

Have many of you been watching the Olympics this time around? Our family used to get local news channels in San Diego, but we're not hooked up here, so it's been more difficult to watch events. But the news cycle does report some of the major events so I feel like I'm somewhat connected. My son competed in gymnastics for about three years during middle school and even when I was a youth I was always drawn to watch the men's and women's gymnastic events. I'd say they are my favorite Olympic events.

As I've been thinking about the Olympics this past week, I've also been thinking about living within our limits in whatever we're trying to accomplish. The idea of limits has been filtering through my prayer and Bible study time. It's difficult - being more aware of my limits - because it's so counter cultural. I mean, the phrase "The sky's the limit!" or "You can be anything you want to be" are two VERY common phrases that come quickly to mind that would argue the opposite of limits and living within them. But I think limits are so healthy.

It's fascinating to me that about three weeks ago I decided to speak about limits related to the olympic games and then just a few days ago, as I was beginning to prepare this message, the story broke about the gymnast Simone Biles and her decision to honor her own limits - as she became aware of them - by dropping out of the women's gymnastic team events completely. I'm sure you've heard some if not all of that story, so I won't say more about it here, except to repeat one of her quotes, "It's ok sometimes to sit out of big competitions to focus on yourself, because it shows how strong of a competitor and person you really are." In other words, knowing and choosing to live within our limits is actually a sign of strength rather than weakness.

The idea of limits, of finitude, as created children of God is all over the Bible. Abraham & Sarah were unable to have children. Moses was slow of speech. The judge Samson was inordinately strong only when his hair was long & uncut. King Saul was mentally imbalanced. The prophets Elijah & Jeremiah were prone to bouts of depression. The

apostle Paul pleaded with God to take away the thorn in his side -we're not sure what exactly it was - some think it was bad eyesight. John, who wrote the gospel of John, was exiled to the island Patmos at the end of his life - imprisoned. But all of these, through their experiences of limits, produced fruit as it were - furthering the work and majesty of God by allowing God to provide what was needed instead of them pushing and pushing to accomplish it on their own.

King David, who Karen read about in the scripture passage for today, is an amazing example of living within the limits God set in his life. As we heard in 2 Samuel 7 starting at verse one, David is at the height of his power, at the height of his influence as King of the Nation of Israel. He's been more successful than you can imagine. He brought the ark back to Jerusalem. Everyone loves him. He's got wealth. He's got popularity. He's got power. He's got the greatest military in the East at that time and he says to God. "Why should I be living in a palace, while you live in a tent?" Even his desire is selfless in that sense. He's just wanting to honor God. So he talks to the prophet Nathan about his idea to build God a permanent building to dwell in and the prophet Nathan tells David, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you." Though, we don't have evidence in the story here that Nathan consulted God first.

But then, later that night, God speaks to Nathan - sounds like it might have been in a dream, but it doesn't specifically say that. But God says, basically, after a long speech - "No." He puts a limit on David. "No, David. Instead I will raise one of up from your offspring - one of your children - and he will build a house for me. Not you."

And David does something so amazing in response - he bows before the mystery. 'Cuz God doesn't explain why he doesn't want David to build him a forever home. He just tells David no. And in response, David just trusts God. Which is an amazing sign of his deep relationship with God.

Sometimes it's obvious why we experience limits. Maybe we haven't been taking care of ourselves the way we need to. Or we made a decision that led to some difficult consequences. Or

we're desiring something that isn't good for us and we know it. But sometimes the limit we experience isn't understandable and we don't like it. In that case, we're experiencing the mystery of God. And God is nothing if not mystery and the sum of all things whereas we are limited and finite in all things.

We're asked by God to live within our limits - to limit ourselves - in order to understand and experience the limitlessness of God.

I had an idea a while ago to interview someone in our congregation who might have something to say about athletics and limits and share that interview with you. The very first time I met with some of you, to decide if we should begin meeting in person for worship or not, I heard an exciting praise that their high school basketball team won the state championships. So I decided to interview that person - Shaylee Cater. Shaylee and I had a chance to talk this past week and she had some interesting things to say about limits and athletics.

Part of Shaylee's story, which she gave me permission to share, is that she began playing basketball herself her freshman year of high school. But during that year, she became aware of a limit of sorts for herself and embraced it. She realized the coaching she was getting wasn't good for her. She had an experience that left her feeling bad, bringing her to tears. But she absolutely loved sports and her team and she knew she wanted to be involved somehow so when they asked to take on a different role for the team rather than playing, she said yes. She was asked to be a manager who kept track of the scores and statistics and helped train the girls on the team. That experience gave her so much joy that now she loves being part of the team behind the scenes more than she liked playing on the team. She loves the math of statistics and in the future she can see herself as an athletic trainer. This is what she said in her own words:

"Playing on the team wasn't fun for me. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. You see other people happy, but you're not. It was an eye opening experience as to what my heart was calling for. It

was an adjustment. I felt happier when I figured out what I wanted to do."

Shaylee is a great example of how God intends for us to be aware of, live within, embrace and grow from our limits. When we do, then we can understand the limitlessness and mystery of God working in our lives.