

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

◆ Intro:

- ◇ In the Fall of 2008, due to stress, health and depression, I came close to quitting ministry. I shared my pain with the Council at that time and they graciously came to my aid and encouragement. We made some structural changes around the church, and I began a personal journey of restoring rest.
- ◆ Here's the strange thing. Earlier in 2008 I could tell my inner self was running out of steam. I began seeking help. One of the things I did was attend a 2 day retreat on the north side of Chicago where the leader taught us about the biblical practice of Sabbath (rest). I'll never forget her words.
 - ◇ She said, "If you're a pastor, you need to take another day beside Sunday as your sabbath. And sabbath is not a day off. According to the Jews, Sabbath is a day for rest, for worship, and for delight."
 - ◇ I'll also never forget my blurted out response. "Twenty years as a pastor. How'd I *miss* that one?"
- ◇ People miss it all the time. It's not surprising that an unbeliever might miss the beauties of God's creation design for mankind, but many a God-follower is also slipping right by and missing out on this life-enriching discipline.
- ◇ Sabbath is a spiritual discipline that many spiritually hungry people walk right past. It's like a feast that the starving don't recognize. Perhaps because the sabbath principle is ironic: you have to do less to get more. And the vast majority of citizens just shake their heads and say, "Nah, no way." I'm here to say "way!"
- ◇ **1. Sabbath is not a day off.**

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

- ◆ **A.** A day off, though it has restorative benefits to family harmony, improved mental health –is a utilitarian thing. You give the horse a day off to make sure the horse can keep working for you!
 - ◇ Restore his strength.
 - ◇ Catch his breath -before he's back at the plow or pulling the wagon up this next big hill.
- ◇ But God did not rest because he was tired, or needed to get ready for the next world he wanted to create. The word simply means he stopped. He quit. He stopped doing. Do you realize what this means? God *wasted* time! At least he could have been gearing up for another monday. But no. God just stopped.
- ◆ **B.** Sabbath is not mere leisure. Leisure is free time that is missing the sacred. Sabbath is where the content of our empty time is an exercise of noticing God and receiving our pleasures as from his hand, following the sunbeam back up to the sun.
 - ◇ This, of course, can be done every day. But in the discipline of sabbath we work at it more.
 - ◆ Imagine how much more full the heart is when every good thing comes with a note from your lover.
 - ◇ “This chocolate is from me!”
 - ◇ “You’re husband is yours because I’m thinking of your security.”
 - ◇ “Go ahead and jump in my cool lake waters.” And with every good thing, you thank someone.
 - ◇ It’s like sharing icecream with your kids vs being home alone. Home alone, and whole 1/2 gallon of Mouse

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

Tracks may not even lure you into the kitchen. But the fun of sharing it with someone who will smile makes it all the more joyful.

- ◇ Maybe like me, you have neglected to practice sabbath and settled for a day off. A day off doesn't restore the soul. I urge you if you are, to quit making your sabbath just a day home from work. Add elements that restore your soul. Add the presence of the sacred.
- ◇ Once we stop doing, then what do we do?
- ◇ **2. The discipline of Sabbath is for worship.**
- ◆ A. Worship, simply put, is enjoying God, praising God. God, in fact, is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him (I'm indebted to John Piper for that explanation.) So if we take the invitation to "catch God's breath" and enact spiritual formation, it is first of all essential to attend to God.
 - ◆ Attending to God may sound like too much scary religious obligation. But not so fast. Jesus himself was constantly fighting for time with his Father, and preaching against what people tend to do with sabbath:
 - ◇ that is, making up lists of rules about what you can and can't do.
 - ◇ Forcing naps on very awake children.
 - ◇ Restricting anything enjoyable lest lightning from heaven strike the ungodly for being too happy. (I believe CS Lewis was right. God is more upset with us when we will not be happy.)
 - ◇ Teaching a class because I probably should, not because I enjoy helping spiritual growth. (we can

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

be very busy for God without knowing him much.)

◇ *These things are not attending to God.*

◇ Attending to God is as simple as trying to find him. In worship we sing, we listen to his word, we pray to him. But there is worship that does not happen in a building. True lovers of God do it every day. But especially make the effort on sabbath.

◇ **3. The Discipline of Sabbath is for rest and renewal.**

◆ **A.** The Swahili word for “white man” –*mazungu*—literally means “one who spins around.” That’s how East Africans see Westerners, says Mark Buchanan, people who dizzy ourselves in a great whirl of motion... without direction.

◇ The Chinese join two characters to form a single pictograph for busyness: heart, and killing. The heart is the place a busy life exacts its deepest toll.

◇ How true! Much of the time even when we “stop working” we are still living at a dizzying pace. We come home from vacation exhausted (which begs the deeply theological question “What’s up with that?”). And many who say they follow the Creator, also end their day flopping into bed uncomfortable because Monday is coming so soon.

◇ **B.** Mark this: there is no spiritual formation without stopping. Growing in your spirit, or becoming healthy in your spirit requires reflection, and reflection only flourishes in rest.

