

Date: 2016-10-09

What Are You Doing With the Gift of Time?

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One of the first things I taught my kids when they were learning to drive was how to stop. That's the brake pedal, I would say before they started up the car. Put your foot on it. Know where it is. Use it liberally.

It was very selfish of me. I wanted to live. It paid off.

After teaching this lesson to my third child Jonathan we buckled up.

Jonathan turned on the vehicle but forgot he was in reverse. He flew backward out of the driveway and missed hitting our neighbors car parked on the opposite side of the road by a hair. He slammed on that brake pedal right in the nick of time. Thank goodness we had talked about where the brake pedal was before this.

Thank goodness in that moment he had mastered the art of stopping.

I think as a culture, especially here in Silicon Valley we have forgotten the art of learning to stop. And literally friends, learning to stop can save our lives. There's an old country song whose chorus lyrics go this way:

"I'm in a hurry to get things done, I just rush and rush until life's no fun, all I really got to do is live and die, but I'm in a hurry and I don't know why."

Do you ever feel like that?

That you're just rushed and have too much to do? You know: take the kids to school, get the project at work done, go to the meeting at church, get the car fixed, take care of an elderly loved one from dawn to dusk, go to the doctor, come back from the doctor, go to the grocery store etc.

It's just endless. And in the middle of all that rushing, I think the best word in the English language is rest.

Some of you might be thinking: "rest" -- it sounds so wonderful, so refreshing, how cruel, how sadistic of you to even mention it.

I can't possibly rest. I have way too much to do. What would happen if I rested?

Everything would fall apart."

Might I gently remind you and myself that stopping and resting is indeed one of the ten commandments. We seem to have forgotten that one.

Hebrew time was divided into cycles of seven: **every 7th day was meant to be a Sabbath day, a day of rest; every 7th year was meant to be a sabbatical year, a year of rest; and after 7 cycles of 7 sabbatical years, that is, in the 50th year, there was supposed to be a year of Jubilee.** In that year all debts were cancelled, slaves

were set free, all property was returned to its original owners, and everyone took the year off.

Isn't that cool? You weren't supposed to work, you were supposed to rest. The Jubilee year was a time to give freedom to the oppressed, give back to the poor, and give rest to the weary.

I think that to observe Sabbath rest is one of the most counter-cultural, radical things we could do in our society, because we are a very busy culture.

Between work, kids, school, church activities, civic organizations, we're slammed.

And you retired people – I think you're busier than any of us – all kind of family commitments and volunteer obligations.

Now, before I go any further let me just confess up front that on this topic of rest, I totally struggle. I really do. I work a lot of hours every week, sometimes don't even take a day off, and I'm always rushing to the next thing.

Why do you think I talk so fast? I'm trying to cram it all in.

Part of it is there's a lot to get done in ministry.. I've got to get going! And like all of you, if I don't get those things done there are some real consequences to be paid.

But there's also something less noble about my busyness.

There's something about telling people how busy I am that makes me feel important, it kind of puffs me up.

Busyness is like a status symbol.

I like to talk about how I couldn't possibly slow down because so much depends on me.

So I complain about being busy, but what I am really doing is bragging, which is kind of strange if you think about it because observing the Sabbath is one of God's main commandments: #4 on his top 10 list.

And while we would never brag about breaking any of the other 9, we'll boast about breaking the 4th commandment. Let me demonstrate. If someone asks you how you're doing, what's a common response?

"I'm so busy." But you would never say, "Oh, just making a couple of graven images, killed a couple of people, too. Other than that, not too much." We would never brag about breaking the other 9 commandments, but we brag all the time about breaking the 4th one and are proud of it. And what do we get for all our busyness? Stress, pressure, fear, high blood pressure and loneliness, because we don't have time to make any real relationships.

And friends...we are doing it to our kids. We are stressing them out along with us. Karlen sent me an article last week..."*A popular and accomplished Los Altos High student received a parent's text message at school last year, to come home to talk about her grades. The student and star athlete had earned all A's, except one D. She asked*

to be excused from English class to go to the bathroom, but she never returned. She had collapsed, suffering a disabling emotional breakdown.”

