

PROCRASTINATION

It's great being together again.
I hope you had a wonderful summer.
And congratulations for finding us here at The Loft.
(Breakfast – a little different.)

Next January, we should be back in the new, improved and expanded
Wesley Hall.

(Woodforest joining us?)

Welcome New Guys

The title of our series this semester is “The Complaint Department.”
I sent you an email a few months ago,
 asking you to give me your biggest complaint
 with yourself, your marriage, your job, your life, your friendships,
 the church and the culture.

And did you ever rise to the occasion.
200 responses to each question.

After reading them all – nearly 2000 complaints,
 I thought I could either thank you for being so open and honest
 and for providing me with so much material to work with.
Or I could just say it:
 Wow, you fellas got a lot of issues.

Honestly, I'm not trying to make you feel worse.
Just the opposite.

What your answers show is that
 all of us are trying,
 all of us have real struggles,
 and most of us have pretty much the same issues and the same complaints.

We wish we were better men, better husbands and fathers
and better followers of Jesus Christ.

We wish we weren't so self-centered and prideful.

We wish we were doing more for others.

We all wish the Texans had hired a better head coach.

And, guess what?

Just about all of us wish we were having sex more often.

That by the way was the number one complaint you guys
had concerning your marriages.

You had others –

but that was number 1:

Not enough sex.

I read that and I thought,

“Yep, those are my guys!”

What it comes down to is that most of us are pretty much the same.

We all have issues, problems and regrets.

And that's why –

Jesus.

And that's why you all fit in here at Quest.

Because we're all pretty much the same.

Magnificent creatures made in the image of God

who are still a bit messed up and

who want to get better.

We're going to spend three weeks looking at your major complaints with
yourself.

That's always the right place to begin.

Work on yourself before you work on your marriage, your friendships, the culture,
or the political climate.

You had all kinds of things you wish were different about yourselves.

Things like
not being organized,
worrying too much about things you can't control,
struggling with lust,
not praying and reading the Bible regularly, and
not being empathetic enough.

And one of you wrote,
I probably drink too much beer.

“I'm not saying I do,
but it's possible –
that I drink too much beer.”

Dude, any time you begin a sentence “I probably”
and it's followed by a negative,
there's no probably to it.
And any time “I probably” is followed with “drink too much beer,”
you definitely should have stopped drinking years ago.

There were three complaints you guys had about yourself
that rose to the top.

Being prideful.
Being impatient.
And this morning's topic: Procrastinating.

And to get into this,
I've got to get serious.
Take a breath.
Ready?
Here goes.

There is great power within you.

Within you there is the power to dream.
Within you there is the power to create.
Within you there is the power to overcome great obstacles and
do glorious things.

And all too often,
we give that power away.

We away the power God has placed within us to worry.
We give it away to the fear of making a mistake.
We give it away confusion and uncertainty and complacency.
We give it away to minor distractions and momentary pleasures.

Within us there is the power to live a great and glorious life
that blesses others and makes us proud.

But the strength we possess to change our lives and be the men we want to be,
we give that strength away
and we get stuck.

We procrastinate
and it makes us miserable.

Many of you on the survey simply wrote:
I procrastinate too much.

Others said:

I want to change my life –
but I never do.

I need to take more initiative.

I need more self-discipline.

I don't spend enough time on things that really matter
because I get distracted by things that are much less important.

Most of us have some issues with procrastination.

Chores at home
or starting a project at work.

But I'm primarily concerned about procrastination in our lives
when it undercuts your physical, financial, emotional, relational and/or spiritual
well-being.

And most of us struggle with procrastination
in at least one of these areas.

There's a reason for that.

The most primitive part of our brain is wired
to do what makes us feel good right now.
It's wired for the instant gratification of our desires and
for the immediate avoidance of pain.

We want to experience pleasure
and we want to avoid the discomfort –
whether it's
physical pain, emotional distress, anxiety, or embarrassment.

But here's the problem –
and you know it before I say it.

A life of doing whatever we want in the present
does not create a life we will be proud of in the future.

Physical, financial, emotional, relational and spiritual health
cannot be achieved unless you are willing to do difficult things
that make you uncomfortable.

Getting better in every area of our lives that matter
is always an uphill battle
that requires self-denial, discipline and sacrifice.
And that involves discomfort and pain.

Procrastination is not doing nothing.
Procrastination is doing something that brings pleasure or avoids pain in the
present instead of doing what brings long-term health and success in the future.

So part of our brain wants to experience pleasure and avoid pain
right now, this moment.
But there's another part of our brain
that thinks about the future.
It wants to create a life we can be proud of.
And it knows that long-term gain demands short-term pain.

