

Sabbath Rest
July 5th, 2015

Welcome: It's a joy to be with you! I'm hopeful that it's already been a wonderful weekend for you!

Next week, we're going to begin our summer message series, *God-Breathed*...which comes out of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. All summer long, we'll be looking at the transforming effect of God's Word in our lives!

For today...as we gather on the heels of Independence Day...a day on which many of us pause for rest and play and celebration, I want to encourage you with something that has brought joy and peace to our family in more ways that I can express! Over the years, as the pressure and pace of life have intensified with our growing family (as I'm sure many of you have experienced) this one thing has led us to make shifts in the rhythm and rhyme of our priorities and schedule...and it has freed us to enjoy God, one another, and friendship in spite of the pace at which we run...

It wasn't always this way...

I've shared with many of you how I walked through a season several years ago where I became exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. At the time, I didn't know what the underlying problem was; I simply recognized the symptoms of the problem.

Manhattan: Many Saturday evenings, as I was gearing up to teach the next morning, my heart was gripped by fear! And I had thoughts of packing up the car with my family skipping town! There were Sunday mornings when I was on my way to Harbor and I'd sit at the Rourke Bridge deciding whether I was going to turn toward Harbor or go straight to 495 South, toward New York City, which is where many people run when they want to get away from pain? I had no plan once we arrived there, which is probably why it never played out, but nonetheless, something isn't healthy if you're 31, 32 years old and still dreaming of running away!

Starbucks: During that season, I felt like cashing in on ministry to work at Starbucks! Let me be clear...there is nothing wrong with Starbucks. I like Starbucks! I'm sure it's possible to make a good wage at Starbucks! Regardless, when pulling Lattes became a desirable alternative to leading Harbor, I knew something wasn't right!

By God's grace, during this season, He led a handful of people into our lives who encouraged us to look carefully at our pace of life. It didn't take long to figure out that though I had always prided myself on valuing family time and not overworking, I was in fact working every day of the week! Even on Saturdays, my one-day off, I was gearing up in the early evening to prepare for Sunday morning. There wasn't a day of the week where we were completely unplugging!

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Beth and I knew that if we continued to run at that pace...it would have a deteriorating effect on the health of our family and ministry.

During that season, God began to teach us the importance of slowing and resting!

Here's why I'm telling you this! Even though I had grown up around the church, I knew virtually nothing about what the Bible describes as the Sabbath.

In fact, there's a lot of confusion and misunderstanding around what the Bible describes as Sabbath!

Several years ago, a columnist in the Washington times wrote, *"There are two ways people perceive the Sabbath. The answers come in two flavors..."*

"...nostalgic or appalled. The nostalgic grow wistful about quiet mornings and leisurely afternoons; they remember streets free of cars, sandlots full of kids, and dinners made special by family and slow-cooked foods. The appalled conjure up memories of long, dull days in which everything fun and interesting was either forbidden or not for sale, and time at church or synagogue passed about as quickly as it does at the dentist's.

Now, it's possible that this is how you view the Sabbath!

However, I'm going to guess that for many of us, we haven't given a lot of thought to what the writers of Scripture and Jesus Himself meant when they talked about the Sabbath!

I believe that of all the gifts God gives us, this is one that we generally overlook and neglect! And though we have a long way to go when it comes to practicing and guarding the gift of Sabbath for our family, I can confidently tell you that it's a gift I'll never let go of!

My prayer today is that you would see that the Sabbath is a gift from God intended for your joy and for His glory!

Now...because most of us know very little about the Sabbath, let's look at what the Scriptures teach us about it, beginning with the very first place we ever see it mentioned in the Bible. **Look at Genesis chapter 2...**

"So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he

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rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation."

Genesis 2:1-3

Two important things to note!

First...let's admit that these verses are just a little bizarre theologically because God is an all-knowing, all-powerful God, with infinite creativity, energy and strength, yet He rests. Which means that the Sabbath must be about more than just physical rest! And we'll get around to that in a moment!

The second is this... In verse two, the author says that on the seventh day, God finished his work of creation, so he rested! Now, there isn't a single person in this room who has produced anything near the level of what God produced! You might develop software or write code or build houses or fix broken things or teach young children or run a small business or manage projects. And all of those things are good and can be physically and emotionally demanding, but no one in here designed and produced the Milky Way. No one brainstormed and knit together the human body with its genetic code and neurological system! As creative as you are, you didn't think up hummingbirds and hippos and hydrangeas and the Himalayas. I'm not dissing your creative genius, but there's no comparison between you and God!

