

TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT

Inspired by the Eagles Song Song

Week #7 of an 8-week "Songs of Life" Series

July 18, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

SOLO

Guest artist Todd Herzog sings the message title song, "Take It to the Limit"

All alone at the end of the evening
When the bright lights have faded to blue
I was thinking 'bout a woman who might have
Loved me and I never knew

You know I've always been a dreamer
Spent my life running 'round
It's so hard to change
Can't seem to settle down
But the dreams I've seen lately
Keep on turning out and burning out
And turning out the same

So put me on a highway
And show me a sign
And take it to the limit one more time

You can spend all your time making money
You can spend all your love making time
If it all fell to pieces tomorrow
Would you still be mine?

And when you're looking for your freedom
Nobody seems to care
And you can't find the door
Can't find it anywhere
When there's nothing to believe in
Still you're coming back, you're running back
You're coming back for more

So put me on a highway
And show me a sign
And take it to the limit one more time

Take it to the limit
Take it to the limit
Take it to the limit one more time

[Instrumental]

Take it to the limit
Take it to the limit - whoo
Take it to the limit
One more time

[Congregation whoops and applauds]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Whooo! [Congregation applauds] Todd Herzog! And give it up for our fabulous band! Whoo hoo! Oh, yeah! [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]

So this state police officer was waiting at the side of the highway to catch anybody speeding when he noticed a car pattering along at just 25 miles an hour. Knowing this was dangerous, he turned on his lights, pursued them and stopped them. As he approached the car, he noticed there were five elderly ladies – two in the front and three in the back. And they were looking wide-eyed and a little white as ghosts.

The driver was obviously a little confused, and said to the officer, *“Officer, I don’t understand! I was doing exactly the speed limit! What seems to be the problem?”* And the officer said, *“Ma’am, you weren’t speeding at all; in fact, you were going much, much slower than the speed limit, which can be really dangerous for yourself and for other vehicles.”* *“Slower than the speed limit? No, sir! I was doing the exact speed limit: 25 miles an hour,”* the lady said proudly. And the police officer – trying to contain a smile – said, *“Twenty-five is the route number!”* [Congregation laughs] *“You’re on Route 25; that’s not the speed limit. The speed limit is 55.”* A little embarrassed, the woman thanked the officer for pointing out the error. And he said, *“One last thing; is everybody okay? ‘Cause all the women in the car look terrified. They look shaken up.”* And she said, *“Aw; don’t worry. They’ll be okay in a minute. We just got off Route 119.”* [Congregation laughs] *Aw, man ...* [Rev. Maraj laughs]

So I would love it if you think of an area in your life where you limit yourself. What is an area in your life where you limit yourself? Or you hold back? And where you settle for less?

How many people have a bad habit or a negative pattern in your life you’d like to change, but you find it really hard to change? Anybody find it hard to change? And how many people have any goals or things that you really want to do, but find yourself procrastinating a lot, and not always getting to it?

So on a scale of 1 to 10 – 10 being the highest – how motivated of a person would you say you are? How much are you striving for greater and better? And how much more motivated would you like to be?

When I was a kid, I loved any inspirational saying. I mean, I have countless – hundreds! – of them that I just have and kept, because I’m inspired by them. One of them is: *“Whatever lies behind, and whatever lies before us, does not compare to what lies within us.”* Most inspirational quotes remind us that there’s something great in us, but we’ve got to keep trying. We’ve got to keep working. We’ve got to keep believing.

Here are some of my favorite Churchill quotes. Winston Churchill said, *“It is consistent effort, not intelligence or strength, that will unlock the potential within you.”* He said that, *“Success isn’t final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”* He said, *“If you’re going through hell; keep going!”* [Congregation laughs] He said, *“Don’t fear failure; rather, you should fear not trying.”* And finally, he said, *“Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.”* [Congregation laughs]

And I love hearing all of these – even the funny ones – because, in a way, they encourage us. They uplift us and inspire us. And it also reminds us that we have got more in us than we sometimes give ourselves credit for. You know, we love to be uplifted and inspired.

