **What kind of tasks, if any, do you tend to approach with vigor? Name a few tasks or responsibilities you might need to approach with greater vigor.**

- Thinking of vigor as related not only to your energy level, but also giving your best efforts to achieve the best results, **can you identify one or two tasks and responsibilities you engage in that you settle for something less than what is possible if you put out more energy?**

These are important questions for anyone to face who wants to be more like Jesus. And if you need any more motivation, here's one more verse:

> **Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

Now's a good time to pray with me.

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, I'll admit today's devotional hit me square in the face. There are many things, even important things, I do just to get them done without trying to do my best with an eager spirit. That doesn't mean I have to be thrilled with the task, I know, but I can be thrilled for the opportunity to be more like You and put my whole self into it for that reason alone. I can do that; I can do all things as if I am doing it for You. But I can also just plain forget in the heat of the moment. I'm asking for Your help to keep that vision of what You are like before my eyes and imagining myself working for You standing right beside me. I'm asking this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.