

“Take a Break Before You Break”

Series: New Year, New You

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Do any of you have a quiet time? Time you set apart with God? Journal? Pray? A few years back Pastor Doug challenged us to take something ON instead of giving something Up for Lent. I started getting up early to have quiet time with God. And I still do it. It's truly time I look forward to. But lately it hasn't been so quiet. I used to start my mornings in a lovely chair by the window in our family room, with my dog resting happily at my feet. PHOTO?

Well now my lovely dog has become slightly neurotic and has decided that we need to do “Quiet Time,” down the basement, with her ball that I must throw and sometimes even retrieve when she rolls it under the couch. And my quiet is being interrupted with texts and ToDo's I think about. One day last week I trudged down the basement with my bible and my journal and my 10 hundred books and my calendar and my iPhone in case anyone needed me.... And I spread everything out, chucked the ball and went to work on my sermon message. On rest!

After retrieving the ball for the millionth time, I looked up at the ceiling and there was this whirling, spinning circle. And I couldn't figure out what it was. No light was coming in from outside, I picked up various shiny objects to see if it was reflecting off that, moved my phone... nothing. But it would get bigger and the circle would shrink and spin wildly. And then grow... No time to figure out what was happening – on with my day – I was BUSY.

The next day I headed down the basement again with my journal and books and ball and dog and guess what – IT WAS THERE AGAIN! This time I got the message. I heard God say, You are spinning like these circles. You are too busy trying to keep a lot of balls in the air. You need to take a BREAK before YOU Break. Oh, and by the way, can you deliver that message for me on Sunday?

Seriously!! Ok – so who here is with me? Who feels like they are busier than ever? And when we're so busy, what do we typically give up – SLEEP. Between work, keeping up a house, caring for kids, aging parents, mounting bills, endless errands, outside obligations, we lack time and we try to find time by cutting out the one thing our body truly needs - rest.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommend that adults aged 18 and up, sleep at least 7 hours each night to promote optimal health and well-being. Sleeping less than seven hours per day is associated with an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and frequent mental distress. Yet 1/3 of us adults REGULARLY don't get enough sleep. Not occasionally – on a regular basis we are sleep deprived. For kids and teens, the recommended amount of sleep is 9 hours and a whopping 97% of teens are not getting that amount, sleeping on average about 6 ½ hours each weekday.

Research says for teenagers, every hour of sleep lost each night increased sad and hopelessness feelings by 38%. For EVERY hour.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/teenagers-who-don-t-get-enough-sleep-at-higher-risk-for-mental-health-problems/>.

Our twenty-first century lives reek of exhaustion. We now live longer than our ancestors, but we spend less time living life and more time fighting death. They died quickly from wearing out their bodies, we die slowly from wearing out our minds. There is value in work and there is value in rest – we need both for a life well lived. Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD, Sacred Rest (Faith Words, 2017), page 162

Clearly, we have a problem! So, what's the solution? Where can we turn to find the secret to living a well-rested, productive, BALANCED life? Who can we look to as a role model here?

God is the only one who can give us true rest and peace. In fact, he modeled it for us, way back in the beginning of time, in creation. God worked for six busy days creating the heavens and the earth. "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work he had done." Genesis 2:2-3. The same God who formed us and breathed life into us, gave us a natural rhythm for work and rest.

God reiterates this to Moses in the 10 Commandments, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Exodus 20:8-11.

God rested; in fact, he found rest so important he made it a commandment.. So, why do WE have such a hard time with rest?

For some of us it may be ego/pride – If I don't do it, it won't get done. Or it won't get done right. We think we are invaluable to our work. In fact we may only find our value IN our work. Do you know people who complain about the "long hours" they put in at the office to subtly let everyone know how valuable and important they are? Or friends who brag about the little sleep they got last night because they were studying, studying, studying...Let's not let ourselves fall into that trap.

We've been programmed to think exhaustion is next to godliness. The more exhausted we are, the more valuable we are and the more we earn others smile of approval. We can even think GOD values our exhaustion. There's a line in a worship song we say a few weeks ago that goes "Light of the World, Oh How Highly Exalted..." My friend Karen shared with me that her young daughter sang the line as "Light of the World, oh so highly exhausted." From the mouths of babes...

God does NOT want us to be exhausted! Particularly not HIGHLY exhausted. God did not say, "Doug I put you here to do everything, to be everything, to solve everyone's problems." In fact, in Psalm 127: 2, David reminds us, "In vain, you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat – for he grants sleep to those he loves." God has uniquely gifted each of us and given

us work to do. Only by resting and spending time with God, will we be able to discover what work He has for us.

Jesus modeled this as well. As Jesus traveled with his disciples teaching and healing, larger and larger crowds began to follow him. *Can you imagine the people shouting and grabbing at him to heal them?* “As often as possible, Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer.” (Luke 5: 16 MSG). Jesus withdrew from the crowds to rest and connect with God the Father. And he taught his disciples to do the same: “The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. Then Jesus said, “Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile. He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn’t have time to eat.” Mark 6:31. Jesus told his disciples to “Take a Break Before You Break!” He knew the value of rest. *And clearly the title of this week’s sermon message.*

Another reason we don’t have time to rest is that sometimes we may take on too many things – thinking of my spinning plates – leaving us overwhelmed and drained, with no time for rest. Joanna Weaver relates a story in her book, Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World that really sticks with me:

A man met God one day in a lovely valley. God asked him to take a wagon with three stones to the top of the mountain. God gave the man specific instructions, sketching a map in the dust. The man cheerfully set off pulling the wagon behind him.