It's the battle between these two parts of our brain
that creates our struggle with procrastination.

Here's how Carl Sandburg put it many years ago.

Carl Sandburg: There is an eagle in me that wants to soar and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.

Here's another way of describing this dynamic that comes from a TED Talk by a self-confessed master procrastinator, Tim Urban.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ari7oStGLkU>

3.00-5.26/27 (Start with "a couple of years ago" and end with "Huge success" and one second of laughter afterwards)

Easy and fun.

That's what the monkey in our brains wants.

And if you're a monkey that works great.

But if you're a man,
and I'll add –

if you're a man trying to follow Jesus and you want your life to count,
giving into easy and fun when we have hard and unpleasant things to do

does not create

a good husband

a great father,

a life that makes a difference in the world, or

physical, financial, relational or spiritual health.

And easy and fun will not produce a life

that God will bless with the words,

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

There's a second reason we struggle with procrastination.

We have a sinful nature.

Paul wrote:

From Romans 7: I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. Oh, what a miserable man I am!

Paul goes on to say that sin lives inside of him,
making it hard for him to be the man he wants to be.

So, it's not just that we have two brains.

We also have two natures –

one that is sinful and wants immediate gratification and
one that is spiritual and wants to be more like Jesus.

Listen: Changing our lives is hard.

Overcoming our monkey brain and our sinful nature
is really tough.

It's easier to ignore our problems,
complain about all the reasons we can't change,
blame others,
make excuses, and
procrastinate.

But when we live that way,

we end up feeling wretched –

drowning in a sea of frustration, regret, and guilt,
not understanding ourselves
and wondering what's "wrong with me?"

It's doing difficult things that matter
that gives our lives meaning.

It's working to get better that enables us to experience self-respect and confidence.

It's doing the hard and even painful things required to be true to our beliefs
that honors God and allows us to be at peace with ourselves.

Let me ask you to think for a moment.

What's one change you want to make in your life?

Something you want to start?

Something you want to stop?

It could be anything.

You want to make your marriage better.
 You want to start reading the Bible daily.
 You want to begin exercising.
 You want to become more comfortable with confrontation.
 You want a better relationship with your children.
 You want to get your finances in better shape.
 You work too much and you want a more balanced life.
 You want to stop looking at porn
 You want to find a way to serve others.
 You probably drink too much beer
 and you want to stop.
 Probably, maybe – well, you wish you wanted to stop.

What's a change you want to make?

Let's look at some situations that make it difficult to move forward
 and see if any of these apply to the change you're thinking about.

One is

1. When we are not sure what to do.

We want to make a change.
 We know we need to do something.
 We think about it,
 but we honestly don't know how to move forward.

A typical response is to put the problem out of our minds and ignore it.
 Get busy doing something else that's not important
 but that's easy and pleasurable –
 and that takes our minds off the problem.

Or, we worry about it.
 We expend enormous emotional and spiritual energy
 going over the same problem the same way,
 until we are drained of energy, consumed with anxiety
 and unable to think clearly enough to make a productive decision.

Either way – we end up procrastinating and doing nothing constructive.

2. When we know what to do, but we are afraid we will make a mistake.

We know what the moment requires,
but we are afraid we will fail.

A little voice in our head says,
“Don’t try.
You’ll just make things worse.”

Who struggles most with this?

One – guys with low self-esteem who do not believe in their abilities.

Two – perfectionists who believe that mistakes are fatal and failure is final.

Perfectionists often refuse to take on new tasks
if they are not sure they can perform at a high level.
Rather than face their limitations and have to admit that in some areas
they are just average or less,
they don’t attempt the task at all.

Why?
Whether they know it or not,
it’s to protect their ego from the unpleasant reality
that they are as limited and as flawed as the rest of us.

So, to all the perfectionists in the room,
myself included,
and this is meant to be helpful:

“If you can’t get started on a situation you need to handle,
the problem is not the situation;
the problem is not the people around you;
the problem is not that you don’t have the time or the resources;
the problem is you.”

Only when we understand that
will we change how we think,
stop procrastinating and
move forward.

3. When we are overwhelmed with the task we need to perform.

Maybe you're depressed or burned out.
And you don't have the energy
to take on something new.

Or maybe the task is so huge that even if you're on top of your game,
it seems insurmountable.

Either way –
when the challenge is too big
or our energy is too low,
we are likely to give up and do nothing.

4. When past efforts have not been successful.

You need to work on your marriage.
But you've tried.

You've had countless conversations with your wife.
You've gone to counseling.