And yet...God, who did all of that and more, comes to the end of his creative production; and he rests...

Don't you find it interesting that God modeled for us the rhythm of Work-Rest...and even called it holy? Yet, we tend to ignore the Sabbath? Maybe we're missing something...

Let's keep going!

Exodus 16:22-30

In chapter 16, Moses had just led the Hebrew people out of Egypt where they had been in slavery for over 400 years. While still in the desert and on their way toward Canaan, the people began to complain and say to Moses, *"We wish we had stayed in Egypt...if only the Lord had let us die there, at least we would have died with full bellies."*

Now...if you've ever taken a vacation by car with a fussy child, you know how difficult that can be. Imagine riding through the hot desert with a million whiners. What God does next is incredibly gracious!

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He says to Moses. Here's the plan! I'm going to send meat and bread every day! Every morning, the people are to go out and collect what they need for the day. If you try to collect two days worth of food and put it in Ziploc, it's going to spoil the next day. But as long as collect enough food for one day, you'll always have enough to eat!

There's only one exception! On the sixth day, on Friday, gather twice as much food to last you for the weekend.

If you read the text, some people follow the plan, but many try to circumvent God's instruction. So, God pulls Moses aside and says, *"Let's try this again. One day's worth of food for days one through five. Then, two days worth of food on day six. Go!"*

The people still didn't get it...

So, finally, God said to Moses, "How long are your people going to refuse to obey my instructions?" (vs. 29)

*"They must realize that the Sabbath is the Lord's **gift** to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days."*
Exodus 16:29

See that? It's God's gift to you!

An important piece of the Sabbath is being reminded that God is our Provider! The Israelites lasted forty years in the desert because God provided for them 24 hours at a time.

Odds are you went to school and got an education, which helped you land a job, which affords you the ability to rent an apartment or possibly even own a home! Even if you're still in school or don't have a job yet, there's a good chance you're eating burgers or steak tips this weekend. And because we live in a time of privilege and plenty, our tendency is to forget that we simply labor for and enjoy what God provides!

God's gift of Sabbath reminds us that our nourishment and sustenance is directly tied to the generosity and faithfulness of God.

If we forget this truth, we will grow dependent on our own strength, skill, and ingenuity. As a result, many of us carry the burden of being the Ultimate Provider for our family instead of resting in and enjoying God's provision!

So...Sabbath teaches us to rely on and rest in God's gracious provision!

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One more text...look at the beginning of Exodus 20...

Many of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments, or at least a few of them. And for the most part, they make a lot of sense regardless of what you think about God or the Bible!

For example, God says, *“Don’t be a liar.”* That makes sense, especially if someone has ever deceived you. *“Don’t envy and take your neighbors stuff.”* *“Don’t take your neighbor’s wife.”* If you have stuff or you’re married, you get this one. *“Honor your parents.”* From a parent’s perspective, we’re glad this is a command! From a teenager’s perspective, there may be varying opinions, but both recognize that life goes better when we follow...

All of these are good and we’re grateful that God ordered the world this way!

Then, you come to verse 8, where God says...

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work...” Exodus 20:8-10

Now...a lot of people, whether they’re a Christian or not, think that if we don’t obey the law, God will condemn us. As a result, their response to God is based upon fear!

For some of us who grew up in the church, our whole understanding of God and approach to His word is built on the notion that our approval is based upon our obedience! **The problem is that this isn’t an accurate understanding of Scripture at all!**

The truth is, in the Old Testament, when anyone speaks of the Law, they don’t speak of it as bad or overbearing! David calls the Law of the Lord honey on his lips! In Psalm 119, he wrote, *“I lay awake at night thinking about your law!”* **David loved and delighted in God’s Word.**

We do not obey the commands of God to keep Him from destroying us! We obey the law because it is God’s way of leading us into life, depth, richness, beauty and purpose. **God’s law reveals the way that God designed us to live!**

God is far more passionate about your joy than you could ever imagine. His instruction on Sabbath is not to pile up religious obligation or duty on you. It’s for your joy, health, peace, and delight!

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So...in Exodus 20, we find God saying to Israel, “As my people created in my image, you need the Sabbath.”