Do you know that the personal development and personal growth industry worldwide in 2020 grossed about \$40 billion in sales of inspirational material? That’s how much we love and like to be reminded that our lives can get better. That there is something magnificent and greater in each and every one of us.

Today we continue with Week #7 of our eight-week “Songs of Life” series, where we use famous popular songs to extract some spiritual idea in how to live more fully and more abundantly. Today we’re going to look at motivating ourselves beyond our limits – looking at the 1975 Eagles hit, “Take It to the Limit.”

You know, at first you think this is a love song. Obviously, *“think about a woman who might have loved me”* ... You know, *“Can’t seem to settle down”* and *“If things fall apart, will you still be mine?”* But it is about that and even more. Here’s what Randy Meisner said, who originally came up with this song, and then it was finished off by Frye and Henley.

He said, *“The line ‘Take it to the limit’ was to keep trying before you reach a point in your life where you’ve done and seen everything ... you know, that part of getting old. And ‘Take it to the limit one more time’ means just keep punching away at it every day while you can.”*

So it’s not just about relationships; it is about a larger philosophical idea about encouraging us to continue to keep trying. To continue to keep believing. To continue to keep working. That, no matter what age or stage – no matter what level of discontent or content, no matter what failure of success – that we are here to keep living and keep striving.

You know, someone said that there may be a retirement age in work, but there ain’t a retirement age in life! That wherever you are, there’s more to do. And *“Take It to the Limit”* is about: move beyond your limits. Keep striving. Keep living. Keep believing. Keep growing.

So what are the lessons of life from this song that we can learn. So here we go; let’s look at a couple of the verses. It says:

*“You know I’ve always been a dreamer
Spent my life running ‘round
And it’s so hard to change
Can’t seem to settle down”*

And the next verse:

*When you’re looking for your freedom
And nobody seems to care
And you can’t find the door
Can’t find it anywhere*

In fact, most of the song is about a general level of disappointment in life. You know, a general level of the things that don’t go well that we don’t enjoy. Lost love. Regretting not getting married; regretting not settling down. The frustration of being alone. Or how we’re spending our money or how we’re spending our time. And feeling like we’re not free: looking for our freedom.

And it seems that life isn’t working here. But what’s good about it is: at least the singer is aware that these things aren’t working. And it might not seem like a big deal, but being aware of where we limit ourselves – being aware of what isn’t working in our lives – is the first step to improving and helping ourselves get better.

Gay Hendricks has a concept – and if you’ve done my prosperity class you know how much I love it. He says every one of us suffer from a *“ULP: an upper limit problem.”* That every one of us has an upper limit – a ceiling that we’ve created ourselves – of how much love we think we deserve. How much happiness. How much success. How much abundance. And how much prosperity. We all have an area in our lives we think, *“Oh, I don’t think I could do that.”* *“I’m not sure I can handle that much responsibility or greatness.”* *“I just can’t see myself running a successful business.”* *“I don’t think I’m worthy of that kind of loving relationship.”* *“I don’t think I can handle that much success.”*

There are parts of our lives that we have an *“upper limit”* – an inner belief; sometimes it’s unconscious! – of how much good, how much happiness and abundance that there is in life. You know, sometimes we limit our own ability to receive love by thinking we’re not worthy. By pushing people away. By thinking we’re not good enough, or even sabotaging our own happiness. Sometimes we limit our happiness and our peace by just creating chaos and drama all the time, or focusing on the negative. Sometimes we

limit our level of abundance and prosperity by just focusing on lack and on scarcity, and what we don't have.

You know, we're the ones that limit our own happiness and success! Let me give you an example. Right now, what's limiting or stopping you from feeling really happy? Or feeling a sense of peace? Feeling a sense of joy? Feeling a sense of gratitude? I would suggest it is ourselves! We're the ones that limit it.

I want you to think about the level of love you have in your life, and ask yourself: What is that limit? And can you expand that limit to open yourself to experience, to embody and to express more love in all areas of your life?

How many people have heard of Mary Kay Cosmetics? We all have! Here's what she said: *"Don't limit yourself. Many people limit themselves to what they think they can do. But you can only go as far as your mind lets you."* And that means don't limit! We are the ones that limit!