And things are as bad as they've ever been.
And now someone tells you to try one more time.

You've given into the same temptation over and over.
You promised yourself and you promised God
you were going to stop.
And you did for a while.
But you gave in again.

You feel guilty and defeated.
And you just don't have the heart to tell yourself, much less God,
that somehow
this time is going to be different
than all the other times you have tried and failed.

5. When we have too many options.

What's called "decision paralysis" increases
the more possibilities we have to choose from.

In their book *The End of Procrastination* Ludwig and Schicker
reported on a study of the clients of one of the country's largest insurance
companies.

The study found that the more savings options the company's clients were given,
the fewer the people who chose to invest.

They knew they needed to invest
and they wanted to.

But as the number of choices went up,
the number who chose to invest went down.

The more options we have,
the more likely we are to procrastinate and do nothing.

These situations – all the ones we just outlined –
in one way or another, they all
require us to do something emotionally painful and difficult
if we are to move forward.

And that's when we're likely to give into the monkey in our brain
that says,
"Hey, let's go do something easy and fun."

What can help us overcome procrastination?

Books on procrastination will give you all kinds of tips and tricks.
Make a list.

Then shorten your list to just the three most important things you have to do today.

Do the hardest thing on your list first.

Give yourself a reward when you accomplish an item on your list.

All good practical things.
But you've got books for that.

In Quest you don't have books,
you have me.

And **me** is going to start by asking **you** a question.

What do you want?

1. Ask yourself the question: What Do I Want?

What do you want to accomplish with my life?
What kind of man do you want to be?
What legacy do you want to leave to your children?
What do you want God to say to you
when you stand before him and give an accounting of your life?

Here's a scene from Office Space
where two guys are asking each other,
if you had it made and you could do anything you wanted,
what would you do?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTDWwq9_1Gk

If that's what you want,
and I'll admit some days that sounds pretty good,
but if that's what you really want,
I got nothing for you.

But if you want something more.

If you want to be
a man of character.
a loving husband,
a faithful father,
a good friend.

If you want to be mourned and missed
 when you're gone.
 If when you're done on this earth,
 you want to hear God say,
 "Well done, good and faithful servant" –

if that's what you want,
 then the real question is:
 what are you willing to do to be that man?

Look what Rudyard Kipling wrote.

Rudyard Kipling: If you don't get what you want, it is a sign either that you did not seriously want it or that you tried to bargain over the price.

If you are who I think you are
 and you want a life anything like I think you want,
 listen:
 The life you want does not come cheaply.
 You will have to pay a price.
 You will have to do hard and painful things.

If you are going to be the hero of your own story,
 it will require courage, and discipline and sacrifice.
 It will require trying when you don't see a way forward.
 And it will demand that you persevere
 when it looks like things will never change.

If you want to live a life that matters,
 you can.
 But that kind of life comes at a price.

2. Tell the lying, sniveling voice inside your head to shut up.

The voice that tells you that you can't do anything because
 you don't know what to do,
 you can't possibly succeed,
 you'll make a mistake and mess things up,
 you're not strong enough or smart enough,
 you've tried before and you have failed –

Tell that lying coward inside your brain
in the name of Jesus to shut the heck up.

Do not give away the immense power that God put within you
to the lying chimp that lives in your head.

God has placed great strength within you
and immense resources around you,
so that you can overcome the challenges of life
and succeed at what matters most.

When you hear that voice,
recognize it for what it is.
It is the voice of the enemy
that wants to keep you from stepping into the life
God created you to live.

Your past does not define you.
Your failures do not define you.
Your uncertainty does not define you.
God defines you.

And he says: Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.
He says: You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

Listen to the voice of God,
not the monkey in your brain.

Flannery O'Connor: It's easier to bleed than sweat.

It took me a while to understand that line.
But I think I got it.

It's easier to play the victim.
It's easier to stay stuck and do nothing.
It's easier to complain that there's nothing you can do about your situation
as you let the life flow out of your veins
than it is to get up and do the hard work of changing your life.

But that ain't you, brother.
 You are made in the image of a God.
 You possess great power.
 And you are a man.

With God's help,
 You can move forward.
 You can do hard things.
 And you can change your life.

And that voice inside that says you can't –
 whether it's the voice of
 a parent you could never please,
 the older boys at school who told you that you were a wimp,
 an ex-wife who told you that you were no good, or
 a million past failures telling you
 that you don't have what it takes.

Tell that lying voice
 that you refuse to bleed out
 when you were made to get up and sweat until the battle's won.

3. Do something.

Often the most difficult part of a task is not completing it, but beginning it.
 So, when you're stuck, do something.