As he was going through a small village, a friend stopped him and asked him what he was doing. He explained that he was taking the wagon of rocks to the top of the mountain. The friend became excited as he explained he was just thinking about how he was going to get his rock to the top of the mountain, and would the man be willing to take the rock in his wagon as well? Happily, the man with the wagon took the friend’s rock and started on his way.

As he went along, more and more people asked him to take their rocks with him until the wagon grew fuller and fuller. The wagon felt huge and awkward as it lumbered and swayed over the ruts in the road. No longer was the man enjoying the day and singing praises. Instead, resentment began to build inside.

About that time God came to his side and asked what the problem was. “You gave me a job that is too hard for me,” the man sobbed. God walked over to the wagon. “What is this?” He held up a big piece of shale and tossed it on the ground. The man explained about his friend who asked him to bring it up the mountain. God continued to unload the wagon, removing both light and heavy items until only the three stones God had given him were left in the wagon.

“Let others shoulder their own belongings,” God said gently. “I know you were trying to help, but when you are weighted down with all these cares, you cannot do what I have asked of you.”

Of course this is an analogy and it doesn’t follow through completely. There are certainly times when we are called to help our brothers and sisters carry their burdens. Paul says in Galatians, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). But then three verses later he writes, “For each one should bear his own load.” (Galatians 6:5) While some tasks require team effort, Jesus does not want us to be weighed down by responsibilities that belong on someone else’s shoulders.

Think about your life -- are you carrying rocks that aren't yours to carry? Do you need to prioritize your rocks – deciding what is worthy of your time and what is not? I know I do.

Let's be honest – how many of us REALLY value rest? Or is our value, our self-worth tied into what we “Get done.” What we produce, what we have to show for our days, our life? What others think of us? Think about it. How tied to work is our identity? When we meet someone, what is one of the first things we ask them? “What do you do?” Or “Where do you work?” When I was first lost my job, people would often ask me what I was planning to do next. Only a few times was I bold enough to actually answer truthfully, “Trying to be still and see where God is directing me.” And I could see the raised eyebrows as they “slowly backed away from the crazy person...” Still? Rest? What? We all may not find ourselves unemployed, but we all can make time to pray and ask God for direction even when we are working.

And why was I more often than not embarrassed to give that answer? I cared what others thought of me – being still was not an acceptable answer.

Do you know what a yoke is? A yoke was used before the invention of the tractor to join two work animals, so that the load was balanced between the two animals. Jesus knows about yokes because, as a carpenter, He probably made yokes for a living. The purpose of the yoke was to direct and guide the animal in its work. The yoke Jesus describes is His teaching, His guidance, His way of life. It is so much lighter than the heavy rules, regulations and requirements of the other teachers at that time. His yoke is lighter than the heavy demands and burdens our culture lays on us.

Jesus offers us a divine gift in Matthew 11:28-29, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” What an amazing gift he offers to ALL of us, without exception. It's an invitation to exchange—to bring our tired, weary, heavy lives, our busy schedules, our hectic mornings, our frantic commute, our sleepless nights – and exchange it for real rest. But we have to come to him, and be willing to learn from him. In God's rest there is peace, fulfillment and a sense of peace.

That is what living should feel like! When we expectantly enter into rest with Jesus, we can extend our heavy yoke of burdens to the Lord of Rest and receive His yoke of restoration, purpose and peace. Can you imagine what that peace would feel like? Handing over your weariness, your cares, your doubts, your fears to him?

I want that peace. I'm tired of being tired. And spinning. If you are too and would like encouragement and support, join me for an on-line bible study and 30 day Sacred Rest Challenge. In a private facebook group, we'll learn a new model for rest and work based on Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith's book, Sacred Rest. Write REST on the back of your Connection Card and I'll be in touch this week.

So, remember my spinning image on my basement ceiling – I figured it out! It was my beloved coffee cup! One of my rituals with Jesus is to have coffee with him every day. (He likes his black; straight up; no messing around for that guy!).

When my coffee cup was sitting on the sofa arm rest, it reflected that circle image on the ceiling. When I jostled and moved to grab a book or throw the darn ball for the dog, the coffee swirled and the image whirled. The more I moved, the more it whirled.

But listen here – when I picked UP the cup to drink from it, the movement stopped; the image disappeared. No more swirling, whirling dervish.

One of my favorite worship songs has the chorus, “I want to sit at your feet, drink from the cup in your hand. Lay back against you and breathe, feel your heart beat. This love is so deep, it’s more than I can stand. I melt in your peace; it’s overwhelming.”

Kari Jobe, “The More I Seek You.”

Jesus invites us to come sit at his feet...

To exchange our busyness, our burdens

For the everlasting rest of his grace and peace.

Will you drink?