And the thing about her that was really cool ... So back in the '60s, she was really, really successful in sales. Amazing in training. But she got tired of getting turned down and looked over by younger males. That she really got frustrated with it, so she quit. And she wanted to create a business that would empower her as a woman, but empower all other woman.

In 1963, at the age of 45 – with a \$5,000 investment from her son – she started Mary Kay Cosmetics. And it's been empowering women – that company – for years, to the point that they have three million consultants in 37 countries around the world and, in 2014, grossed \$3 billion in sales! She didn't want to limit herself, but she also wanted to help others not limit themselves, either.

I love the next verse when it says:

*"When there's nothing to believe in
Still you're coming back
You're running back
You're coming back for more"*

And, to me, that little verse is about hoping. It is about wanting help, and wanting to believe that our lives can get better than the way they are, no matter how much it does not seem like that. No matter how much you've failed. No matter how much things have not worked out. It is an idea to believe. Not just be aware of our limit, but to believe that we can break through whatever limitation we think is upon us.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started Apple in 1976. In 1985, Jobs was actually forced out of the company that he helped found. It was embarrassing. But he had about six billion reasons why not be that embarrassed. *[Congregation laughs]* He had a ton of money! He didn't need to prove a thing! He was a tremendous success. He was profoundly wealthy.

But then he started a company called Next, and I think they started another company called Pixar that did *Toy Story*. They were outrageously successful. Apple ended up buying them, and then 12 years later – in 1997 – he became the CEO again. And that's when the boom of the iPad, iPod, iPhone, iTunes ... Ay yi yi! *[Congregation laughs]* This bad boy was kicking in!

And here's what he said. He said, *"I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life."* Where he really revolutionized the personal computer industry.

The thing I love is: he didn't let success, he didn't let billions of dollars, he didn't let failure or embarrassment limit him from being who he came to be. And limit him from doing what he was called to do.

And so what are you limiting your life in? How are you holding yourself back? Because it sounds silly, but just being aware of where your own limits are – where your “upper limit” in your life is – whether it’s love or happiness or success, is the absolute first step in transforming it. And then actually just believing that it’s possible to break through that limit. You don’t need to know how; you just need to be willing to believe that it can get better. Willing to believe that there’s more in you and more for you.

And then the chorus says:

*“So put me on a highway
And show me a sign”*

How many people like to take road trips? Anybody like road trips? I used to love road trips! There is something about getting in your car and driving a long way that seems to clear your head! Makes you forget about all the responsibilities and challenges; it kind of calms and soothes you, relaxes you, and opens up. And you begin to think a little more clearly. You begin to have better perspective and understanding and insight.

So “*Put me on a highway*” kind of represents a little bit of solitude: quieting your mind and just letting yourself open a space for greater insight and greater understanding. Because we all have times in our lives where we just don’t know what to do! We don’t know how to act. We don’t know what decision to make. We don’t if to hold on; we don’t know if to let go. We don’t know what’s best. We don’t know what the positive thing to do is.

And it is in those moments that, “*Put me on a highway and show me a sign!*” To get ourselves on a path and open ourselves to listen to the inner guidance. You know, we have so much wisdom inside us! We’d rather turn, though, for advice from anybody and everywhere – all kinds of sources, except for ourselves.

And the question is: To be shown a sign, first you’ve got to ask! And the answer is already within us! The question is: How much do you trust your intuition? How much do you trust your inner voice? How much do you trust your gut? How much do you trust God has a plan for you?

You know, I had been suggested for years from family members and people in my church that I should be a minister. I thought they were all nuts! I didn’t see a minister; I didn’t want to be a minister. It was something I resisted. I did not think that was me at all: working on weekends. It was just not a good gig for me! [*Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh*]

And so a buddy of mine offered me a job as a bookkeeper at his reforestation company in Whistler, British Columbia. So I flew to BC. We drove to Whistler. Snow everywhere! We took the ski lift. And I said, “*Man, can you stick a chair in that snow for me? Let me sit and meditate for a while.*” Sat in the chair, meditated, saying, “*God! What am I meant to do? What is it that you have for me?*” And so I meditated. Opened my eyes. And, God! It was so beautiful up there. It was so picturesque. So beautiful. It was so incredible. And after a few minutes of silence, I realized I so didn’t belong there. [*Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh*]

And it was meditating on a mountain in British Columbia that I got clarity that I was meant and called to be a minister. “*Show me a sign.*” And sometimes our signs come in different ways. For me it was a feeling; for some people you might hear something, or someone might say something to you. Or some person might come into your life to give you clarity. But I always believe that it will come.