Now...it’s one thing to see what God says about the importance of Sabbath. It’s another to actually put Sabbath rest to practice in your life!

Life has a way of piling us with incessant demands, obligations, and appointments until we find ourselves going from place to place fulfilling task after task. In the process, we forget that God created us to do, but he also created us to be! And many of us here have a really hard time being, and not doing!

Ancient Israel was a predominantly agrarian society. There was no electricity or iPhones or Verizon Fios. When the sun went down, they day was over.

Today, we are more connected than ever to the rest of the world. We’re constantly plugged in through technology! Many of us face enormous economic pressures. Our jobs are demanding! Our commutes are long. Margin is tight! Busyness is a reality for us...it’s endemic in our country (which is why many of us continually commiserate about how busy we are). **Until we bring our busyness under the care of our Creator, we run the chance of missing so much of what we were created for!**

The question becomes...how do we embrace God’s gift of Sabbath? How do we live out an ancient practice in our modern world? I want to spend our last few moments by giving you some very practical steps to do just this! I believe, if you will take God’s gift of Sabbath rest seriously, you’ll never go back!

Application

Let me first ask you... *“Do you have a day when you’re completely unplugged from the obligations and demands and pace of the other six days?”*

A day set aside...set apart to rest in God and enjoy His goodness in your life.

In Isaiah 58, God promises that if you will embrace his gift of Sabbath, He will honor you and be your delight!

If we’re being truthful, some of us don’t delight in God very much. It could be simply that we’re not slowing down to enter into His rhythm of life!

What does it look like to Sabbath? I think that this is where God has given us a lot of freedom!

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It could be going for a walk, delighting in God's creation! It could be having friends to the house and making a good meal together, enjoying a glass of wine. Almost every Friday, Beth and I enjoy breakfast and conversation. In the evening, we prepare a family meal and we laugh and rest and live life to the fullest.

Sabbath is a day to turn the phone off. I really don't answer the phone or respond to emails on my Sabbath, which happens to be Friday. You see...unless I put my phone down, I will stay connected and if there's an issue or problem or if someone needs my attention, I am so easily distracted back into work!

Sabbath is a time to rest in Christ! To love Him! To listen to and respond to His Word! Sabbath is a time of ensuring that the things that matter to God also matter to us!

Staff: This is why we encourage and even require our staff to develop healthy work/rest rhythms. This is why I make people take time off...because we're not machines. We don't exist primarily for what we can produce. We're finite humans with limited strength and bandwidth and creativity and passion and all of that goes out the window very fast if not for regular and intentional rest, worship, joy-inducing activity, and time with the people we love. As a result, we have a very healthy staff. People will ask why Harbor is so full of joy. In part, it's because your pastoral staff has joy...they work very hard and serve you very consistently, but they also rest and play very well. I'm grateful for that and believe that God is honored in that!

How about you? Do you have a day when you're disconnected? A day to delight in your spouse...to enjoy your children...to read a good book or listen to music or go to the park or climb a mountain?

Do you have that?

If not...God's given you a gift that you've yet to open!

The Cross – Here's what I'm learning as well! Sabbath isn't the ultimate point; it is a shadow for something else! The Sabbath continually points us to the cross.

The Sabbath reminds us that because of Jesus Christ, God accepts us, not because of what we do, but because of what He has done! It reminds us that our identity isn't wrapped up in what we can produce or how we perform. It's wrapped up in the God who loves us enough to die for us to call us His children!

So...when do you stop and breathe?

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Unless you say, “*This is the day we’re going to do this,*” I’m not sure you’ll ever get to it! Life won’t let you...the culture won’t let you!

Some of us are going to find this difficult because so much of our identity is wrapped up in what we do and accomplish!

Try it! Slow down, turn off your phone...and see what happens!

When will we embrace God’s gift for you? When will we recognize that He asks you to find a day to stop doing...and to simply be? I encourage you to do that. Imagine what it would mean for our relationship with Jesus...for our personal and relational health...for our marriages and families and joy and peace!

It’s going to take time and work for each of us to figure out what it means to stop and rest in Jesus! For Beth and me, it took several months to make it a habit! But it’s been revolutionary for us! It’s been a long time since I dreamt of escaping to New York City!

Regardless of how long it takes... May you embrace God’s gift of Sabbath. May you learn to rest well! May you see his simple mercies. May you learn how those simple mercies point you to the cross and may you find strength, peace, and joy there!

Pray