◆ The reason most who don’t rest don’t, is because of the way they see their world. They see the world as a place requiring production. Your value is in what you make, who you can impress. So they need to produce.

◆ Know what workaholism is? It’s just physical worry. It’s

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

trying to be responsible for all good that might come your way by *doing* stuff. Other people do their worrying in the mind: they too take responsibility for all things going well by trying to think about it enough.

◇ ex: Why would a parent restrict his child from climbing a tree? Because he might fall and get hurt. But then, climbing a tree can be a fun, beautiful thing just as many joys are dangerous. If we cannot let the son climb without watching, reminding, commenting on the branches chosen, urging to give it up we are taking responsibility for them on ourselves. This may be OK if they are 5 years of age. But when they're 19 and we're still doing this, something is wrong.

◇ Scripture says, when you live your life as though you are the sole responsible party, not only do you dishonor God, you destroy your soul part. Counter this with the discipline of sabbath.

(stopping)

◇ **C.** Sabbath is set in the creation rhythm that begins in nothing, and ends in something.

◇ The earth was formless and void, we read. And then God created.

◆ Over and over in Genesis 1 we read “there was evening and there was morning, that first...second...etc -day.” Hebrews don't count days like we do when the alarm goes off in the morning, or when the clock strikes 12 in the middle of the dark time. For a Hebrew, tomorrow starts at sundown. A day starts with evening.

◇ What's evening? The time when you do nothing. You

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

can't. No light (at least in ancient times)

- ◆ The idea of sabbath is that the day, life, starts with grace, receiving, not doing. We wake into a world we didn't make, into a salvation we didn't earn. God, and his grace, is always first. And when I quit my days work, nothing that really matters stops for God is *before* me. While I was sleeping great creational things, things too marvelous for me to invent, or engineer, were in process. The moon was orbiting earth, controlling the tides, the lion was roaring for it's prey, the earthworms were aerating the earth, proteins were repairing my muscles.
 - ◇ *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*
Colossians 1:17, NIV.
 - ◇ And when I get up to start work, I walk into an operation that is half over already.
- ◇ What God asks of me is to open my arms, and rise on *his* wind, *his* breath. The way of the raven.
- ◇ Sabbath is about learning to walk through the world with a different mindset. One that sees God as first, and present and providing the power, the lift. The only way to really feel this kind of inner rest is to do just that, rest. Be renewed by a rhythm of doing and not doing. Giving, and receiving. No: not doing & doing, receiving and giving.
- ◇ **4. The discipline of sabbath is about delight.**
- ◆ A. Wow has this one been missed. Our fallen tendency toward legalism has historically made sabbath into drudgery.
 - ◇ You can play catch but not use a bat.
 - ◇ You can't ride your bike. (Sabbath is the perfect day for riding a bike, unless you hate riding bikes!)

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

- ◇ You can't tend the garden. (Well, if it's a task you need to get done, then don't do it on your sabbath. But let's say gardening is a delight to you, almost a sacred joy because you have a desk job in a windowless room where you can never tell much about the difference your number crunching is making in the world. Gardening may feel freeing & and delightful to you. Then, it is appropriate on your sabbath!
- ◆ B. In Mark 2 Jesus taught the legalists of his day that the sabbath was made for us! We were not made for it! Your sabbath is a day for feasting, for celebrating. for using the special dishes just because.
 - ◇ Do whatever is enriching, whatever fills your spirit back up. Here's the golden rule of the sabbath: 1) cease doing what is necessary. 2) embrace doing what gives life and joy.
- ◇ **Conclusion:** The whole theme of this series has been this: to catch my breath, I need to catch your breath, God.
- ◇ In his book Rest of God, Mark Buchanan writes
- ◇ "I was a flagrant Sabbath-breaker. I didn't pay the least bit of heed to the rest of God for almost 20 years of Christian faith. I wish I could say that what finally caught my attention was a conviction of the Spirit brought on by a careful exegesis of biblical texts, a deep meditation on rabbinical writings, a still, small voice wooing me in deeper. But that would be lying. The conviction, the study, the meditation, the voice—they all came late, as a consequence of my interest in rest and Sabbath. What actually finally caught my attention was that I wasn't doing well. Plain and simple, I was worn

Practicing Sabbath, Gen.1:31-2:3

Catch Your Breath #6

out. I knew that if I didn't recover the art of rest—if I failed to find the rest of God—I would watch all my works and all my days turn to blight. I became, as I shared earlier, a Sabbath-keeper the hard way.”

◆ In the margin of that book I wrote “me!” I could say every word. Maybe it's true of you to one degree or another. Let me say this though. As I have been learning about practicing sabbath, I now look forward to my day off, (in recent years, Wed), because it is my sabbath, not my day off. I feel healthier on my insides the other days of the week too. I experience God more than I used to as well.

◇ There's so much more to be said. Suffice it to say, God's promise is that when we don't go our own way on his holy day, the result is our joy! (Isa.58)

◇ rest

◇ worship

◇ delight -it'll make a new person outta ya.