In the Book of James it says, “*If any of you lack anything, ask God, who gives generously to all.*” Ask! Put it out there! And the answer will come. There’s a Cameroonian proverb that I love. It says, “*He who asks the question cannot avoid the answer.*” The question: Are you willing to ask? Ask to be shown a sign: is this the highest and best? And not just ask, but are you willing to trust? Are you willing to listen to that inner voice and inner wisdom?

In the Book of Proverbs, it says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And lean not on your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your path.”* That, if you ask and trust and listen, God will show you a sign. God will give you an answer.

So where in your life are you confused? Where in your life are you not sure what to do? Where in your life are you looking for an answer? And the question is: Are you willing to let God put you on a highway? To have that solitude and quiet and show you a sign? Because I guarantee you: if you ask, you will receive.

And the final verse is:

“Take it to the limit one more time.”

And to me, *“take it to the limit”* is to stretch beyond your limit. To reach beyond your grasp. And *“one more time”* means to do it again and again and again, until you can’t do it anymore. It is about a way to live: stretch beyond your grasp, and do it again and again and again.

You know, stretching – whether touching our toes, doing yoga – stretching physically is very healthy and important for us. It lengthens the muscles, better circulation, greater range of motion, less likely for injury, more likely to recover from injuries. It’s about good circulation and good health.

But stretching ourselves mentally and spiritually is important, too! Stretching our faith. Stretching our imagination. Stretching our compassion. All of these open us to greater possibilities and a fuller experience of life.

You know, when the man with the withered hand wanted to be healed, Jesus said, *“Stretch out your hand!”* and he was restored. And sometimes it is stretching beyond our mindset – stretching beyond our comfort zones ... It is that stretching that can restore and bring life to us.

If you really look at it, Jesus’ entire ministry was about stretching: teaching us to stretch our minds and stretch our hearts. In the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus wanted to stretch our faith: that, in spite of lack, there is still abundance. That, even in moments of lack, gratitude and thanksgiving is an important thing. He wanted us to stretch.

When the adulteress woman – they wanted to stone her – he said, *“He who is without sin, cast the first stone.”* He was trying to stretch people to have greater compassion and empathy and understanding of others. And judgement of others.

When the disciples said, *“How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”* And Jesus said, *“No; as many as 70 times seven!”* Jesus was trying to stretch our minds that forgiveness wasn’t a one-time act; it was a consciousness of perpetually letting go and not holding on to the past.

Remember when Peter was in the boat on that stormy time? And that Jesus called him out of the boat? And first, he looked at Jesus, and he stayed on the water. And then he looked at the storm, and he sank into the water. And yet, still, Jesus said, *“You are the rock upon which I will build my church.”* Why? Because he was willing to step out of the boat of his comfort zone and to stretch his faith. And it is the willingness to stretch that expanded and made Peter the person that he wanted to be the leader of his church.

So my question for you is: What way is life calling you to stretch? What is it for you that you are being called to do that will stretch you? What risk? What action? Trying what? Opening your heart? I mean, what ways is life calling you to stretch and expand?

You know, I have a friend (Barry) who – in 1969 – he was 23 years old, and he was introduced to the game of racquetball. Racquetball, I didn’t realize, was only discovered or started a year before he started playing. He used to play at the Y, because there was no organized anything. About a year or so later, there were house leagues, and he came second the first year. He won it the second year. Then the

third year they had traveling teams going from the Y. And he found something really, really successful! He liked baseball, but he started falling in love with racquetball.

And at the age of 26, he was playing a game. And he got hit in his eye, and had to have seven surgeries and lost his eye. And about a year after, he went by himself late at night with a racquetball ... And just for a second, everybody just close one eye. *[Closes one eye]* I mean, you lose depth perception. Can you imagine living with that? But then can you imagine trying to play a game where a ball is coming fast at you? Can you imagine how tough that would be?