In The Procrastination Cure

Damon Zahariades: I've found that the biggest challenge isn't *completing* seemingly-daunting tasks. It's *starting* them. Once we start doing something, even something we dread, working on that task becomes easier.

When you have a difficult situation or task in front of you,
 tell yourself, I'm going to do something.
 I'm not going to do it all,
 not now.
 But I'm going to do something.

And you can always do something.
You can always say a prayer.
You can always call a friend
 and ask for help.
You can always get a piece of paper
 and write down some next steps.

I always get excited when I sign a contract to write a new book.
My fifth one comes out this week.
How can you get a copy?
Oh, don't you worry your little head about that.
You'll have plenty of opportunities.

I always get excited when I sign the contract.
But I always dread it when it comes to writing.
It's hard work.
It's emotionally draining.
And it takes much longer than you might think.

So, how do you write a book?
You tell yourself,
 I'll go in early tomorrow and write for two hours.
If I write four pages, great.
If I write two sentences, that's ok.
If I have a great idea, I'm going to the office.
If I've got nothing,
 I'm still going to the office,
 sitting at my computer, and
 pray and think and sweat and scream
 until something comes.

That's what you do to get started.
that's what you do to finish.
You do something.

And once you've put enough somethings together,
 you've written a book.

Whatever you're facing,
 take a step in the right direction.
 Just a step.
 And tomorrow take another step.
 Don't worry about the whole thing.

Do what you can do today.
 That's how Jesus said we should live,
 one day at a time.

Take a step today
 and another step tomorrow.
 And you're moving.
 And if you're moving,
 you've got momentum.
 And momentum is power.

4. Ask yourself: What's the worst that could happen?

We often get stuck because we exaggerate
 what a mistake or a failure might lead to.

This is called catastrophic thinking.
 If I make the wrong decision,
 my life will be ruined.

Here's an example from a movie that's not very good
 called The Intern.

Anne Hathaway has discovered that her husband has been cheating on her
 And she's tells Robert DeNiro
 that she isn't going to confront him,
 just hope that things get better.
 Why?
 Because if she confronts him –
 well, you watch where she takes it.

Clip: The Intern https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8zmJB8o_1A
 3.37 – 4.12

If she confronts her husband,
she'll get divorced and
if she gets divorced,
she will be buried in the strangers' single section of the cemetery.

Right, that's very reasonable.
That's where most women who confront their cheating husbands end up –
dead and alone surrounded by a bunch of strangers for all of eternity.

I once met with a college student
who was paralyzed with fear.
He had made great grades in high school
and he had done very well as a freshman.
But she was certain he was going to fail out
as sophomore.

Finally, I asked him,
“What's the worst that would happen if you failed out?”

He said,
Well, no one would hire me.
I couldn't get a job.
I'd run out of money.
And I'd end up living on the streets.

When I asked him if he thought his parents would let him stay with them,
he said, Yes, of course.

And did he like his parents?
Yes, they're great.

If you lived with your parents,
could you get a job at the mall or someplace like that?
Probably.

Do you think you could make some friends here at the church
in our young adults ministry?
Probably.

Do you think you could be happy if that was your life,
 at least until you figured out something else you wanted to do?
 Yeah.

So, you're ok with the worst that could happen.
 So why don't you stop worrying about that
 and concentrate on doing what you've always done:
 working hard and making good grades?

That was two years ago.
 He went back to school
 and he's doing great.

Not always, but usually the worst that can happen
 is not nearly as catastrophic as we think.
 Don't worry about making the wrong decision.

Do something
 and trust the gifts that God has given you
 and the promise that God has made to you
 that he will never leave nor forsake you.

Last one.

5. Ask someone to help you.

When you're stuck and you don't know what to do,
 ask someone to help you think things through.

Proverbs 19.20: Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will
 be wise.

Proverbs 20.18: Make plans by seeking advice.

Ask a couple of people you trust
 and who are knowledgeable about the kind of situation you're facing.
 And if you're really stuck,
 just do what they tell you to do.

If they're objective and not emotionally involved.
If they're wise and have your best interest at heart –
and you need to move forward –
just do what they say to do.

Tell them,
“That’s what I’ll do.
Please hold me accountable.”

Let’s close with these words from James Russell Lowell.

James Russell Lowell:

Life is a leaf of paper white
Whereon each of us may write
His word or two; and then comes night.
Greatly begin though thou have time
But for a line, be that sublime;
Not failure, but low aim, is crime.

Aim high, boys.

Claim the strength God has given you,
greatly begin,
aim high, and
do something hard –
today.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit
and the help of your brothers,
you can change your life.