Educators are seeing more and more students suffering from depression, anxiety and social Phobia...The acuity of mental illness among students has sharpened, they say, and it's striking every younger children...thought many quietly bear the stress for years before snapping.

We need to take that 4th commandment seriously. A colleague of mine has a mug that reads...**“Remember the 10 commandments. They are not multiple choice.”**

Now I want you to understand something.

For the Israelites the Sabbath commandment was truly a life changing gift. It meant for the Israelites that they were a free people.

A command to stop work was in stark contrast to their lives as slaves under Pharaoh's rule.

While living in slavery under Pharaoh, their lives were completely focused on how much work they produced seven days a week. Living such an existence in bondage, in fear of the whip, did not give them time to reflect on the purpose of life or to enjoy leisure. They were too pressured.

Their lives depended on reaching the next quota or assignment.

Their lives had no value beyond their economic value to their slave masters.

DOES this sound familiar?

It's a different day, a different culture, but often we sound enslaved to our work or the tasks that are our responsibilities at home, in the community, maybe even in the church. We are enslaved to the regimen of school, to grades, to performance...fearful if we don't get everything done perfectly.

Working harder and longer hours seems to have become the way to prove our worth.

So even after the “formal” workweek ends, we continue at home, in the evenings or weekends. The idea to STOP the work, worry and anxiety is not part of our thought process.

And all the time God is trying to get our attention.

You are my child. Your value is in me. You are a slave to no one. I have set you free. Live as a free person in me. Don't go back into bondage.

Honor the Sabbath. Take time to rest.

So you can see that Sabbath is as necessary today as it was thousands of years ago. With the command to observe the Sabbath, God renews his covenant promise,

“I will be your God and you will be my people...precious in my sight and honored and I love you.”

The Sabbath is a time to “enjoy God” and enjoy each other.

To discover patterns of living that will endure throughout our lives and give us pleasure and connection with God through our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a time for **REST, REFRESHMENT, RENEWAL, and RELATIONSHIPS.**

We are slaves of no one. We are sons and daughters of the Most High God who sets us free...

Give It A Rest ... Friends, God has bigger dreams for us than slavery and bondage.

That's why he says to take at least one full day off every week.

That's why he instituted the Jubilee year, hoping that at least once every 50 years folks would slow down. Slow down so we can connect with God. Slow down so that we can build real friendships. Slow down so that we can have time to serve God and serve others in a way that brings us joy and connects us to things that are eternal.

But how can we possibly slow down, how can we possibly rest, when we have so very much to do?

We have to trust that God is sufficient to take care of us. The reason we're so busy is that deep down I don't think we trust that God is perfectly capable of taking care of us and everything else that we are worried about.

We're afraid that if we slow down, everything is going to fall apart. The boss is going to be unhappy, the friends are going to be unhappy, the kids will freak out, we'll never make it in the world, get into the right school, we'll look weak or lazy.

The question Sabbath asks is "**Do you trust that God's work is sufficient to take care of you, and to get you where He wants you to be?**" Maybe not where you want to be, but get you where He wants you to be. God's work is sufficient. *If you believe that...* Find the brake pedal. Stop. Take the rest and be renewed.

That is why God himself rests on the 7th day of creation. Not because he's tired as if God is saying, "Whoa, that really took a lot out of me."

No, **God rests on the 7th day because his work is complete, it is sufficient; it's all that it needs to be.**

God himself does not show up at the office every day – seven days a week - why do we think we have to?

Sabbath means trusting God that if we take time off, either one of two things will happen: either God will get everything done that needs to be done; or what doesn't get done didn't need to get done in order for us to become, and be who God wants us to be.

The way we use our time says a lot about the priorities we have in life doesn't it? There's an old proverb that says:

The time that God gives to us to walk this earth is God's gift to us. What we do with it is our gift to God.

There are 7 days in a week and there are 24 hours in each day – **7x24=168**.

We all get 168 hours every single week. We can't buy or barter for more time, and we can't decide to take less.

We do, however, have a choice as to how we use each hour!