So he went by himself at night, because he didn't want to get embarrassed. And he tried to hit the ball ... and he missed the ball just trying to hit it. And he did that over and over again. And he kept missing. He started to cry. And he thought this part of his life was over.

But somehow – even though he was depressed – he went back. And he kept hitting this ball and hitting this ball. And he kept thinking, *“I need to look at it at a different angle. I need to be more strategic. I can't just be strong or fast; I need to find new ways of trying to learn how to play.”*

Then he started playing some of the people that he used to beat, and they were beating him. But he had to keep trying. Every single day he went and practiced and practiced and practiced, and got better. He went from being an A player down to being a C player. And then he started back being a C player, and then he went to B player and A player. And then he started playing in the Open, which is where the best players play.

And this was in his mid 30s. Late 30s, 40s, 50s. And today he has won 25 national and international singles and doubles racquetball championships. And just last weekend, he was inducted to the Illinois Racquetball Hall of Fame. I didn't even know they had an Illinois Racquetball Hall of Fame! *[Congregation laughs]* But he got inducted into it!

He's 75 years old; still playing three to four times a week. Amazingly, his wife has won 24 national and international championships. You know, I like to call them Mr. and Mrs. Racquetball! And, in fact, last year she was the oldest All-American collegiate athlete; she played racquetball for the team at ASU, because she was working on her PhD, or something.

And so, here's the thing: He started out later than most racquetball players, and he lost one eye. But he did not let that limit what he loved and wanted to do. What he thought might have been possible. He didn't even think it was possible! But he was willing to stretch. He was willing to go after it. And he was willing to give it a try. And every one of us has excuses: *“Man, I can't do that! I don't want to try that!”* But if it is in you, we need to stretch. If it is in us, we need to go beyond it and give it a try.

Madam Curie was the only woman – and I believe the only person ever – to win two Nobel prizes. In 1903, she won the Nobel Prize for physics. In 1911, she won the Nobel Prize for chemistry. And it was amazing! Because in the early 1900s, to have a woman scientist, period, in a man-dominated industry! And then to win the Nobel Prize! And then to win it twice! And being born in Poland, living in France – a foreigner in France ... to do all this?

And here's what she says: *“Life isn't easy for any of us, but so what? We must have perseverance and, above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that this thing must be attained.”*

You know, somebody once said, *“Nothing will work, unless you do!”* *[Congregation laughs]* And the work for us is to stretch. Is to get out of our comfort zone. And whether it's the example of Peter or Barry or Madam Curie, that ability is in us. We're the ones that have to work it!

And the way we do it is by being aware of where we limit ourselves, and being willing to believe that we can expand beyond the limits. The second thing is to seek guidance and clarity; ask God! Trust and listen! And ask God to show you a sign, and God will, indeed. And finally, stretch and expand beyond

your limits. If there's something you want – or even don't believe – go after it! Just stretch yourself, and reach out and give it a try. You will be amazed at the amazing things that will happen in your life.

So this is the simple – yet powerful – lesson for living from the song, "Take It to the Limit."

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to close your outer eyes. To make yourself comfortable in your chair. To let go of any busy-ness you've had so far this morning. Take in a deep and mindful breath, and release it slowly. If you've come into the room with a heavy heart, just gently let your cares go as we move our awareness within: to that place of peace that passes understanding. Into the very center of our being. That place where we are all one, and where God is in us and as us and through us. That place of Spirit.

In this quiet, still space, we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding us, providing us with answers – solutions for old problems – when we listen. When we go within, we know that God is present in each and every one of us and across the cosmos. Because it's all God! And we feel the presence and the power of Spirit within us: in our bodies, in every cell, bringing us to health and wholeness, which is our birthright.

And when we spend time in prayer and meditation, we are lifted up out of the old into a new consciousness of peace. Of love. Of joy. And prosperity. For it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

And so in this high and holy and exalted state, we move more deeply into the silence as we feel the presence of God within.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together. For lifting us up. For creating us in your image and likeness. For this and all of our blessings, we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

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