And God says to us in the 4th commandment that we love to brag about breaking – For one seventh of the time you are given...each week...for 24 hours of that 168 hours a week REST.

Give it up. STOP being a slave. Live in freedom. Honor the Sabbath.

Yeah, but back then it was easier, you might say. They didn't live in Silicon Valley 2016. That was a different culture - a different time.

I would say yes it was...but...think about this... the year of Jubilee meant that the agrarian community – God's people the majority of whom depended on crops for a living – had to allow their fields to lie there fallow for a year without tending them – trusting instead in God's provision instead of their hard labor.

Think about all the income and resources they were losing by not harvesting crops that year! Any savvy businessman would say to them...that's not wise.

Sometimes what looks unwise to the world, is exactly what God wants us to lean into.

It was no easier for them back then, than for us today, to STOP. Stopping back then, stopping now, resting...is/was counterintuitive and countercultural for both times.

As a Session we have been challenged in our Elder Leadership Training process to STOP business for the first 45 minutes and simply listen to one of us share our spiritual life story. We have learned much about each other in and through this process. We've learned that God has been at work in each of our lives, and its inspiring to hear. At the end of the persons share we always pray for them.

You know what is striking in all this. God always provides enough time for us to get the business done.

When we act upon the principle that **GOD IS ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR US...Jehovah Jireh** is the phrase in the Old Testament that means "God Provides"when we act on this...not just believe it in our heads...but really act as if God is sufficient, we find rest and joy, because we become people who regularly rise above the ordinary frazzled and harried world and connect to what is eternal.

Scott Dudley was a colleague of mine at Menlo Park – we both went to Princeton Seminary so we had that in common - and he tells this story, which I think so beautifully illustrates God's sufficiency when we put him first by observing Sabbath rest.

A colleague of mine, he said, at Princeton was studying for her PhD defense. She was married, she had kids, and she decided that she was going to observe the Sabbath.

6/7ths of her time she was going to devote to studying, and 1/7th to Sabbath, to eternal things like worship, family, friendships, and serving God and serving others. Of course, all her fellow Princetonians said: "No, no, no, no. Such a thing is definitely contraindicated at a place like Princeton. No, no. It will be terrible."

But she did it anyway. Well, finally the day of her exam came, and she really blew it. She did a terrible job; it was a disaster. So after she was done the committee asked her to step out of the room while they decided whether or not they were going to pass her.

She waited for an hour, which is a very long time. Finally, her advisor came out and said, "That was terrible, you did a terrible job, you barely passed." She said, "I knew it, I knew I should have worked harder."

And her advisor said, "Yeah, you might want to think about that, because you know what we call people around here who barely pass their PhD defense, don't you?"

And she said, "No, what do you call them?"

And he said, "Doctor. Congratulations, Doctor."

Today she teaches in a University doing exactly what God called her to do.

How much is enough folks?

God's work was sufficient to get her where she needed to be, and because she acted as if that were true, not just believed it, but acted as if that were true, she got rest, and got to invest her life in things of eternal significance.

One week ago this past Friday I was reminded of the importance of Sabbath rest. At the invitation of a friend I spent eight hours at a pastor's Soulcare retreat, and it was a renewing time for me. I struggled with taking that time off. Friday is usually my sermon writing day...but I did the sermon for last Sunday ahead of time, jamming in it to an already crazy week. I made that intentional choice even though it was hard... And when I arrived, I was so grateful to be there.

I was convicted of my own resistance to taking the time I needed for renewal, for prayer, for fellowship – how important that is!

Trevor Hudson spoke to us; he is a pastor from South Africa and has written some wonderful books about tending the pastor's soul, staying young and joy-filled, open to the Holy Spirit and putting first things first in our lives.

Spending our time wisely and intentionally seeking renewal so we don't burn out.

IT was A wonderful time for me...

Friends, let's not be slaves to the whip of culture.

The sun does not rise and set on our Herculean efforts to carry the world on our shoulders

The Messiah has already come, and we are not him, as much as we try.

Let's use our time wisely. Let's prioritize and do what is most important. And let's stop breaking that 4th commandment...

The Challenge For This Week: You got it. **Take one day and practice Sabbath rest.**